

GROUND FISH ADVISORY PANEL REPORT ON REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES (ONMS)

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed the briefing book documents under this agenda item and offers the following comments.

In general, the GAP opposes the designation of large new sanctuaries along the West Coast, and in California in particular. This follows a fisheries-wide sentiment. Most of the California coast from Point Reyes, above San Francisco, to the Channel Islands south of Santa Barbara, already falls under Sanctuaries authority.

On the face of it, sanctuary designation could provide protection of fisheries from many competing uses fisheries face. These include hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation, at-sea aquaculture, oceanic renewable energy development/wind farms and others.

However, over the years, experience has prompted a greater fear of losing fishing access due to the efforts of sanctuaries staff and regulations than is presented by the specter of competing ocean uses.

In the case of the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary (CINMS), in 1980 designation efforts had gathered broad support by fishers. Fears of additional regulatory hurdles were mitigated by the inclusion of explicit language within its designation document excluding CINMS from regulating fisheries.

Yet, by 2001 CINMS staff had spearheaded a process designating the largest area of no-fishing Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in the state, which remains so to this day. In 2006, CINMS staff successfully endeavored to have the wording explicitly prohibiting CINMS from managing fishing stricken from its designation document.

In the context of well managed fisheries, science has shown perennial fishing closures of this scale and type offer little compensatory fisheries benefit and indeed model to cost fisheries productionⁱ (Ovando et al. 2021). Further, dynamic fisheries closures model to be much more effective at reducing the bycatch of species to be avoidedⁱⁱ (Pons et al. 2022).

In the California case, permanent closures have hampered our ability to survey and assess fish stocks along this coast. Fisheries independent data derived by MPA monitoring efforts have thus far not been able to be incorporated into stock assessments. Of course, there is no fisheries dependent data coming from these MPAs.

Until Sanctuaries establishes a track record of an actual “hands off” policy regarding fishing, leaving fisheries policy to the National Marine Fisheries Service and state wildlife agencies, these kinds of experiences lead the GAP to support the statements seen in the Public Comment by the Alliance of Communities for Sustainable Fisheries at this meeting under this agenda item.

ⁱ Ovando, D. et al. (2021) Assessing the population-level conservation effects of marine protected areas, *Conservation Biology*, 2021; 35: 1861-1870 <https://doi.org/10.1002/cobi.13782>

ⁱⁱ Pons, M. et al. (2022) Trade-offs between bycatch and target catches in static versus dynamic fishery closures, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, January 2022; <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2114508119>

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