

California Fish and Game Commission
715 P Street, 16th floor,
Sacramento, CA 95814

February 14, 2024

RE: Petition to Modify CA Marine Protected Area Network to Enhance Protections for
California's Most Resilient Kelp Forests

Dear President Sklar and Honorable Commissioners:

As marine and environmental businesses and recreationists, we know first hand the value California's nature holds for residents and visitors alike. California's ocean holds some of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world and, to keep it that way, the state has been a global leader in ocean conservation. Now, we are writing to you to urge the Fish and Game Commission to prioritize strengthening the state's existing network of MPAs so that California can continue to safeguard its treasured ocean life and set an example for the nation and the globe of responsible stewardship.

California's coastline serves as a captivating haven for individuals seeking to revel in its myriad wonders. Californians flock to the shores for a plethora of activities, indulging in beach trips to engage in tidepool exploration, birdwatching, surfing, swimming, kayaking, scuba diving, whale watching, horseback riding, hiking, biking, and an array of other delightful pursuits. That is why, as business owners and community members who rely on a vibrant ocean, we are worried about the ongoing biodiversity crisis in our ocean. Over the last half-century, marine vertebrate populations have declined by nearly 50 percent, and the number of endangered marine species is growing.¹ Marine heatwaves have doubled over the last 30 years, and have become more intense and longer in duration, putting stress on California's marine species and ecosystems.²

The impacts of climate change are compounding the effects of other human activities that impact our coastal ecosystems. The pollution of our coastline, resulting in higher levels of marine debris, has caused significant harm to wildlife. Which we have seen through increases in entanglement, ingestion, and disruption of their habitat.³ Fishing remains the number one driver of biodiversity loss in the ocean.⁴ Yet overfishing continues. About 90 percent of global fish

¹ Doebeli, Anna G., et al. "How Does the Environmental State "See" Endangered Marine Animals?" *Environmental Science & Policy*, vol. 124, 2021, pp. 293-304, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.07.001>. Accessed 31 Jan. 2024.

² García-Reyes, Marisol, Andrew Leising, Rebecca Asch, Steven Bograd, and Tessa M Hill. Rep. Indicators of Climate Change in California, "[Coastal Ocean Temperature](#)", *California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment*, 2022.

³ California Coastal Commission, "[The Problem with Marine Debris](#)," April, 2023

⁴ Eduardo Brondizio et al., "[Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#)," Zenodo, May 4, 2019.

stocks are classified as fully exploited, overexploited or depleted.⁵ On the U.S. West Coast, six commercially caught fish, including three species of salmon, remain on the overfished and overfishing list.⁶ The effects of this loss reverberate throughout marine ecosystems; declines in biodiversity exponentially weaken an ecosystem's ability to recover from disturbances, worsen water quality and lead to widespread resource collapse.⁷ As a business that relies on the ocean's ecosystem for sustenance and profits, these statistics are extremely worrisome.

In the face of this urgent crisis, the California government has the opportunity to take bold, effective action.

No-take MPAs, such as California's state marine reserves, are especially impactful in addressing this loss of ocean life. They lead to average increases of 28 percent in organism size, 166 percent in species density, 466 percent in biomass, and 21 percent in species richness.⁸ All of these metrics tell a story about the health of the ecosystem; ocean spaces with more species, and more diverse individuals, have a better chance of survival as climate change intensifies.

No-take marine reserves (i.e., "fully" protected MPAs) are one of the most effective ways to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem function and improve ecosystem resilience, as the ocean is faced with myriad stressors.⁹ Marine reserves provide areas that serve as buffers against the impacts of climate change and are able to adapt to acidifying waters, rising sea levels, intensified storm events, and decreases in oxygen availability.

California's ocean economy provides 1.035 million jobs for California residents and contributes to about 7% of the state's workforce.¹⁰ However, if we continue to not take any action to preserve the ocean, then this will decrease over time. Not only will hundreds of thousands of people be out of a job, but we will not receive the intrinsic benefits we receive from having access to our beautiful California coasts. We are asking the government to take real action to prevent this great loss, as we rely on the ocean for so much more than just our livelihoods.

A broad set of Californians love the ocean, and should be included in making decisions that impact our state's coastal waters. It's important that the diversity of California's ocean users is reflected in this political process. This includes youth, recreational users, conservation groups, businesses, ocean lovers and more.

⁵ Mukhisa Kituyi and Peter Thomson, "[90% of fish stocks are used up – fisheries subsidies must stop emptying the ocean](#)," World Economic Forum, July 13, 2018.

⁶ NOAA Fisheries, "[Status of Stocks 2022](#)," Sustainable Fisheries, August 9, 2023.

⁷ Worm B et al. 2006. [Impacts of Biodiversity Loss on Ocean Ecosystem Services](#). Science **314**:787–790.

⁸ Fox, H.E. et al. 2012. [Reexamining the science of marine protected areas: linking knowledge to action](#). Conservation Letters, 5: 1-10.

⁹ Jérôme Petit and Johnny Briggs, "[Studies Show Powerful Benefits of Fully Protected Ocean Areas](#)," The Pew Charitable Trusts, June 2, 2021.

¹⁰ Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, "[The Ocean Economy in Los Angeles County: Economic Impact Analysis](#)," LAEDC, 2020.

The ocean is a source of clean air to breathe, wildlife to marvel at, beauty and mystery. It is imperative that California continue to lead the nation and world in taking bold action for the sake of the sea and its future.

Sincerely,

Central Coast Outdoors

Dive Outdoors

Enjoy Napa Valley

Kayak Connection

La Jolla Sea Caves Kayak, LLC

Otter Bay Wetsuits

SpitSea Dive