

ADAPTIVE PROCESS DESIGN FOR MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING: A TEMPLATE FOR SUCCESS FROM THE CALIFORNIA MARINE LIFE PROTECTION ACT INITIATIVE

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When the California Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Initiative was launched in 2004, the ability of the State of California to effectively design a statewide network of marine protected areas (MPAs) using a multi-stakeholder planning process was not yet proven. After two unsuccessful attempts to implement the MLPA, a public-private partnership was created to assist the California Department of Fish and Game in applying the MLPA, which resulted in a transparent, stakeholder-driven, and science-based MPA design process. The state was divided into five "study regions" with MPA planning to occur in a stepwise regional approach to building a statewide network. The first two study regions were the central coast (2005-2006) and the north central coast (2006-2007). The MLPA Initiative is currently engaged in the third iteration of MPA planning, focused on the MLPA South Coast Study Region.

While initially planning and implementing the stakeholder-driven portion of the central coast process, MLPA Initiative staff accounted for a variety of issues, including lack of precedence for process design, strongly positional stakeholders, limited policy guidance, and unclear roles for advisory and regulatory groups. As the process was completed on the central coast and staff designed the north central coast stakeholder process, changes in these circumstances were considered, including the successful creation of alternate MPA proposals in the central coast; significant interest from stakeholders and policy-makers in cross-interest support; a body of guidance on key policy issues; and increased clarity regarding the roles of participating groups. In addition, MPA planning in the north central coast study region presented a host of additional issues not previously considered in the central coast.

To account for both changing circumstances and unique challenges associated with different regions of California, the MLPA Initiative has developed a dynamic approach to process design, which relies heavily on lessons learned from previous efforts and a diversity of policy and planning expertise. Staff developed and adapted a number of tools and protocols, including methods for stakeholder selection and grouping; tools for providing best readily available scientific information and guidelines; and a structure for identifying and responding to key policy questions.

During this panel session, key MLPA Initiative staff contributing toward process design in the central coast and north central coast processes will discuss the benefits, challenges,

and lessons learned from adaptively managing the MLPA Initiative, with a primary focus on the stakeholder process for developing alternative MPA proposals. The panel also includes a member of the MLPA North Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group, who will provide a perspective regarding how adaptive management of the process was viewed by stakeholder participants. Additionally, panelists will discuss further lessons learned from the MLPA North Central Coast Project and implications for the latest planning effort focused in southern California.

Worldwide, the landscape of coastal and ocean resource management is in a constant state of change. The MLPA Initiative process provides an informative example and potential model for how flexibility and adaptive management can contribute toward successful ecosystem-based management of marine resources given these dynamic circumstances.

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