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## **Ocean Task Force Recommendation Is a Step in the Right Direction for Southern California's Coastal Waters**

Los Angeles, Cal. –The Marine Life Protection Act Blue Ribbon Task Force, a governor-appointed advisory group, today recommended a marine protected area plan for southern California's coastal ocean. Conservationists called their plan a step in the right direction, but feel an even stronger plan would better serve the region's people and wildlife. The Task Force will present their recommendation to the California Fish & Game Commission on December 9, and the Commission is expected to make a final decision early next year.

The Task Force met in October to review three proposals created by local stakeholders: one that would have protected high quality marine habitat for maximum conservation benefits, one that provided minimal protection, and a compromise between the two. They requested further scientific analysis of options for Santa Monica Bay, Orange County and San Diego before finalizing their recommendation.

The Marine Life Protection Act Science Advisory Team met yesterday to assess proposals for those key areas. Their message to the Task Force: protecting high quality habitats will produce better results. Despite science showing that the west side of Palos Verdes (around Rocky Point) is the region's most productive area, the Task Force recommends leaving Rocky Point open to accommodate local fishermen. They did, however, follow the scientists' advice in recommending the protection of south La Jolla, Swamis Reef, and Point Dume.

The plan recommended by the Task Force—known as the “preferred alternative” —was designed to balance the needs of ocean users and sea life, and leaves nearly 90% of coastal waters open for fishing.

“This ocean protection plan is certainly a step in the right direction, but there is still room for improvement at places like Catalina Island,” said Greg Helms of Ocean Conservancy. “In seeking compromise between different interest groups, we have to be sure we don't compromise the health of the ocean.”

“Marine protected areas are good for sea life and for business, since coastal tourism and recreation drive so many jobs and dollars in southern California,” said Kate Hanley of San Diego Coastkeeper. “I’m glad the Task Force recognized the economic and environmental value of protecting iconic places, but would have liked to see more protections for south La Jolla’s kelp forest.”

“The decision at Palos Verdes is a missed opportunity to regenerate marine life in Santa Monica Bay,” said Jenn Feinberg of Natural Resources Defense Council. “But the protections recommended for recreational and biological gems like Naples Reef, Point Dume and La Jolla are good for the oceans and good for people.”

The plan recommended by the Blue Ribbon Task Force will undergo further analysis, and the public will have an opportunity to comment at the December 9 meeting, as well as future Fish and Game Commission hearings, before a final decision is reached next year.

The Marine Life Protection Act was designed to ensure the long-term health and productivity of California’s ocean. Go to [www.caloceans.org](http://www.caloceans.org) or [www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/mlpa) for more information.

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