



California Water Quality Monitoring Council



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*Secretary for
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Jonathan Bishop & Paul Helliker, Co-Chairs

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*Secretary for
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Re: Support Integration of MPA and ASBS Monitoring Programs

Dear Chair Laird, Vice Chair Rodriguez and Council Members:

The California Water Quality Monitoring Council applauds recent efforts by the Ocean Science Trust (OST) to better integrate monitoring programs for California's Marine Protected Areas (MPA) and those for Areas of Special Biological Significance (ASBS). We are encouraged by steps taken toward meaningful integration of water quality regulatory efforts and ocean resource protection.

The California Water Quality Monitoring Council was created by the Legislature under Senate Bill 1070 (Statutes of 2006) to integrate monitoring efforts of the State's numerous boards, departments, offices, commissions, and conservancies. Members of the Council are appointed by you and the Council is charged with providing you with our recommendations to improve water quality and associated ecosystem monitoring, assessment, and reporting.

Over the last few years, the Council has broadened its focus from freshwater and drinking water monitoring programs to those taking place in the ocean environment. We observed that, until recently, there has been little coordination and integration between the two statewide programs of substance that operate in marine waters, one administered by the Natural Resources Agency to assess effectiveness of the statewide network of MPAs and the other administered by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) to assess effectiveness of ASBSs. While these two programs have some difference in mission, they also have considerable overlap and there is potential for enhanced coordination.

During the last several months, OST, the entity funded by the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) to implement the MPA monitoring program, has taken two initiatives to enhance this coordination. First, they have placed one of their post-doctoral fellows at the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project Authority (SCCWRP), the agency funded by the SWRCB to coordinate the ASBS program. This person has been tasked with looking for leveraging opportunities and in the short-term to develop a rocky reef ecosystem health index that would be used by both programs in interpreting their monitoring data. This will help ensure consistent data assessments from these two programs.

Second, OST has assumed leadership in a planning effort to develop an ocean and coastal ecosystem health workgroup and a marine environment data portal that would appear on the Council's My Water Quality web site (www.MyWaterQuality.ca.gov). Beyond our mission to enhance efficiency of monitoring programs, the Council is charged with ensuring that the State's monitoring data are easily accessed and interpreted by the public. Toward that end, we have created a series of web portals to the State's programs, having started with beach water quality, the safety of eating fish and shellfish, and the health of our wetlands, streams, and estuaries. We are now focused on doing the same for ocean and coastal water quality and the OST has agreed to provide the initial construct for this effort. The Monitoring Council's ocean and coastal portal, along with the California Coastal Geoportal, will serve to integrate and provide a way for the public to understand the value of their investment in these two programs.

We suggest that you agendize MPA-ASBS integration at an upcoming OPC meeting. You should be proud of these advances, and shining a light on them will foster dialogue about other opportunities for collaboration. We see this as a first step and look forward to working with OPC and OST on other areas of overlap.

The Council will soon be sending you our triennial audit report that includes this among our many other observations of monitoring program successes and opportunities for improvement. We hope that you find our recommendations valuable.

Sincerely,



Karen Larsen for
Jonathan Bishop, Chief Deputy Director
State Water Resources Control Board
Monitoring Council Co-Chair
Representing Cal/EPA



Paul Helliker, Deputy Director
Delta & Statewide Water Management
Department of Water Resources
Monitoring Council Co-Chair
Representing the Natural Resources Agency

cc: Skyli McAfee, Executive Director, Ocean Science Trust
Tom Howard, Executive Director, State Water Board
Cat Kuhlman, Executive Director, Ocean Protection Council