



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
Marine Region
1933 Cliff Drive, Suite 9
Santa Barbara, CA 93109
wildlife.ca.gov

GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



September 6, 2024

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary for Natural Resources
Chair, California Ocean Protection Council
California Natural Resources Agency
715 P St, 20th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

SUBJECT: Support for the California Artificial Reef Program Plan (Item 8) and Advancing Recommendations from the Decadal Management Review and to Inform Management of California’s Marine Protected Area Network (Item 9a and 9b)

Dear Secretary Crowfoot and members of the Ocean Protection Council:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has worked closely with Ocean Protection Council staff to develop funding priorities and supports the authorization for disbursement of funding for **Item 8: Development of The California Artificial Reef Program Plan** and **Item 9: To Advance Recommendations from the Decadal Management Review and to Inform Management of California’s Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network**, which are being considered at the September 10, 2024 meeting.

The Department is tasked with the management of the state’s Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network and the administration of the California Artificial Reef Program (CARP). These proposed projects would support the Department’s ability to carry out these mandates and aggregate the best science available and to integrate input from stakeholders and California Native American Tribes to implement and adaptively manage these programs.

The CARP was created in 1985 by Fish and Game Code section 6420 – 6425 and was never fully implemented due to lack of allocated resources. While the CARP has remained unfunded, requests to expand the use of artificial reefs for a wide range of objectives have been growing rapidly and are anticipated to continue to increase. Large scale development projects exploring mitigation pathways and interest in species specific restoration projects are driving much of the increase in project requests. The Department supports funding the proposed project for **Item 8** as the project will address a critical need for the Department and other state regulators to have a science-based and stakeholder informed programmatic guidance plan to inform the development and implementation of the CARP. Robust scientific, agency, stakeholder, and Tribal engagement is the center piece of the project ensuring the CARP Plan will be based on the best science available and integrate local,

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traditional and expert knowledge. The CARP Plan will provide consistency and transparency for both project developers and regulators, which will promote improved coordination and efficiency of the environmental review and permitting processes.

In 2023, the Department released the first comprehensive Decadal Management Review of the MPA Network and Management Program that included 28 recommendations prioritizing adaptive management of the Network over the next decade. The Department's continued partnership with Ocean Protection Council will be integral in moving many of these recommendations forward. The proposed funding for **Item 9a** would address Decadal Management Review recommendations to:

- Improve the understanding of human dimensions and MPAs and advance approaches to better utilize community science to supplement core monitoring programs (recommendations 12 and 14), and
- Develop tools to apply the results of the Decadal Management Review to support potential adaptive management changes to the MPA Network and update the MPA Monitoring Action Plan (recommendations 4 and 11).

Investment in the mapping tool SeaSketch and updates to the California Connectivity Model will further inform evaluation of network design and performance, inform adaptive management, and refine the tools needed for the MPA petition evaluation process that is currently under way. Funding to support the next round of long-term monitoring in mid-depth rocky reefs will forward the key findings of a Technical Advisory Panel to streamline data collection in this habitat that is so critical for promoting biodiversity across the MPA Network and supporting the state's economically important fisheries species.

These proposed projects would bring together qualified technical experts and directly address key science-based questions that will improve the efficacy of future management actions. Importantly, the projects leverage past work to infuse with emerging science as well as stakeholder and Tribal input ensuring management actions are based on the best science and information available.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at (805) 568-1246 or by email at r7regionalmgr@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Craig Shuman, D. Env.
Marine Regional Manager

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary for California Natural Resources Agency

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Page 3

ec: Claire Waggoner, Environmental Program Manager
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Claire.Waggoner@wildlife.ca.gov

Stephen Wertz, Senior Environmental Scientist
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Stephen.Wertz@wildlife.ca.gov

Eric Wilkins, Senior Environmental Scientist
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Eric.Wilkins@wildlife.ca.gov

Cyndi Dawson, Senior Environmental Scientist
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Cyndi.Dawson@wildlife.ca.gov