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7. MARINE SANCTUARIES: Calif. creates 29 ocean refuges

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With a unanimous vote, the California Fish and Game Commission on April 13 adopted a plan to create 29 marine protection areas along the Pacific Ocean coastline. The new sanctuaries represent 204 square miles, 18 percent of state waters, with 85 square miles of that designated as "no-take" zones where commercial fishing will be prohibited or severely restricted. That area stretches from just south of San Francisco to Point Conception, near Santa Barbara.

Richard Rogers, president of the Fish and Game Commission hailed the decision, stating, "With this vote, we have taken the first step to return our ocean waters to the place they used to be; an ocean full of sustainable abundance."



California has designated 29 coastal areas as marine sanctuaries, including key fisheries off the coast from Monterey. Photo by Colin Sullivan.

The state's action, based on the 1999 Marine Life Protection Act, comes in advance of federal efforts to also create Pacific Ocean sanctuaries off the California coast ([Land Letter](#), Dec. 21, 2006).

The severe restrictions on commercial fishing were lessened in several cases for specific existing activities, such as commercial kelp harvesting off the White Rock and Ano Nuevo state marine conservation areas, recreational hook and line fishing at the Edward Ricketts SMCA offshore from Monterey, and commercial harvests of pelagic fish at Soquel Canyon and Portuguese Ledge located farther out into Monterey Bay.

Under state law, it is unlawful to damage, take or harvest any living, geological or cultural marine resource for commercial or recreational purposes.

In other portions of the marine protected areas where fishing will be allowed, the state is working on identifying the most important fishery areas, in order to promote sustainable harvests. A recent survey indicates at least 19 fishery areas in the Monterey bay region that are considered of great economic importance, representing annual catches averaging 63 million pounds of fish and seafood, predominantly market squid, sardines and anchovy.

While many commercial fishers continue to fear the restrictions will put them out of business, others complained that the program would result in more kelp harvesting between Monterey and Pacific Grove -- to the detriment of such recreational activities as diving and kayaking.

This is the first step in a program that will eventually cover all of state coastal waters. Reserves for the area between Half Moon Bay and Point Arena, excluding San Francisco Bay, will be named next year. Reserves for all other coastal waters will be designated by 2011.