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## America's Underwater Parks: The Marine Life Protection Act Safeguards Our Special Undersea Places

More than 130 years ago, the United States began to protect our most treasured areas on land by creating National Parks. It is now time to extend that same crucial protection to special marine areas by creating parks and wilderness reserves, called marine protected areas, in our oceans. The Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) is creating a network of marine protected areas off California's coast to sustain and revitalize the rich web of ocean life.

For more information, please contact **Karen Garrison** or **Leila Monroe** at (415) 875-6100.

### What Is a Marine Protected Area?

A marine protected area, or MPA, is a designated space in the ocean designed to provide long-term protection for the full spectrum of marine life and underwater habitats. MPAs allow—and often enhance—activities like diving and kayaking as long as guidelines to protect marine life are respected. In fact, MPAs are some of the best places for people to see marine wildlife. The acronym “MPA” is an umbrella term, covering a range of areas that offer different levels of protection. Under the Marine Life Protection Act, California is creating several types of MPAs:

- *marine reserves*, where all marine life is protected and no species can be fished or taken;
- *marine parks*, where managed sport fishing is allowed but commercial fishing is prohibited; and
- *marine conservation areas*, where one or more species is protected, but fishing for other species is allowed.

California's Marine Life Protection Act is designing a series of these safe havens that work together as a network connected by currents and include rare and vulnerable habitats and wildlife. A network of linked MPAs has been shown to offer greater security to life in the state's coastal waters, and provide a stronger buffer against disasters, than scattered MPAs can.

### Marine Protected Areas Allow Wildlife to Flourish While Enhancing Ocean Recreation

MPAs already exist all over the world, protecting fragile habitats and marine life. Scientific studies have shown that biodiversity inside MPAs can be 50 percent higher than in exploited areas. MPAs allow fish to grow large and old; these older fish have more and healthier offspring than their younger counterparts, increasing productivity inside MPAs. Well designed marine reserves can also seed nearby areas, providing benefits for fish

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and for fishermen. The MPAs along California's coast are home to a vast array of sea life, including sea otters, pelicans, myriad rockfish, hydrocorals, and abalone.

### A Visionary Commitment to Ocean Protection in California

In 1999, with bipartisan support, California passed the first ocean protection law of its kind in the country: the Marine Life Protection Act. In 2004, Governor Schwarzenegger made the MLPA a priority under his Ocean Plan. The current process for creating a statewide network of MPAs, scheduled for completion in 2011, includes:

- a high-level Blue Ribbon Task Force to advise the state and keep the process on track;
- extensive public participation;
- an advisory team of expert biologists, economists, and other scientific advisors;
- a private/public funding partnership to support public involvement and information gathering; and
- a phased implementation approach that breaks the state down into five regions—North Coast, South Coast, North Central Coast, Central Coast, and the San Francisco Bay.

In 2003, California also created 12 MPAs around the Channel Islands. The five-year review of these areas showed they are very successful, with larger fish, denser populations, and more productive kelp forest habitats than in similar unprotected and fished areas. The first region of MPAs was completed for the Central Coast region in September 2007; this network covers nearly 20 percent of Central Coast waters from Point Conception to Año Nuevo. These new MPAs include important protection for Point Lobos, parts of the Big Sur Coast, among other special places. A network of MPAs for the North Central Coast went in the water in 2010, and it includes iconic locations at the Farallon Islands, Point Reyes Headlands and Fitzgerald tidepools. For the South Coast region, the Fish and Game Commission has identified their preferred network from among the options of MPAs, and they are on track to complete review and adoption of the South Coast

MPA plan by Fall, 2010. The process of designing the North Coast MPAs is well underway, with completion scheduled for 2011.

### What You Can Do to Protect Our Oceans

Your help is needed to ensure the success of marine protected areas. Please support California's implementation of the Marine Life Protection Act and the creation of a strong network of marine protected areas along California's coast. Tell the Governor and the California Fish & Game Commission to:

- Continue supporting the MLPA and its modest budget as an urgently needed investment in protecting our invaluable ocean.
- Go to [CalOceans.org](http://CalOceans.org) and sign up for updates on the latest MLPA activities, including region-specific actions you can take.
- Join us on Facebook at the CalOceans Facebook page to protect some of the most treasured places on earth.



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### For more information

- [www.caloceans.org](http://www.caloceans.org)
- [www.dfg.ca.gov/mrd/mlpa/index.html](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/mrd/mlpa/index.html)
- [www.piscoweb.org/outreach/pubs/reserves](http://www.piscoweb.org/outreach/pubs/reserves)