

## **The Marine Life Protection Act: Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is a marine reserve?**

Marine reserves are areas of ocean habitat that are designated as protected areas off limits to destructive human impacts, such as dumping, commercial and other fishing and oil and gas drilling. At least 29 nations and territories around the world have established reserves to protect ocean ecosystems and manage fisheries. Most marine reserves allow scientific surveys, as well as recreational activities such as surfing, swimming, diving and boating. More than 250 marine reserves have been established worldwide, from New Zealand to Florida. The federal government has established 122 marine protected areas of varying levels of protection, and 23 U.S. states have established marine protected areas.

### **Will the Marine Life Protection Act “shut down” surfing, diving and other recreation?**

No. One of the law’s goals is to improve study, education and recreation opportunities along our coast, recognizing the economic and cultural benefits ocean resources provide to local communities. Marine reserves and protected areas are often deliberately sited near public beaches and state parks to provide easy access for diving, kayaking, surfing, and research. On the North Central Coast, stakeholders have proposed the creation of five to seven small “no disturbance zones,” or special closures, which the Department of Fish and Game can designate outside the Marine Life Protection Act to protect bird and mammal breeding grounds and haul-outs. There are no plans at this time to designate special closures on the South Coast.

### **Why is California creating marine reserves in state waters?**

California’s oceans are in crisis, and marine reserves are an integral part of the solution. The Marine Life Protection Act requires networks of marine reserves as the backbone for California’s ocean restoration and protection plan. They have been proven through numerous scientific studies to help fisheries and other ocean wildlife recover from threats like climate change, pollution runoff, loss of biodiversity, and destruction of habitat. And with reserves set aside as research areas, we can better understand the convergence of the many threats facing our ocean, and leave a legacy of healthy ocean habitats and fisheries for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

### **What are the benefits of marine reserves in California?**

Marine reserves provide places where fish can feed, breed and thrive, and where adverse human impacts are minimized. They conserve and protect essential habitat for fish and wildlife. Marine reserves provide insurance against unforeseen events, and help increase the resiliency of ocean resources to threats such as overfishing, pollution and climate change. Marine reserves provide a living laboratory for research and education—a benchmark to measure the effects of fishing, drilling and other human impacts that can harm marine life over the long term.

### **What if we postpone implementation of this state law?**

Ocean habitats in state waters are in a precarious situation and need immediate attention. Some California fish populations have declined by 90 percent of historic levels. Some species and habitats (like rockfish, kelp forests and rocky reefs) can take decades to recover. If this decline isn’t reversed, marine life could see irreversible damage. Every year of delay puts our ocean as we know it at risk.

### **Do marine reserves work?**

Yes. Extensive scientific documentation in peer-reviewed journals gives us a clear picture of the performance of more than 120 marine reserves of different sizes in a variety of temperate and tropical habitats. A comprehensive review by the Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans revealed that most well-regulated marine

reserves result in relatively large, rapid and long-lasting increases in population sizes, number of species, and reproductive output of marine animals and plants. In protected waters, studies found for example, that total scallops can increase by 2400% (Georges Bank), lobsters can grow 500% more abundant (Anacapa Island) and on average, the biomass (or mass of animals and plants found in an area) increases by 446%.

### **What are the alternatives – such as changing size or time of year fishing rules?**

Previously, if a species was in decline, protections were placed on that particular species, but not the forage fish and habitat needed for that species' survival. Marine reserves are different--they recognize the interconnectedness of all the species in an ecosystem and help maintain balance. For example, keystone species like lobster and sheephead in Southern California waters help keep urchin populations in check. This prevents urchins from overgrazing kelp, which in turn supports all the species that rely on kelp for food and shelter. Like underwater parks, marine reserves protect entire ecosystems, and they have been shown to work in temperate ocean waters like California's. Experts agree that marine reserves can be used together with traditional fishery management rules.

### **Is the science behind marine reserves in doubt?**

No. Protection from fishing allows animals in reserves to survive longer and grow larger. Also, habitats are protected from anchors and fishing gear, so they can sustain the plants and animals that rely on them. Fully protected marine reserves are the only marine management tool that promote the recovery of entire ecosystems, not just target species. Over 160 marine scientists have signed [a consensus statement](#) on marine reserves, agreeing that they are an effective and under-utilized ocean conservation tool.

### **But isn't water pollution from land the real culprit?**

Water runoff does bring chemicals and other pollutants into our oceans, and we need to do all we can to reduce that threat. California has made great strides in the area of water quality, and we should continue to invest in those programs. But a pollution-control strategy alone will not save our oceans. Habitat destruction and depleted fish stocks are very real problems, and marine protected areas are an integral part of the solution for long-term ocean health.

### **Can we afford this?**

California's budget crisis has affected virtually all state programs and priorities. But, thanks to a public-private partnership model, California can proceed with the Marine Life Protection Act in a fiscally responsible manner. The MLPA represented less than .002% of the state's budget in the last fiscal year, and funding for this fiscal year remains 95% intact. Many partners, including the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the Point Reyes National Seashore have stepped up to help with design, research and education, and the Ocean Protection Council has allocated bond funds for mapping and baseline monitoring. For every dollar in state funds to date, another \$3 from the federal government and nonprofit organizations comes into California.

### **What are the economic effects of ocean protection?**

Protecting our oceans isn't just good environmental practice, it's good for California's economy. Animals living inside marine reserves can replenish populations outside their borders because larvae disperse in ocean currents, spreading into unprotected areas. As populations inside reserves recover, some fish "spill over" and become available to fishermen. This has been documented in California's Channel Islands, and all over the world. It's no coincidence that the majority of record-breaking game fish in Florida are caught just outside the reserve at Merritt Island. Healthy, vibrant underwater parks also provide opportunities for diving, kayaking and wildlife watching. In 2006, wildlife enthusiasts contributed a total of \$4.2 billion to California's economy, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.