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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 acted to protect our most special areas on land by creating the first National Park. Now it's time to extend that same protection into the sea, by creating parks and wilderness spaces in our oceans. NRDC is supporting the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) to ensure that California has a system of marine protected areas along its coast to help the rich web of ocean life thrive.

For more information, please contact **Kate Wing** at (415) 875-6100.

What Is a Marine Protected Area?

A marine protected area, or MPA, is a place in the ocean designated to provide long-term protection for marine life and underwater habitats. MPAs allow activities like diving and kayaking as long as restrictions to protect marine life are followed. In fact, MPAs are often the best places to see marine wildlife.

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 the following three types of MPAs:

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

Under the Marine Life Protection Act, California is designing a series of MPAs that work as a network, connected by the currents and including rare and valuable habitats and wildlife. These linked MPAs paint a fuller picture of life in the state's coastal waters, and provide better insurance against disasters than a few scattered MPAs.

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 shelter more fish and bigger fish, and allow fish the opportunity to mature. These mature fish play an important role in the ecosystem by producing more and healthier babies than their younger counterparts. Moreover, sportfishers working at



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the borders of reserves report catching record-sized fish. The MPAs along California's coast are home to a vast array of undersea life, including sea otters, pelicans, tuna, rockfish, and abalone.

A Renewed Commitment to Ocean Protection in California

In 1999, California passed the first ocean protection law of its kind in the country: the MLPA. Implementation of the law has been slow, but in 2004, Governor Schwarzenegger responded to public support for the MLPA and made it a priority under his Ocean Plan. The current initiative, scheduled for completion in 2011, includes:

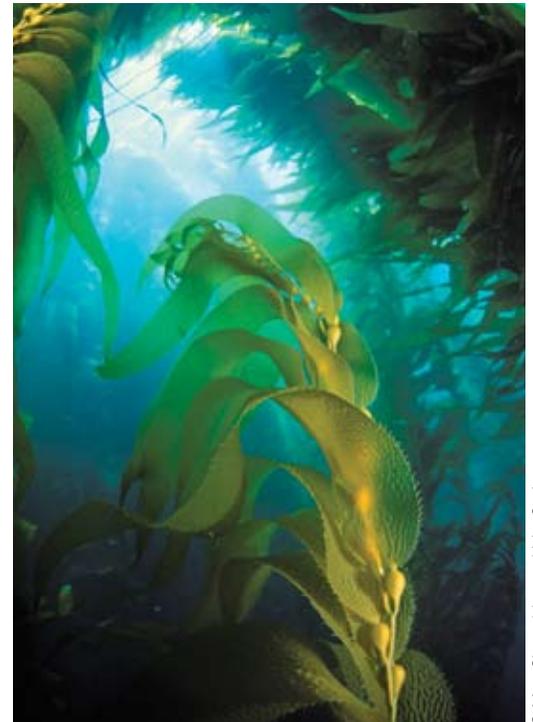
- a high-level Blue Ribbon Task Force to advise the state and keep the process on track;
- an extensive public participation process;
- an advisory team of biologists, economists, and other scientific experts;
- a private/public funding partnership to support public involvement and information gathering;
- a phased approach that breaks the state down into separate study regions.

In September 2007, the state finished the first region of the state, putting into place an MPA network that covers nearly 20 percent of coastal waters from Point Conception north to Año Nuevo. These new MPAs include more protection for Point Lobos and along the Big Sur Coast, among other special places. The design process for Phase 2, from Año Nuevo to above Point Arena, is now underway and is scheduled for completion by January 2009. California hopes to complete the whole state by 2011.

What Can You Do to Protect Our Oceans?

Marine protected areas need your support all along the coast to make them a reality. Support California's implementation of the Marine Life Protection Act and the creation of a network of marine protected areas along the California coast. Tell Governor Schwarzenegger and the California Fish & Game Commission that you support funding for the science and monitoring that will help people enjoy marine protected areas right away.

Go to CalOceans.org and sign up on the mailing list to keep up on the latest MLPA activities.



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For more information

- www.caloceans.org
- www.dfg.ca.gov/mrd/mlpa/index.html
- www.piscoweb.org/outreach/pubs/reserves