Marine Spatial Planning/Zoning

Over the past decade, there has been an increased demand for using specific areas of the marine environment for various industrial related purposes ranging from coastal uses, such as aquaculture facilities and desalination plants, to uses that generally occur farther offshore, such as mineral extraction and energy production. Recognizing that many activities can co-occur and/or conflict with each other leading to potential negative impacts on the marine ecosystem, natural resource managers at both the state and federal level consider collaborative partnerships with other agencies, stakeholders and constituent groups to be an effective tool for managing the marine ecosystem.

The state's increasing population raises concerns of increased challenges in reconciling resource protection mandates with economic development interests. Many non-government organizations are convinced that both social and ecological goals can be better achieved through coordinated spatial planning efforts that are based on science and public input. To do this, it is suggested California's ocean management agencies utilize an integrated and comprehensive marine resource management framework, generally called marine spatial planning, to facilitate interagency coordination, and place marine ecosystem health needs at the center of spatial planning activities, activities which currently are supported by President Obama's Administration.

On the other hand, many consumptive users associate such planning efforts with marine resource management areas and closures. They contend the use of marine protected areas, like the ones established through the state's Marine Life Protection Act as a resource management tool, to be unnecessary due to "de facto" reserves already created by other programs (e.g., Federal Safety Zones or wave energy fields), which are perceived to cause economic harm. Moreover, conflicting goals and authorities created by the large number of federal, state and local agencies with diverse mandates present legal or institutional barriers that can interfere with their ability to utilize coordinated marine spatial planning. Still there are others who believe that social needs should trump any ecological concerns.

State law supports utilizing both traditional fisheries management strategies, as well as more progressive ecosystem-based management tools in order to provide protection for biodiversity in all marine habitats. The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) uses multiple strategies to benefit conservation, recreation, research and education opportunities while simultaneously helping to rebuild depleted species. In doing so, DFG increases the sustainability of our critical marine resources for future generations.