

Overview of the Application of MLPA Goals, Regional Objectives and Site-Specific Rationales in Planning Marine Protected Areas in the MLPA South Coast Study Region

November 17, 2008

The purpose of this document is to provide the MLPA South Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (SCRSG) with an introduction to goals and objectives for marine protected areas (MPAs), how they apply to MPA planning and design in particular, and how they apply to MPA monitoring and adaptive management in general. The document contains three sections:

- Section I provides a definition for goals, regional objectives, and site-specific rationales.
- Section II describes the various purposes of the regional objectives and site-specific rationales.
- Section III provides an overview of who identifies regional objectives for the MLPA South Coast Study Region and how they will be applied by the SCRSG. Most importantly, the document identifies the use of goals and regional objectives in the SCRSG process for designing MPAs and developing MPA proposals.

When enacted, the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) found that many of California's MPAs lacked a clearly defined purpose and, therefore, it directs that MPAs be re-examined and redesigned, and that the resulting MPAs have clearly identified objectives to meet the MLPA goals. Additionally, clearly defined objectives are critical factors influencing MPA design, regulations, monitoring and evaluation. In the context of MPA array(s) that will be proposed in the MLPA South Coast Study Region, the MLPA further notes that individual MPAs may serve varied primary purposes, while collectively achieving the overall goals and guidelines of the MLPA. Thus, the overall network of state marine reserves (SMRs), state marine conservation areas (SMCAs), and state marine parks (SMPs) must work toward achieving the goals of the MLPA.

Definitions

Goals Defined

In general, the MLPA goals are broad statements of intent that briefly and clearly define the desired long-term vision and/or condition that will be achieved with effective design and management of the MPAs or MPA network. The MLPA itself states that "it is necessary to modify the existing collection of MPAs to ensure that they are designed and managed according to clear, conservation-based goals and guidelines that take full advantage of the multiple benefits that can be derived from the establishment of marine life reserves." The MLPA identifies six goals based on that standard:

1. To protect the natural diversity and abundance of marine life, and the structure, function, and integrity of marine ecosystems.
2. To help sustain, conserve, and protect marine life populations, including those of economic value, and rebuild those that are depleted.
3. To improve recreational, educational, and study opportunities provided by marine ecosystems that are subject to minimal human disturbance, and to manage these uses in a manner consistent with protecting biodiversity.
4. To protect marine natural heritage, including protection of representative and unique marine life habitats in California waters for their intrinsic value.

5. To ensure that California's MPAs have clearly defined objectives, effective management measures, and adequate enforcement, and are based on sound scientific guidelines.
6. To ensure that the state's MPAs are designed and managed, to the extent possible, as a network.

For purposes of implementing the MLPA in the south coast, the MLPA goals should serve as the primary goals to achieve in the region.

Regional Objectives Defined

Objectives are specific aims or statements of intent that collectively work toward achieving a broader goal. For purposes of MPA planning under the MLPA, objectives for MPAs within each study region are intended to be relevant to that particular study region. These “regional objectives” serve as potential ways for individual MPAs, MPA clusters, or MPA arrays in that region to meet particular goals of the MLPA. Each proposed MPA should help accomplish one or more of the MLPA goals and, taken together, the statewide MPA network should meet all of the MLPA goals.

Useful regional objectives have a number of features:

- Specific and easily understood;
- Written in terms of what should be accomplished, not how to go about it;
- Realistically achievable;
- Provide clear priorities for MPAs; and
- Help inform development of monitoring plans after implementation.

Some regional objectives will apply to a single MPA (“site-level”), while other regional objectives will reflect linkages between MPAs and will need to consider more than one MPA at a time to be achieved (“network-level”). The science guidelines in the *California Marine Life Protection Act Master Plan for Marine Protected Areas* articulate means to achieve “network-level” regional objectives. For example, objectives pertaining to connectivity and habitat protection may be achieved via the MPA spacing and habitat replication guidelines.

Generally, the SCRSG should focus on “site-level” regional objectives. The collective contribution of multiple MPAs towards “network-level” regional objectives will be evaluated by the MLPA Master Plan Science Advisory Team (SAT) and California Department of Fish and Game; the evaluations will be provided to the SCRSG.

Site-Specific Rationales Defined

Site-specific rationales explain the various reasons why a single MPA is placed in a particular location and designed in a specific manner. The information provided in the site-specific rationales specify underlying conservation-based reasons for why it is important to place an MPA in a particular geographic area. This rationale may also include information on why specific portions of that geography are included or excluded, or may provide specific insight for why other key design elements are specified as they are (e.g. size, boundaries, allowed take). Overall, site-specific rationales should be consistent with the intent of the MLPA goals.

Design Considerations Defined

Design considerations may be used to document other factors that influence MPA design, such as socioeconomic considerations, resources use needs, and how “trade-offs” were integrated into the design. These design considerations are distinct from site-specific rationales and regional objectives.

Purpose of Goals, Regional Objectives and Site-Specific Rationales

Goals, regional objectives and site-specific rationales have different purposes within different stages of MPA planning and management. These stages include MPA design (including defining regulations), MPA proposal evaluation, and MPA monitoring.

The SCRSG will primarily use the goals and objectives within the first stage of MPA design, in order to clearly characterize the intended outcomes at MPA and regional levels.

MLPA goals and regional objectives will be used by the California Department of Fish and Game and SAT to evaluate the potential effectiveness of the proposed MPA arrays in achieving stated goals and objectives.

MPA design necessarily includes significant detail to document the intended outcomes at individual MPA and regional levels. However, given likely future time and resource limitations, monitoring must focus on a limited set of the most important information. Regional objectives and site-specific rationales will inform the development of MPA monitoring plans by clearly documenting intended outcomes and guiding the selection of information that most efficiently measures whether objectives and MLPA goals are being met.

Process for Developing and Applying Regional Objectives by the South Coast Regional Stakeholder Group (SCRSG)

The SCRSG Creates Regional Objectives for Use in the Study Region

In the study region, the SCRSG will discuss the MLPA goals and, keeping those in mind, will determine and adopt a set of south coast regional objectives to accomplish each MLPA goal in the study region. The SCRSG will have the opportunity to review previously adopted regional objectives from the central coast and north central coast study regions and modify them as appropriate for this study region.

Application of Regional Objectives by SCRSG

The development of MPA proposals is an iterative process and regional objectives play an important role in refining MPA proposals developed by the SCRSG.

The SCRSG will use the MLPA goals and regional objectives to inform identification of a range of potential MPA locations to achieve each objective. Selection of a specific MPA location from within potential locations will be accompanied by a site-specific rationale; this rationale articulates the reasons for selecting the chosen location and the justification for the design employed (e.g. size, boundary placement, and regulations). For example, an MPA that strives to protect biodiversity may be best located in an area with a variety of habitat types and may prohibit all take, while another that seeks to enhance recreational opportunities may be best

cited near coastal access points and may allow some recreational take. As multiple MPAs are designed, the SCRSG should revisit the regional objectives to determine whether, collectively, the array of MPAs will achieve regional objectives for all MLPA goals.

The California Department of Fish and Game will assist the SCRSG with identifying goals and regional objectives that highlight and are consistent with the rationale for proposed MPAs and MPA arrays; the department will also provide feedback and advice regarding consistency with MPA design and regulations. Please see the November 12, 2008 document *Department of Fish and Game Feasibility Criteria and Evaluation Components for MPA Proposals* for details about the evaluation approach.

The SCRSG will review the feedback and advice provided through various evaluations and will continue to refine MPA proposals based on that feedback. As design(s) for MPAs in particular locations evolve, regional objectives and site level rationale identified for those areas should influence crucial decisions regarding adjustments to size, location, regulations (allowed take), boundaries, and other critical design elements.

Figure 1 portrays components of MLPA goals and regional objectives in the MPA planning phase, and reflects the area of most immediate priority for the SCRSG.

Figure 1. Connections between Goals and Regional Objectives Identified by the SCRSG for MPAs in the South Coast MPA Planning Phase

