

# Stakeholder Assessment Memorandum

**Date:** October 1, 2008

**To:** South Coast Regional Stakeholder Group Members

**From:** Scott McCreary and Rebecca Tuden, CONCUR, Inc.

**Re:** Stakeholder Assessment Memorandum, SCRSG Process

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This Stakeholder Assessment Memorandum presents our summary findings from interviews we conducted a broad cross-section of MLPA South Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (SCRSG) nominees. We conducted over 80 interviews, including interviews with 57 nominees appointed to the SCRSG. Interviews were conducted by facilitation team members Scott McCreary, John Gamman and Rebecca Tuden of CONCUR, Inc., and Eric Poncelet of Kearns and West.

These interviews and this Memorandum represent a key part of our preparation to facilitate the SCRSG process and will inform ongoing process design decisions.

Several overarching findings emerged from the interviews:

- Stakeholders are taking a keen interest in the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative south coast process. The stakeholders interviewed want MLPA implementation to take into account the broad diversity of stakeholder interests with particular attention focused on the large population and many uses of the south coast study region (SCSR).
- Stakeholders have considerable local knowledge and experience and are willing to bring this to the process.
- In general, stakeholders recognize the challenges inherent in designing and proposing a set of marine protected areas (MPAs) that satisfies the multiple stakeholder interests in the SCSR.
- The stakeholders expressed appreciation that each phase of the MLPA effort, including the central coast and the north central coast study regions, demonstrated an improved process and an improved outcome. Stakeholders were optimistic that the effort in the SCSR would build on prior efforts and result in MPA proposals that achieved the goals of the MLPA.
- A significant number of stakeholders interviewed emphasized the importance of protecting the marine resources for future generations and keeping an eye toward minimizing socio-economic impact of MPAs.
- Many stakeholders stressed the importance of respecting their fellow SCRSG members and listening to all sides of an issue before reaching a conclusion.

This memorandum is organized into two main sections. Section A summarizes the interests expressed by the stakeholders interviewed. Section B summarizes key views on the south coast project, including potential challenges to overcome and keys to success.

## A. Stakeholder Interests

In the interviews, respondents expressed a wide variety of interests with regard to the MLPA and the marine resources of the MLPA Initiative's SCRSG. Most of the respondents expressed multiple interests, demonstrating the complex patterns of resource use and affiliations in the study region.

### 1. Shared interests

Several of the interests expressed were shared across all of the stakeholder perspectives. These included interests in healthy ocean ecosystems; sustainable use of marine resources; policy making informed by sound science, accurate information, and diverse stakeholder perspectives; sustainable coastal communities; and a transparent stakeholder process viewed as legitimate by all.

### 2. Hopes regarding the SCRSG process

Respondents expressed a variety of other hopes regarding the SCRSG process. These included desires for:

- MPA decisions that represent a "balance" among stakeholder interests, especially between protection and utilization of a resource and between conservation and socioeconomic needs.
- A well-informed stakeholder process where stakeholders' views are heard, trust and respect are established within the SCRSG, and information from studies as well as direct observation and experience are included.

## B. Views on the Project – Potential Challenges and Keys to Success

Respondents acknowledged the complexity of issues facing the MLPA Initiative's south coast process as well as the multiple competing interests involved. Respondents identified the following key challenges to the process along with several keys to success.

### 1. Key issues likely to confront the SCRSG — achieving a balance and addressing user "hot spots"

Respondents identified a number of key issues viewed as likely to arise in the SCRSG process. The most commonly identified issues concerned:

- **Achieving a balance between ecosystem protection and socioeconomic impacts.** Many respondents believed that the SCRSG must work hard to find an appropriate balance between conservation, biodiversity, and ecosystem protection goals and the avoidance of negative socioeconomic impacts. In particular, respondents emphasized the intensity of use in the SCRSG, the importance of protecting specific uses such as bait fisheries, ensuring that no one area takes the brunt of excessive closures or restrictions and the role of "no take" areas in implementing the MLPA. This was balanced with the acknowledgement that fishing populations have declined in certain species, the importance of meeting the intent of the MLPA to provide a sustainable ecosystem for future generations, and the respondents desire to ensure fishing for our grandchildren.

- **Pinpointing and addressing user “hot spots.”** Most of the respondents predicted that disagreements would arise within the group over the protection of specific areas of high ecological, economic, and recreational value (e.g., rocky habitats; La Jolla reserve; Santa Catalina, San Nicholas, and San Clemente Islands; and habitat that supports bait fisheries). Respondents cautioned that some stakeholders might assume entrenched positions regarding these particular areas, due to fears of a loss of livelihood or concerns that key fishing spots may be closed and that critical habitat may not be protected.
- 2. Finding a constructive way to address marine issues that are not in the purview of the MLPA process.**

Many respondents raised concerns about issues affecting MPA functionality that fall outside the strict purview of the MLPA and are therefore difficult to address in this process. Yet, several respondents noted that such issues may have a bearing on successful implementation of MPAs. The most frequently mentioned issues included:

- Addressing the impacts of non-point source runoff and other water quality concerns associated with coastal development. Several respondents suggested that pollution runoff has a significant impact on ecosystem protection and health of fisheries. Respondents suggested that guidance is needed in addressing key water quality issues to consider in the siting of MPAs.
- Finding a fair way to account for the impact of existing fishery regulations and fishery management as the impacts of new MPAs are considered. These respondents noted that the commercial and recreational fisheries are both currently highly regulated, and that the contribution of these regulations toward achieving the goals of the MLPA should be acknowledged and addressed. In particular, some respondents suggested that “catch and release” be considered as a management option for some MPAs. Others noted that the type of fishing gear used (e.g. barb hooks or barbless) and the fishing season (e.g. spawning) has significant impact on a fishery.
- Addressing the intensity of use on remaining “open” areas. Many respondents noted that closures of certain areas would only serve to intensify use of other areas and that these negative effects should be considered in strict closures of important areas.
- Addressing the issue of decommissioning off-shore oil and gas platforms and the role of artificial reefs. Some respondents noted that artificial reefs provide important habitat in a study region that does not have as much rocky bottom as the study regions to the north.

**3. Distinguishing the South Coast MLPA Process from the Channel Islands Process**

For many of the interviewees, the northern Channel Islands MPA designation process provided the most direct source of exposure to the design of MPAs. Some of the respondents felt that the Channel Islands effort had been more “positional” and felt that the overall process had been a disappointment. Many of the respondents expressed their belief that the south coast MPA designation process would be an improvement over the Channel Islands effort. Some respondents recommended that the Channel Islands not be open for consideration along with the entire study region. We indicated in our interviews that the question on how to specifically address the northern Channel Islands in this study region is under consideration by the California Fish and Game Commission.

#### **4. Effectiveness of MPAs**

A few respondents raised concerns about the demonstrated effectiveness of MPAs along the California coast. Other respondents pointed out that debating the effectiveness of MPAs along the California coast or as a fishery management tool is not the charge of the SCRSG. In conclusion, all of the respondents felt that the MLPA process was going to proceed in the study region and that, rather than debate its effectiveness, it was essential to be at the table when discussing the specific MPA proposals.

#### **5. MLPA implementation and accountability**

Several stakeholders noted that successful implementation of the MLPA requires sufficient funding, adequate enforcement, and implementation of an adaptive management plan. These respondents were concerned that funding might not be available to ensure successful implementation.

#### **6. Public awareness of the MLPA and the Initiative process**

Several respondents pointed out that there are many users of marine resources in the SCSR, but that most of them still do not know about the MLPA and the Initiative process. These stakeholders noted that effective public outreach to the many diverse stakeholder populations in the south coast will be critical to ensuring the project's success.

#### **7. Building trust in the MLPA Initiative process**

Many respondents expressed concern about the extent and nature of the stakeholder dialogue needed to develop MPA proposals. Our interviews uncovered several sources of concern, some of which may hinge on misunderstandings or limited information on resource users and ecosystems. Noted issues include potential conflicts between the recreational and commercial fisherman, miscommunication and mistrust between the scientific community and the fisherman, and feeling vulnerable to complete closure of key areas and the associated economic impacts.

We also note that while some respondents expressed one or more specific concerns, many also praised the progress made in each study region and the effort to draw lessons learned from the central coast and north central coast study regions. These respondents appreciated hearing that the MLPA Initiative takes stakeholder concerns seriously and is working to address them.

One noted concern involved the perceived breach of process commitments that arose when the blue ribbon task force made late changes to stakeholder MPA proposals in the central coast process. Individuals noted that this perceived breach was not repeated in the north central coast process. Another improvement was providing information assessing socioeconomic impacts for commercial fisheries early on in the process. This was also noted as an improvement on earlier efforts. However, there was also an area of skepticism regarding Ecotrust's methodology for assessing socioeconomic impacts and fear about sharing such confidential information. Ecotrust has worked to ensure absolute confidentiality and we noted these steps during some of the interviews.

## **8. Public access to the coastline**

A few respondents noted that coastal property owners may view MPAs as a way of limiting both public and private access to the coast line.

## **9. Keys to success**

In their discussions of potential challenges and barriers, respondents recommended several key ways to help ensure the success of the SCRSG process. These included:

- Appointed SCRSG members and other participating stakeholders must be firmly committed to work toward achieving the goals of the MLPA.
- The process must be informed by sound science and accurate information.
- SCRSG members need to represent or otherwise ensure consideration of all of the key interests and perspectives in the distinguishing the SCSR from the Channel Islands process.
- Stakeholders need to feel that they are being listened to and that their concerns are being seriously considered.
- Stakeholders must be willing to “compromise” (we prefer to frame this as “make trade-offs and seek mutual gains”) and look beyond their own interests. They need to “keep an open mind” and be “compassionate to others’ views”.
- Stakeholders must search for solutions that “balance” multiple stakeholder interests.
- SCRSG members need to be diligent in reporting back to their broader constituents and bringing the views of these constituents back to the SCRSG deliberations.
- Initiative staff needs to ensure robust outreach to the many marine resource users in the south coast to help increase awareness of the Marine Life Protection Act and the MLPA Initiative process.