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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, also called *marine protected areas*, in our oceans. California has created a network of underwater parks along its coast under the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) to sustain and revitalize its rich web of ocean life.

### 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, these areas are some of the best places for people 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 has created 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 Initiative has empowered citizens to design a series of safe havens that work together as a network connected by currents and include vulnerable habitats and wildlife. Networks of linked MPAs 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 exist all over the world, protecting fragile habitats and marine life. Scientific studies have shown that biodiversity inside these areas can be 20 percent higher than in exploited areas. These areas 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 and for fishermen. The protected areas along

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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 NRDC-sponsored Marine Life Protection Act. Both Governor Schwarzenegger and Governor Brown made the MLPA a priority. The process for creating a statewide network of MPAs included:

- A high-level Blue Ribbon Task Force to advise the state and keep the process on track
- Extensive public participation in designing sites
- An advisory team of expert biologists, economists, and other scientific advisors
- A private/public funding partnership to support public involvement and information gathering
- A phased approach that divides the coast into four regions—North Coast, North Central Coast, Central Coast and South Coast
- Tribal Consultation and maintenance of tribal traditional use in some marine conservation areas.

In 2003, California 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 areas. Protected areas took effect on the Central Coast in 2007, the North Central in 2010, and the South and North coasts in 2012. The completed network covers about 16 percent of state waters and includes rich and iconic places like the kelp beds at South La Jolla, the submarine canyon near Malibu, the productive reefs at Point Lobos, the tide pools at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and the honeycomb rock formations at Point Arena.

### What You Can Do to Protect Our Oceans

Your help is needed to ensure the success of marine protected areas. Please support California's exciting new network of marine protected areas. Tell the Governor and the California Fish & Game Commission to:

- Continue backing 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 celebrations, fairs, and other events.
- 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)