

MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING IN CALIFORNIA: THE USE OF COMMON MAPPING AND DATA GATHERING PROTOCOLS TO IMPROVE AGENCY COORDINATION

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We suggest that a comprehensive mapping and information standards program will lower government agencies' barriers to obtaining high quality scientific information, and thus incentivize coordination. This will address two recognized barriers to effective natural resources management: information failure and lack of coordination.

Scholars of law and administration consistently recognize information failure as a primary cause of regulatory paralysis among government agencies charged with governing natural resources. For any given agency, statutory directives can severely inhibit programmatic decisionmaking by (1) placing burdens of evidence on agencies, who are constrained in their abilities to obtain and verify information and (2) setting low standards of review, thereby allowing stakeholders to game decisionmaking processes by drawing attention to scientific uncertainty and strategically sequencing their permitting.

As a governance matter, regulatory fragmentation has been identified by some as an overarching cause of ecosystem degradation. Scholars and coastal administrators in numerous jurisdictions have begun to explore spatial management as a means of improving ocean resource health and reducing conflicts between ocean users and ecosystems. This approach likely requires significant coordination between stakeholders and governing bodies. In California, however, marine spatial management may be hindered by the presence of multiple agencies with overlapping and often conflicting jurisdictions, legislative mandates, and informational capacities. Coordination costs appear to be high, but the source of those costs remains unclear.

Here, we examine the regulatory efficiencies that may follow increased agency access to comprehensive mapping data that include ecosystem characteristics, human activities, and exogenous stressors. We discuss how common use of a comprehensive mapping and information framework can lower each agency's cost of obtaining high quality scientific information. We then explain how these lowered costs can ease inter-agency coordination. Finally, based on our findings, we discuss the implications of mapping for improving the integration of scientific information into agency decisions generally.

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