

California a Charter Member of New National System of Marine Protected Areas

Sacramento-The federal government has announced California's 34 Areas of Special Biological Significance (ASBS) are officially among the nation's first to form a National System of Marine Protected Areas (MPA's). California's ASBS are managed for water quality by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board), and have the highest standards for ocean water quality in the United States. California's ASBS shelter an extraordinary variety of aquatic sea and plant life, and supply a source of clean seawater which helps maintain overall coastal water quality.

The U.S. Departments of Interior and Commerce are partnering with other federal, state and territorial agencies to form the National System of Marine Protected Areas. This joint effort is the first formal system for coordinating MPAs managed by diverse agencies around the country. California's State Water Board will continue to manage the State's ASBS. The new national system will allow the independently managed MPAs to work together at the regional and national levels to achieve common conservation goals.

"This expansion to a national system should greatly improve the State Water Board's efforts to develop and expand our ASBS network into a vital coastal safety net for California," said State Water Board Member Fran Spivy-Weber.

ASBS are just one kind of MPA. In the U.S., these areas may span a range of habitats including the open ocean, coastal areas, inter-tidal zones, estuaries, and the Great Lakes. The majority of U.S. MPAs are multiple-use areas, where a variety of uses are allowed. No-take MPAs, also called marine reserves, are areas where all fishing and collecting are fully prohibited. Although rare in the U.S., these areas are mostly used to protect fish nursery and spawning grounds, or to protect ecologically important areas.

In California, ASBS range from heavily used waters in San Diego and Orange County's beaches, to isolated reefs on the north coast and areas like San Mateo County's Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and Ano Nuevo State Reserve in Santa Cruz County. They protect more than 900 square miles of California's coastal waters, and will make up 15 percent of the new National System of Marine Protected Areas.

This first group of MPAs accepted into the national system will be the focus of cooperative efforts to address common resource management challenges and will be placed on the official List of National System MPAs, which is available to the public via the [Federal Register](#) and on www.MPA.gov.

You can learn much more about California's ASBS, including their locations and protected species at:
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/ocean/asbs.shtml .

The State Regional Water Quality Control Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and ensure their proper allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.