

Dear Editor,

Thanks so much for covering the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) issue in your June 10 edition (No delay for controversial Marine Protection Program). I would like to offer the following response and additional information.

The article says that the Harbor District's North Coast Local Interest Marine Protected Area (MPA) Workgroup is "largely made up of those who oppose the MPA process, and it includes many sport and commercial fishermen." In fact the group has participation from Mendocino, Humboldt and Del Norte Counties, all three harbor districts from Crescent City to Ft. Bragg and several Indian tribes. Certainly the majority of attendees at our formative meetings were fishermen and sportfishermen because their livelihoods and quality of life are potentially enormously affected. Some fishermen oppose MPA imposition in any form, but that is not the majority view of our group.

The letter our Work Group is circulating to North Coast local and county governments clearly conveys our sentiments. Although your reporter mentioned the letter, which is addressed to Secretary of Resources Michael Chrisman, he must not have bothered to read it. We want MPAs, but only if they are scientifically derived not capriciously imposed. I am attaching a copy of the letter, if the McKinleyville Press wishes to print it in its entirety. The counties of Del Norte, Humboldt and Mendocino will be considering endorsing and signing on to the letter on Tuesday June 16, as will the Eureka City Council. By July 15, we are expecting a virtual unanimous three-county call for the delay of the North Coast MLPA process.

Although our letter is addressed to Mr. Chrisman, we are also copying key members of the legislature. We frankly don't expect an affirmative response from the Governor's office because he has set this up as his "legacy". This last week, however, the Senate Budget Conference Committee cut the General Fund money for MLPA out of the California Department of Fish and Game's (CDFG) budget for this year. Senators Florez and Ducheny feel legislators have lost touch with the program because it was being funded and implemented off-budget and without any oversight. As our communities come to consensus on the MPA delay issue, we will carry our arguments to the legislature, whose intent in the MLPA we think has been subverted. We expect that our Senator Pat Wiggins may take interest in this issue and also call for its airing in the Joint Fisheries and Aquaculture Committee she chairs. There will be opportunities for North Coast residents to weigh in soon, so stay tuned.

I want to take serious issue with MLPA Program Manager Melissa Miller-Henson's quotes in the article and her assertion that we are "misinforming the public on how the process works and the amount of data available". She cites "decades of existing research", but HSU didn't find such data when conducting a data assimilation exercise for a recent California Resources Legacy Foundation Grant. When the Harbor District filed a California Public Records Act request to CDFG last year asking for data on key species constraining fisheries off our coast, such as the yellow-eye and canary rockfish, they said they didn't have any.

Science is a process where data are collected using methods that are repeatable so that if conclusions are questioned, the scientific methods can be duplicated and results checked. Interviews by Ecotrust of fishermen do not constitute science. The value of having the best marine scientists in the State on a panel is lost without data because their views without such data are only opinion. Fisheries management expert Dr. Ray Hilborn and others reviewed the MLPA model for size and spacing of MPAs and found: "It appears to us that those prescriptions were pulled out of the air, based on intuitive reasoning."

The MLPA process has used "divide and conquer" tactics pitting preservationist environmentalists against fishermen in other California coastal regions. The June 10 article painted a picture of those opposing the current North Coast MPA process as motivated by "fear and anger" and said some were "fanning the flames of those emotions." That is a mischaracterization of our movement. We are raising legitimate questions of policy and science and we expect straight answers. I hope that our resistance will win us respect and the resources we need to collect data and arrive at conservation solutions that do not cripple our community economically and that will serve us for hundreds of years going forward.

Sincerely,

Patrick Higgins  
Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation and Conservation District