

Focus on the Bay – Marine Protected Areas in Central California

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Last October, Governor Schwarzenegger released an ocean protection plan that is intended to guide California's management of ocean and coastal resources. As part of that plan, the Governor created a Blue Ribbon Task Force to implement the 1999 Marine Life Protection Act. The Task Force has been meeting monthly since January to evaluate and recommend changes to the state's system of marine protected areas (MPAs), such as marine reserves, marine parks and marine conservation areas, which restrict some or all fishing activities.

In early April, the Blue Ribbon Task Force adopted a proposed master plan framework to guide the development of alternative proposals for new MPAs. The recommendations will be forwarded to the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) for review, and then to the Fish and Game Commission for its consideration. The nine-member Task Force also selected the area between Pigeon Point (just north of Santa Cruz) and Point Conception as the boundaries for the Central Coast Study Region, the coastal region in which MPAs will initially be evaluated and possibly created.

The Task Force will now oversee an effort to develop and present recommendations for MPAs in the Central Coast Study Region, a process to be completed by March 2006. A Science Advisory Team has been formed to help provide information about marine resources and human activities in Central California. The next step in the process is the creation of a local stakeholders group. The director of DFG will solicit nominations and appoint key stakeholders who can provide biological, socioeconomic, and other local community information and perspectives to assist in developing alternative proposals for marine protected areas.

The Blue Ribbon Task Force is interested in public opinions about MPAs in Central California. You can read their documents at: www.dfg.ca.gov/mrd/mlpa/draftdocuments.html and email your comments to: MLPAComments@resources.ca.gov