

OPERATING PRINCIPLES FOR MLPA MASTER PLAN SCIENCE ADVISORY TEAM

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Preface

In fulfilling the mandates of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA), the ultimate goal of the Master Plan Science Advisory Team (SAT) is to assist the California Department of Fish and Game (Department) and MLPA Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) in developing scientifically sound policy recommendations on behalf of the people of California. In meeting this goal, the SAT has a responsibility to inform and help educate the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission), Department, BRTF, stakeholder group, and the interested public. Additionally the SAT has a specific role in analyzing marine protected area (MPA) proposals and providing feedback to established stakeholder working groups and the BRTF during the development of alternative MPA proposals.

The Commission, in determining how to implement the MLPA, makes decisions based upon three elements: what is known (information), what is desired (values), and what can be done (alternatives). Of the three decision elements, the first is the clear purview of the SAT, to provide information that is scientifically sound. Information provided by the SAT should be based on the best readily available science and able to stand the test of scientific peer review. The SAT also has a role in the third decision element by providing scientific analyses of the proposed alternatives but has no role in value-based decision elements. The SAT will be proactive in providing scientific information and scientific analyses of alternative proposals that will help guide the Department and BRTF's recommendations and the Commission's decisions.

SAT Activities

The role of the SAT is to provide impartial assessments without subjective value judgments or opinions. It is not the role of the SAT to advocate on issues of value, i.e. what the people of California want or should want. Consistent with this, the SAT will not develop its own MPA proposals, but will support the MLPA process by providing scientific information and playing a role in reviewing and evaluating the scientific efficacy of proposed MPA designs. SAT members will also play a key role in helping the stakeholders and decision-makers in their understanding of the ecological aspects of the region.

The MLPA requires that the master plan for MPAs be based on sound scientific guidelines. The SAT's responsibility is to provide the best readily available scientific information to inform the MLPA process. The SAT (as a whole and in the form of any sub-teams) should clearly describe the basis for any recommendations.

In carrying out its duties, the SAT may synthesize multiple factual inputs from published papers, reports and studies, and available data, and utilize scientific models. The SAT will apply best professional judgment to identify and work with uncertainties in the available scientific information. Tools used by the SAT can include, but are not limited to, peer-reviewed scientific publications; state-of-science reports; technological assessments; scientific modeling; weight-of-evidence analyses; meta-analyses; and health, safety, or ecological risk assessments.

MPA Proposals

The SAT and sub-teams of the SAT will support the MLPA process by making available scientific information, providing comments on MPA alternatives, and playing a key role in reviewing and scientifically evaluating MPA proposals. A sub-team of the SAT will assist a regional stakeholder group in developing MPA alternatives by providing information, and commenting on and reviewing proposed MPA designs, but will not generate its own MPAs proposals. The SAT as a whole will provide scientific information and guidance to assist the process of developing MPA alternatives and will review and evaluate MPA alternatives proposed by regional stakeholder group.

The SAT will evaluate proposals for MPAs using a set of predetermined and publicly available criteria and evaluation tools. The criteria will be focused on the technical ability to meet the goals and objectives of the MLPA and the master plan for MPAs, along with individual MPA objectives determined by the stakeholder group or BRTF. The SAT evaluation may include recommended alterations of proposals to better achieve the stated scientific goals and objectives of the MLPA.

Guidelines for SAT Regional Sub-teams

SAT regional sub-team members will work directly with the stakeholder group in the designated coastal study region. SAT sub-team members will be encouraged to actively participate in stakeholder group meetings and at least one SAT sub-team member must be present at all stakeholder group meetings. The role of SAT sub-team members at these meetings is to provide expert advice and information; respond to questions or relay questions to the full SAT if additional information is needed; and to assist stakeholders in developing proposals. SAT sub-team members will have a seat at the meeting table for stakeholder group meetings and participate directly in joint fact finding and providing presentations to the group but will not participate in stakeholder group decision-making.

Requests for Information

Individual SAT members may receive multiple requests for information from both the general public and stakeholder group members. Requests for information will largely be restricted to the stakeholder group or SAT meetings and through the MLPA website. SAT members should try to best relay the views of the SAT as a whole in responding to information requests and, if providing personal opinions, make it clear that they are doing so. Formal responses from the SAT will be reviewed by the entire SAT prior to distribution to the stakeholder group.

During stakeholder group meetings, SAT sub-team members or support staff shall document scientific questions raised by stakeholder group members and the public. Science questions also may be submitted to the SAT sub-team via the web or by email. When appropriate, some questions may be answered directly by SAT members following the guideline in the above paragraph. A group including Department staff, MLPA Initiative staff, SAT sub-team members and support staff, and others will review and prioritize questions based on their relevance to the MLPA process and the availability of scientific data. Department staff, MLPA Initiative staff, SAT sub-team members, or SAT support staff will take the lead in responding to appropriate questions and may call on additional expertise. SAT responses will be reviewed by the entire SAT via email or at SAT meetings and approved responses will be presented at subsequent stakeholder group meetings and/or be posted on the MLPA web site.

The SAT chair(s), selected members of the SAT, SAT liaisons, or MLPA Initiative staff will present SAT responses to the BRTF or the Stakeholder group as appropriate.

SAT Interactions with MLPA Initiative Staff

Department and MLPA Initiative staff have been assigned to assist the SAT in fulfilling its role. The SAT chair(s) and SAT members may contact the Department's SAT member and MLPA coordinator and the BRTF's executive director when direction is needed.

Department or initiative staff will provide the SAT with clear requests for input and information that have been developed by the BRTF, stakeholder group, or the public. Staff will provide updates at SAT meetings including summaries of public comments. By acting as liaisons between the SAT and other parties participating in the MLPA Initiative, staff will help facilitate the flow of information.

Staff will not speak for the SAT unless specifically requested. Whenever possible, the SAT will provide its own representatives to deliver information to the Commission, BRTF and to other appropriate groups or parties.

SAT Interactions with the Commission, BRTF, and Stakeholder Group

It is important for the SAT to speak with a clear voice, albeit not necessarily a single one. On matters of science, the SAT should make clear, unambiguous recommendations to the Commission, BRTF, and stakeholder group. Whenever possible the SAT should agree to specific messages and recommendations, as a group and with unanimity, to deliver to the Commission or BRTF. If multiple, scientifically supported, choices are available, the SAT should clearly describe these choices to in a manner that allows the Commission, BRTF, or stakeholder group to best incorporate the scientific findings into the decision-making process. This process should ensure that the ideas of all SAT members are appropriately captured in recommendations and messages transferred from the SAT.

When providing commentary, individual SAT members will clearly state when they are expressing a view that is their own, and that may not be consistent with the SAT as a whole. The SAT can empower members to speak on its behalf.

The role of the SAT Chair(s)

The role of the SAT chair(s) and any SAT-designated advisory members is to facilitate the SAT's role in the MLPA process by providing leadership at SAT meetings, organizing SAT agendas, serving as spokespersons for the SAT at various meetings, and coordinating SAT activities. SAT sub-team members will be selected to fulfill identified tasks and are viewed as working subsets of the SAT. In this capacity the chair(s) and any SAT-designated sub-team members serve all members of the SAT.

The chair(s) and, if possible, designated SAT members will attend all BRTF meetings. Other SAT members will be selected by the SAT to attend specific BRTF meetings as needed. Efforts will be made to identify a subset of the SAT to serve in this capacity to achieve consistency in communicating with the BRTF. Alternate SAT members will be selected to attend BRTF meetings whenever the designated SAT members are unable to attend. The chair(s) or designated advisory members of the SAT also will participate in the stakeholder process as members of SAT sub-teams.

Potential Conflicts of Interest for SAT Members

Members of the SAT bring to the process an extensive and wide range of scientific knowledge and skills, including experience working in regional environmental settings and with data, tools, and analytical methodologies of use to parties involved in implementing the MLPA. Therefore, it should be expected that SAT members will be candidates for receiving contracts or other funding from various sources, potentially including the Department, to perform work associated with the MLPA process. These award decisions are not within the purview of the SAT and do not imply SAT endorsement. Nevertheless, such

awards can create a perceived conflict of interest. Hence, all contracts or grants to SAT members provided by the MLPA Initiative or the Department shall be fully disclosed by posting this information along with a statement of participating SAT members' qualifications on the MLPA website. Further, a SAT member who is a principal investigator or author of a proposal or contract shall abstain from reviewing such proposals or potential contracts, or evaluating the quality of the direct work products resulting from the execution of such proposals or contracts, if this work is associated with the MLPA process. Participation on the SAT, however, shall not prohibit any SAT member from competing for funds in support of the MLPA process.