

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative
Summary of Master Plan Science Advisory Team Response to CFC Report
August 1, 2006

The Master Plan Science Advisory Team (SAT) is a requirement of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA), to provide advice and guidance based on the best readily available science. Following public comment and positive recommendations by the MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) and the California Department of Fish and Game, the SAT's guidance was incorporated into the MLPA Master Plan Framework (MPF), which was adopted by the Fish and Game Commission. SAT work focused on addressing the six goals established by MLPA statute, which place emphasis on protecting the structure, function and integrity of marine ecosystems. SAT work and recommendations were based on the best readily available science; peer-review by scientists appointed by the Oregon and California Sea Grant programs judged the scientific basis to be sound. Three scientists commissioned by the California Fisheries Coalition (CFC) produced a report that was critical of certain SAT findings and conclusions; the CFC report emphasizes fisheries management.

Responses to CFC Report

- Commissioned by a group of recreational and commercial fishing associations and businesses and thus represents a particular point of view. These report findings were neither peer-reviewed, discussed publicly, nor vetted through the MLPA process.
- Critical of the lack of integration of MPA planning with fishery management strategies when the SAT was not tasked with integrating MPAs into fisheries management. The report does not specifically address all six goals of the MLPA.
- Focuses on fishery yield, and does not consider the ecosystem conservation benefits or other roles that MPAs might play, such as bycatch controls, insurance against uncertainty, and tools for evaluating fishing impacts.
- Indicates that MLPA will produce MPAs only in state waters and, therefore, will protect only a small fraction of species. However, many species most at risk in California are shallow water species whose populations are entirely encompassed by state waters and are not actively managed by any agency.
- Developed models from which authors concluded that there were few differences in the projected outcomes of the various MPA packages now under consideration. SAT believes interpretations of these models is inaccurate because: 1) adult movement rates are applied incorrectly; 2) emphasis appears to be on species with home ranges larger than the range of recommended MPA sizes; 3) how changes in abundance of one species might influence other species is not taken into account; 4) life-history traits associated with MPA benefits to long-lived fishes (e.g., increased fecundity with increased body size and age) are not adequately addressed; and 5) all proposed MPAs are considered to be "no-take" state marine reserves.
- Criticizes the SAT for not using models similar to those described in the report. SAT members did develop a new model after the design guidelines were drafted, which has been accepted for peer-reviewed publication. Although this model was not employed in SAT determinations, it did show clear MPA network benefits for different species in some stakeholder MPA proposals.
- CFC models reduce the benefits of MPAs. However, if accurate, models predict that displaced fishing effort caused by MPAs will not affect the overall sustainability of the species analyzed.
- Concludes that highly mobile species may not benefit from MPAs but this does not negate the value of MPAs for more diverse groups of species that are less mobile or unfished. That MPAs will contribute little to resource protection is at odds with overwhelming empirical, peer-reviewed evidence for increased species abundances within MPAs found around the world.
- Concludes there is no evidence that current fishing practices upset the 'natural' biological diversity of marine ecosystems, which is also at odds with existing scientific information. Ample evidence exists from around the world that, by restricting fishing, MPAs can play a key role in enhancing the structure and functioning of marine ecosystems.