Chapter 9. Alternatives Analysis

This chapter provides a comparative evaluation of the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Project and alternatives. The alternatives analyzed in detail in this EIR include variations of MPA network components identified as Alternatives 1 and 2. Descriptions of these alternatives can be found in Chapter 2. This chapter also describes and considers the No Project Alternative and describes the alternatives screening process used in this planning effort.

9.1. Alternatives Screening Process

This discussion provides an overview of the alternatives screening process, including a discussion of alternatives considered in the previous stages of project development and stakeholder outreach. Because the MLPA mandates the creation of MPAs, alternatives consideration is limited to project alternatives that would meet this primary project objective. Therefore, alternative regulations (e.g., changes in fishing quotas, seasonal species take restrictions, no-trawl zones) would not meet the specific mandate of the MLPA and were not considered in this EIR.

In accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6, EIRs must evaluate a "range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which could feasibly attain the basic objectives of the project." The discussion of alternatives should focus on "alternatives capable of eliminating any significant adverse impacts or reducing them to below a level of significance, even if these alternatives could impede to some degree the attainment of the project objectives or would be more costly." CEQA further directs that "the significant effects of an alternative shall be discussed, but in less detail than the significant effects of the project as proposed." The factors relevant to the Proposed Project that should be taken into account when addressing the feasibility of alternatives include site suitability, economic viability, consistency with existing plans or planning documents, regulatory limitations, and jurisdictional boundaries.

State CEQA Guidelines Section 21061.1 defines *feasible* as "capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, legal, social, and technological factors." The final decision regarding the feasibility of alternatives lies with the decision-maker for a given project who must make the necessary findings addressing the potential feasibility of reducing the severity of significant environmental effects (PRC 21081, State CEQA Guidelines Section 15091).

9.1.1. Alternatives Development

Alternatives analyzed in this EIR were developed considering project goals, significant environmental impacts of the Proposed Project, and information generated through the alternatives screening process that preceded the writing of this EIR.

9.1.1.1. Project Goals

As stated in Chapter 2, the goals of the project are as follows:

- **Goal 1:** To protect the natural diversity and abundance of marine life, and the structure, function, and integrity of marine ecosystems.

- **Goal 2:** To help sustain, conserve, and protect marine life populations, including those of economic value, and rebuild those that are depleted.

- **Goal 3:** To improve recreational, educational, and study opportunities provided by marine ecosystems that are subject to minimal human disturbances, and to manage these uses in a manner consistent with protecting biodiversity.

- **Goal 4:** To protect marine natural heritage, including protection of representative and unique marine life habitats in central California waters, for their intrinsic value.

- **Goal 5:** To ensure that central California's MPAs have clearly defined objectives, effective management measures, and adequate enforcement, and are based on sound scientific guidelines.

- **Goal 6:** To ensure that the central coast's MPAs are designed and managed, to the extent possible, as a component of a statewide network.

9.1.1.2. Alternatives Selection

The Department developed a range of alternatives through a comprehensive review process that merged input from stakeholders, scientific specialists, and concerned agencies and jurisdictions. Multiple meetings and discussions with stakeholders enabled Department personnel to narrow down options for potential MPAs, reduce potential impacts on existing uses and activity patterns (where possible), as voiced by the various experts and concerned parties.

Using the Commission-adopted master plan framework as a guide, the comprehensive stakeholder and public process was initiated in October 2004 to identify a range of alternative MPA network component proposals for the central coast study region. These alternatives were to be submitted to the Department for consideration in development of a Department-recommended preferred alternative. Over a 2-year period, a substantial number of design and planning meetings took place, including three public workshops, seven meetings of the Central Coast Regional Stakeholders Group, 12 meetings of the Statewide Interests Group, 15 meetings of the Science Advisory Team, 14 meetings of the BRTF, and seven special meetings of the Commission.

In April 2006, the BRTF formally transmitted three alternative central coast MPA packages (Packages 1, 2R, and 3R) to the Department for its consideration. The task force included its recommendation that Package 3R be considered the preferred alternative. The Department used this recommendation as the basis for its development of the staff-recommended Package P. The Commission in turn used components of Packages 3R and P in developing the Commission-preferred alternative.

The Commission-preferred alternative became the Proposed Project for the purposes of CEQA review. The Commission also determined that Packages 1 and 2R should be carried forward for consideration as alternatives in the EIR. These packages are identified as Alternatives 1 and 2, respectively, in this document.

9.2. Alternatives Considered but Dismissed from Further Consideration in this EIR

The following alternatives were dismissed from more detailed impact analysis in this EIR because they were considered infeasible, would not meet MLPA objectives, would have unacceptably high potential impacts on fisheries, or were substantially similar to the project alternatives under consideration. Each dismissed alternative is described below, along with the reason it was dismissed from further analysis.

- **Package AC:** This alternative was prepared by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and PRBO Conservation Science and was considered to have unacceptably high potential impacts on fisheries. Though components of this proposal were included in discussion and preparation of packages to recommend to the Department and Commission, the BRTF did not forward this outside proposal to the Department for consideration.

- **Package B:** This alternative was prepared by Help Our Peninsula Environment. This alternative was not a network of MPAs, but rather a single MPA encompassing the entire portion of the central California coast occupied by sea otters along with an additional single MPA in the Monterey Peninsula area. Therefore, it did not meet the project objectives and the mandate of the MLPA or the scientific guidelines for size and spacing adopted by the Commission in the Master Plan Framework.

- **Package S:** This alternative was prepared by MLPA Initiative staff and was substantially similar to Package 3R, which was forwarded to the Department by the BRTF.

- **Alternative fishery management techniques:** Additional species quotas, seasonal restrictions, or gear restrictions would not meet the primary MLPA mandate of improving the State's existing array of MPAs and ensuring they are based in sound science and function, to the extent possible, as a network.

- **Alternative MPA locations that have lower potential to displace existing fishing effort:** This alternative would result in lower potential increased air emissions; thereby potentially eliminating the only significant adverse impact of the Proposed Project. Such an alternative would provide little of the habitat and species protections identified in the MLPA objectives, would not meet scientific design guidelines, and could lead to continued declines in certain populations and a less resilient ecosystem; likely to the point of creating a significant biological impact comparable to the No Project Alternative.

The State CEQA Guidelines also suggest that an EIR examine any reasonable offsite alternatives to a project. Offsite alternatives to the Proposed Project are precluded by its geographic scope, which limits it to the California coast between Pigeon Point and Point Conception. Therefore, offsite alternatives are not possible. It is the Department's intent to establish MPAs along the remainder of the California coast and some offshore islands at a later date, but the Proposed Project deals only with the central coast.

9.3. Alternatives Analyzed in the Draft EIR

CEQA suggests that impact discussions for alternatives do not need to be presented to the depth of the discussion of the Proposed Project's impacts. However, the Department decided to review each alternative MPA network component design at an equal level in the draft EIR. This analysis can be found in Chapters 5 to 7. Table 9-1 briefly summarizes the impacts associated with each alternative compared to the Proposed Project. Alternatives 1 and 2 would consist of the same project characteristics as the Proposed Project; the differences would be limited to number, size, shape, and location of the MPAs and the restrictions on fishing proposed within various MPAs. Alternative 1 would place 14.9% of state waters in MPAs, consisting of 14 SMRs (58.90 square miles [mi^2]), one SMP (4.41 mi^2), 13 SMCAs (107.37 mi^2), and one SMRMA (0.66 mi^2). Alternative 2 would place 19.3% of state waters in MPAs, including 20 SMRs (147.02 mi^2), one SMP (9.84 mi^2), eight SMCAs (63.93 mi^2), and one SMRMA (0.66 mi^2).

Overall, impacts resulting from Alternatives 1 and 2 were found to be the same as impacts resulting from the Proposed Project (Table 9-1). Alternative 1 could result in less air emissions; however, it would not reduce identified potentially significant adverse air quality impacts to less than significant levels. Aside from the No Project Alternative, feasible alternatives to reduce air quality impacts to less than significant levels could not be identified (see Section 9.2).

9.3.1. No Project Alternative

The No Project Alternative is described in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.3. Under the No Project Alternative, there would not be potential for added impacts resulting from the displacement of fishing activity, such as increased air pollutant emissions and redirected fishing–related impacts on biological resources. However, there is insufficient habitat

within existing MPAs to meet the goals of the MLPA and satisfy the recommended scientific guidelines for establishing MPAs in the master plan framework. The MLPA was passed specifically noting the lack in real ecosystem benefit or protection provided by existing MPAs. The No Project Alternative could lead to continued declines in certain populations and a less resilient ecosystem, as noted in the MLPA. This would be considered a potentially significant biological resources impact.

Table 9-1. Comparison of Impact Significance under Proposed Project and Alternatives

Environmental Issue Area	Proposed Project	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	No Project
Aesthetics	NI	NI	NI	NI
Agriculture	NI	NI	NI	NI
Air Quality	SU	SU	SU	NI
Biological Resources	LTS to B	LTS to B	LTS to B	SU
Cultural Resources	NI	NI	NI	NI
Geology and Soils	NI	NI	NI	NI
Hazards and Hazardous Materials	NI	NI	NI	NI
Land Use	NI	NI	NI	NI
Mineral Resources	NI	NI	NI	NI
Noise	NI	NI	NI	NI
Oceanography	NI	NI	NI	NI
Population and Housing	LTS	LTS	LTS	NI
Public Services and Utilities	LTS	LTS	LTS	NI
Recreation	LTS	LTS	LTS	NI
Research and Education	NI/B	NI/B	NI/B	NI
Vessel Traffic	LTS	LTS	LTS	NI
Water Quality	LTS	LTS	LTS	NI

Notes: NI = no impact; B = beneficial; LTS = less than significant; SU = Significant Unavoidable

No feasible mitigation measures identified for significant unavoidable impacts.

9.4. Environmentally Superior Alternative

Because all alternatives considered would result in a significant unavoidable air quality impact, the identification of the environmentally superior alternative focuses on the relative degree of significant and less-than-significant impacts, as well as the relative degree of potential environmental benefit associated with each alternative. In

the short term, Alternative 1 potentially would result in the least amount of fishing displacement, and less extensive potential impacts such as increased air pollutant emissions resulting from increased vessel transit, water quality impacts resulting from vessel abandonment, and increased demand for law enforcement. However, in the long term, Alternative 2 provides greater habitat representation, thereby providing a greater potential benefit to populations of marine species that depend on these habitat types for some part of their life history. This greater net benefit to biological resources ultimately would likely offset initial fishing displacement–related impacts, particularly as species presently designated in an overfished status begin to recover as a result of increased fishing restrictions. The combination of increased fish stocks due to fishery restrictions and the added benefit provided from new MPAs ultimately should result in healthier sustainable fishery populations, reducing the need for fishermen to transit beyond the periphery of the MPAs in search of available resources. Alternative 2 is therefore considered the environmentally superior alternative under CEQA.

9.5. Preferred Alternative

The Proposed Project (Commission Preferred Alternative) was developed to address biological and fisheries considerations as well as management concerns. In particular, ease of recognition by the public, enforcement of boundaries, ability to implement, and regulatory simplicity were considered. As noted in the MLPA, existing MPAs "lack clearly defined purposes, effective management measures and enforcement," creating “the illusion of protection.”

In Alternative 1, high protection MPA and MPA cluster (combined MPAs directly adjacent to each other) size is relatively small. Only 6 of 13 MPA clusters in Alternative 1 meet or exceed the minimum size guidelines provided by the SAT, as compared to 9 of 14 in Alternative 2 and 8 of 13 in the proposed project. Additionally, Alternative 1 has the fewest replicates of various desired habitats. On average, habitats reviewed by the SAT are only represented in 2.6 MPAs within Alternative 1, as compared to 4.9 in Alternative 2 and 4.5 in the Proposed Project. Finally, in certain sub-regions, Alternative 1 protects minimal amounts of some habitats (e.g., kelp forest and shallow rock) in small MPAs. While this meets the scientific guidelines for spacing between habitats, it does so due to the fact that within a small MPA, a relatively small amount of any individual habitat will be a large percentage of the total MPA area. Thus, within certain sub-regions, Alternative 1 does not meet the overall intent of MLPA to improve habitat representation.

Alternative 2 includes several design and regulation recommendations that would be difficult for the public to understand, difficult to enforce and would likely not be able to be implemented. At Point Año Nuevo, Alternative 1 surrounds Año Nuevo Island with an MPA using multiple boundary corners. The Proposed Project instead uses a straight line along an easily determined line of longitude. In the Monterey peninsula, Alternative 2 recommends using the 10 fathom contour as an offshore boundary. Depth contours are difficult to both comply with and enforce as MPA boundaries due to the nature of the environment (e.g., changing tides and swells). It is also difficult to accurately determine

depth and variability between depth meters is common. The Proposed Project, conversely, uses straight-line boundaries between existing landmarks and/or easily marked corners. Within Carmel Bay, Alternative 2 uses straight-line boundaries, but includes offshore corners that would be difficult to mark and which do not line up with known landmarks. Additionally in both Carmel Bay and at Big Creek, Alternative 2 surrounds a portion of a no-take area with a limited-take area creating both difficulties in public understanding of regulations and difficulties in enforcement due to multiple boundary lines. Finally, at Point Buchon, Alternative 1 uses a southern boundary that angles outward from shore not following a cardinal compass direction. This makes boundary recognition difficult to determine from sea.

Because Alternative 1 falls short meeting the MLPA intent for a cohesive biological network and Alternative 2 contains elements that are difficult or unrealistic to enforce and implement, the Proposed Project is the most likely to achieve the full range of MLPA goals and objectives, and has therefore been identified as the Commission preferred alternative.