

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

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Chair Don Benninghoven Issues Statement on Progress in Implementing the Marine Life Protection Act Initiative

Today MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force Chair Don Benninghoven issued the following statement on the progress being made to implement the Marine Life Protection Act Initiative in California:

"Recently the MLPA Initiative has experienced strong criticism, which is to be expected when engaged in a significant, cutting-edge effort to provide for a more balanced use of our ocean. We are confident in our mission to hear and consider all perspectives as we move forward in southern California that we can balance efforts to provide maximum ocean protection while limiting short-term economic impacts.

"A collaboration of public and private partners is supporting a dedicated team of over 80 stakeholders, scientists and community partners to develop and release to the public in the next few weeks the first set of draft marine protected area proposals for the study region. The draft proposals identify different ways the state can reconfigure its marine protected areas to help ensure the state's marine ecosystem has greater protection.

"Stakeholders are making tremendous strides in their efforts to maximize habitat protection while minimizing, to the extent possible, economic impacts. I applaud their efforts working as a team to consider multiple viewpoints on how best to redesign MPAs in California waters; in doing so they are also using the best readily available data that is displayed in a GIS-based system on the Internet that is available to everyone, including the public.

"This is an unparalleled effort to gather the best readily available science and data related to ocean ecosystems and marine protected areas and to apply it in the real world. With an ongoing public-private partnership providing a solid foundation of over \$8 million in private funds for completing the redesign process along the coast and to begin planning in San Francisco Bay, we fully expect to complete our task in late 2010 as planned.

"In January of this year Secretary Mike Chrisman reiterated the Schwarzenegger Administration's tireless commitment to completing this planning process and for ensuring adequate funding for implementation. He also emphasized the importance of public-private partnerships, such as the MLPA Initiative, in making long-term management most effective, whether for enforcement, outreach, education or on-site management.

"Similar criticisms about the MLPA Initiative were made during the north central coast process in 2007 and, yet, in 2008 the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force forwarded to the commission four marine protected area proposals, including an integrated preferred alternative that was developed based upon the extensive work of 45 stakeholders representing a variety of interests during a 15-month redesign process. The integrated preferred alternative received support from a diversity of interests, from fishermen and divers to conservationists and the general public.

"Everyone agrees that healthy oceans are good for the economy. We are all stewards looking for a balanced use and protection of California's marine resource for current and future generations. Next month we begin work in the north coast study region and expect to engage with another exceptional group of stakeholders and community partners to help California achieve this goal."