

# Talking About MPAs

*Adapted from materials produced by Resource Media*

## Five Key Messages About California's MPAs

### 1. California Pride

In 2012, California became an international leader in ocean protection by completing the United States' first statewide network of underwater parks that are designed to ensure healthy, vibrant ocean life for generations to come.

- Over the last ten years, Californians from many walks of life came together to create marine protected areas up and down the coast because they wanted to leave a lasting legacy of a healthy coast for the next generation to enjoy.
- California's ocean creatures now have a state-long series of refuges where they can thrive undisturbed. There are different levels of protection, from "no-take" zones to those that allow some forms of fishing.
- The completed necklace of marine protected areas is the latest chapter in California's long history of being at the vanguard of conservation efforts, from the adoption of the Coastal Act to the state's ban on new offshore oil drilling.
- The protected areas were created through the landmark Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) adopted with bipartisan support in 1999. The law was implemented by local stakeholders over the past eight years, with local business owners, scientists, tribes, and government officials meeting to design protections for their stretch of coast.

### 2. Socioeconomic Benefits

Tourism and recreation dominate jobs and income in California's coastal regions, making ocean protection a smart investment in the economy and environment.

Statewide network:

- According to the National Ocean Economics Program, California's coast and ocean generate \$22 billion in revenue and sustain 350,000 jobs each year.
- Marine protection means money in the bank for California's tourism industry, hotels and restaurants, which depend on healthy fish populations and beautiful coasts to attract guests.
- On the Central coast:
  - This year, Central California celebrates the fifth anniversary of its marine protected area network. The word is out among nature enthusiasts such as SCUBA divers who are drawn by the promise of a more vibrant, healthy coast and exciting dives.
  - Point Lobos State Marine Reserve, for example, has become so popular due to its abundant fish populations that a waiting list has been established to accommodate enthusiastic diver and snorkeler interest.
  - Schools and youth organizations are making visits to the underwater state parks part of their outdoor education, because in addition to enabling kids to watch wildlife in nature, many now feature full-color educational interpretive displays and docent programs.
  - Recreational fishermen are flocking to Cambria state marine park where they can now fish without competition from commercial harvesters.
  - The coastal economy in Monterey County alone generates over \$2 billion per year in visitor spending. Everyone from the ice cream vendor on the pier to a real estate agent has a stake in keeping our ocean healthy.

### 3. Stewardship

Throughout California, residents from all walks of life are embracing marine reserves and

joining local efforts to protect them. They are making a difference in ocean protection – and you can too.

- On the Central coast:
  - Through the Otter Project and Monterey Coastkeeper’s MPA Watch, hundreds of volunteers take part in monitoring beach and coastal use in and around the protected areas. The information is used to help with education programs, and inform enforcement and management agencies.
  - Volunteers in Save Our Shores’ DockWalker Program share information with boaters and fishermen about marine reserves, in addition to advising them on how to reduce oil pollution.
  - From Cambria to just north of Santa Cruz, more than 2,400 volunteer docents and guides play a critical role in the stewardship of our coast and ocean.
  - You can walk, surf, dive, kayak, or watch birds and mammals at underwater state parks such as (insert local example). Or you can get involved in a citizen science project and help study wildlife, or become a volunteer educator to teach visitors about life beneath the waves.

#### 4. Ecological Benefits

Marine protected areas are like underwater state parks. They protect the “Yosemites of the Sea,” like Big Sur’s submarine canyons and rocky pinnacles that are home to playful sea otters, rare coldwater corals, and large rockfish.

- Underwater parks have been called “hope spots,” because they are our best hope in restoring the beauty and bounty of ocean life threatened by overfishing, pollution and habitat destruction.
- Numerous studies have shown that, over time, marine protected areas lead to bigger fish and give female fish a chance to feed, breed and thrive.
- Marine reserves can make the ocean more resilient to disasters. A recent long-term study of a Baja California marine reserve by Stanford University scientists showed that after a massive dieoff, pink abalone inside a reserve recovered far more quickly than abalone in fished areas.
- In California’s Channel Islands, where marine protected areas have been in place for 10 years, a 2012 study found that lobsters were more abundant and larger in protected areas, with an average of 5.49 more legal-sized lobsters caught per trap inside the refuges.
- The benefits of marine reserves on the central coast will continue to appear over time, since many slow-growing species such as rockfish will need more than five years to show signs of recovery.

#### 5. Economic Benefits

California’s coastal ocean supports a \$39 billion economy and 472,000 jobs. Safeguarding this natural capital with a system of marine protected areas is a wise investment that’s already paying dividends in the form of more and bigger fish, and thriving tourism and recreation businesses.

- Our ocean is more than just a spectacular backdrop—it’s an economic powerhouse. Coastal tourism and recreation businesses employ more than 350,000 Californians.
- Marine protection means money in the bank for the hotels, restaurants, and outdoor companies that depend on healthy fish populations and a beautiful coast to attract guests.
- The state’s oldest marine reserve, at Pt. Lobos, draws 400,000 visitors per year to enjoy its unique meeting of land and sea.
- The coastal economy in Monterey County alone generates over \$2 billion per year in visitor spending. Everyone from the ice cream vendor on the pier to real estate agents have a stake in keeping our ocean healthy.

- Science-based ocean protection is good for fish and fishermen. California's marine protected areas leave the vast majority of the coast open for fishing while protecting key feeding and breeding grounds.
- Early monitoring has shown encouraging results in fish size and numbers, and positive trends in terms of catches and boat trips.
- Five years after marine protected areas were established on the Central Coast, average revenue was found to have increased for California halibut, Dungeness crab, market squid, and spot prawn.
- The number of charter boat trips had increased at most Central Coast ports since the protected areas were established, and nearly half of captains that lead research or dive trips reported increased interest.
- Five years after marine protected areas were established in the Channel Islands, commercial landings for some of the largest fisheries in Island waters--squid, lobster, urchin and crab—had increased.
- On average, fish species targeted by sport and commercial fishermen were larger and more numerous in Channel Islands reserves compared with fished areas.