

C.3 National System of Marine Protected Areas

Dear PFMC,

There IS an abundance of groundfish in coastal waters off Alabama because they have created over 14,000 underwater structures that create marine ecosystems. Economic benefits of this to Alabama are HUGE!

Proponents of Marine Protected Areas seem intent on ignoring or minimizing this spectacular achievement; that has been my personal experience dealing with the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Advisory Council.

Two respected University researchers and the Director of Alabama's Marine Resources Division state the question of production versus attraction of underwater structure re fish is SETTLED!!

Auburn University fisheries professor Stephen Szedlmayer recently conducted a study of the diets of red snapper and grey triggerfish taken from artificial reefs and concluded that "artificial reefs are productive environments" for both species

And

University of Alabama's Shipp thinks so, too: "We're landing eight to 10 times what we did over 100 years ago. I think the increase in population is doubtless because of the reef program."

And

Vernon Minton, director of the Marine Resources Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, agrees that the debate is settled. "We are growing fish here," he insists. "We have some very good published research that shows that in our area we are producing additional biomass of fish. It's a very fair statement to say that the artificial reefs and the program are improving the quality of the environment."

<http://www.reason.com/news/show/28175.html>

These respected researchers and Director of Alabama's MRD can be easily reached for their information; I urge the PFMC to do so and include this information in its consideration of MPA's because in areas where natural reefs have had habitat destruction from trawl damage (which is almost everywhere!!) this constitutes a means to redress that habitat destruction and expand marine ecosystems.

Additionally, I offer the research of UCSB's MSI on oil rig structure and morbidity of groundfish (which is a type of underwater structure!):

Studies Show That Rockfish Thrive With Offshore Platforms As Their Home Base

The rockfish species called Bocaccio (*Sebastes paucipinis*), which can live up to 50 years, was, until recently, an economically important rockfish species along the West Coast of North America and was abundant from Oregon to northern Baja California.

Overfishing has reduced the stock to less than one-tenth of its former population, according to Milton S. Love, a marine biologist with UCSB's Marine Science Institute (MSI). However, the platforms are helping to restore this species.

"This is the first time that we have solid evidence that platforms can be critical habitat for rebuilding some species of rockfishes," said Love.

AND

Brian M. Emery, a physical oceanographer with (UCSB) MSI, is the lead author of a second paper which reports on ocean currents in the region of Point Conception to Point Arguello, north of the Santa Barbara Channel and near Platform Irene.

The results showed that, on average, about three-quarters of the young Bocaccio settling around Platform Irene would not survive in the absence of the platform. Rather, the prevailing currents would move them offshore where they would have a very low probability of survival.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2006/06/060629122443.htm>

AND...

There's Something Fishy About Rigs to Reef
In a Disturbing Turn of Events, Oil Companies Could Be Doing Good

When I got back, I went straight to a marine biologist who studies the reefs, and asked, indignantly, about Rigs to Reef.

And it turned out that, maybe, oil platforms do help the fish. There're two possibilities.

Either hellacious numbers of fish randomly come from all over the ocean and decide to stay at the platform where they are usually protected by fishing bans, or the platforms are creating fish.

The biologist, Dr. Milton Love, works with the UCSB Marine Science Institute and the U.S. Geological Survey, studying the ecological role of natural reefs and oil platforms for fish.

Despite his two fish tattoos, a USGS study on the oil platforms and a book called *Probably More Than You Want to Know About the Fishes of the Pacific Coast*, Love claims he gets ignored in the Rigs to Reef debate.

He's not exactly ignored, since the L.A. Times seems to quote him whenever they do a story. But he claims he wasn't called about the most recent bill on California's Rigs to Reef program, which the governor vetoed in October. Instead, the governor called some of Love's colleagues at the MSI, who authored another study claiming that there is no scientific evidence that the platforms help the fish.

Love thinks there's some pretty good proof that the platforms work to enhance the fish population. He's been studying the rigs for six years, with two colleagues in the MSI, and he's published several USGS papers on the topic.

It's been suggested that the fish just come from elsewhere to live at the platform base but the numbers make this unlikely. Pick a species and there are thousands at the platform.

Take the platform out and what's left?

Love pulls up another photo: mud. A shot of the huge parts of the Santa Barbara Channel that are just mud with random fish scattered here and there.

Not, Love says, that this is bad. It's up to people to decide what they want: mud or fish.

<http://www.dailynews.com/article.php?a=1887>

To truly build a partnership with fishermen you need to focus on the dramatic success in Alabama and begin focusing on restoring fishing, not just closing areas to fishing. You also need to focus an education program that highlights all this research on creating marine ecosystems.

Lastly, Marine Sanctuaries that have already had the bottom altered by trawl damage, sewer outfalls, desalination effects, erosion and silting of biologically sensitive areas with land based persistent organic pollutants must not have language that prohibits the placement of underwater structure to restore and/or expand marine ecosystems. **DO NOT JUST FREEZE IN THE NEGATIVE PRIOR EFFECTS AND THEN CLOSE FISHING OFF WITH MPA's!**

There's already too much of that going on in Monterey Bay.

A multi-faceted approach is much more fair and palatable to recreational fishermen than just MPA's! We have NOT created the situation that currently exists.

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