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Press Release

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Alliance Of Communities for Sustainable Fisheries Releases Public Opinion Polls

Two Studies have been released by the Alliance of Communities for Sustainable Fisheries (ACSF) dealing with the public's attitude about ocean conservation issues and the management of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS).

The nationwide study sought to determine the public's core values in ocean management issues. The public's attitudes and differences between wanting ocean resources to be able to be used sustainably, as opposed to preserved (meaning not used at all) was explored. The study also sought the public's views in tradeoffs between preserving natural ocean biodiversity and the ability to provide food from the ocean.

The second study of the public's opinions about certain management issues facing the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary was conducted regionally of residents of San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Luis Obispo Counties. This study also explores questions on sustainable use, versus preservation of resources, similar to the national study, but also queried the public about specific issues such as the Monterey Sanctuary's potential to regulate fishing. Additionally, several questions are asked regarding the public's opinions about the way the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council is structured and operates.

Study Relevance

The National Survey results are directly relevant to both California's Marine Life Protection Act process and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's Marine Protected Area process for Federal waters. The poll reveals that the public expresses a reluctance to place the ocean off limits to human use if those areas and the resources can be used sustainably. An identified exception is for rare and fragile habitats, or species. This is in contrast to the State and Sanctuary processes which in large measure are not about the sustainable use of resources, but rather emphasize setting aside large areas for their intrinsic value.

The Monterey Bay Area Regional Study is directly relevant to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's Marine Protected Area process. It shows that the Sanctuary, to stay in the mainstream of public support, must work with fishermen and garner their support for any fishing regulations or zones which it proposes. If the Sanctuary does not do this and breaks the agreement it has with the fishing community not to regulate them, the public indicates they will have far less trust in Sanctuary management. Additionally numerous public agencies and organizations have gone on record as expressing concern with the structure and function of the Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC), particularly regarding its membership selection process and its current inability to communicate freely with whomever it wants. These poll results indicate very strong public opinion that methods be developed to assure that SAC representatives actually represent their constituencies and are accountable to their constituencies, including the "At Large" general public representatives who the public believes should be appointed by elected officials. This information is relevant to MBNMS assertions that its Sanctuary Advisory Council represents the collective voice of our communities and stakeholders.

National Study Highlights

- An overwhelming majority of U.S. residents support legal recreational fishing (90%) with most of that being strong support. Additionally large majority of U.S. residents support legal recreational fishing in National Forests (80%) and National Parks (78%) and wilderness areas (72%).
- Overwhelming majority of U.S. residents support legal commercial fishing and shell fishing in U.S. waters (86%)
- Among U.S. residents, support for protecting U.S. ocean waters and ocean life is nearly unanimous...78% strongly support doing so and another 17% moderately support it for a sum of 95%
- Posed as an open ended question, respondents were then asked what "protect" means, as in "we should protect ocean waters and ocean life". The most common responses regarding the meaning of "protect" pertains to managing for sustainable use (29%), protecting rare and fragile habitats or sea life (21%), and protecting the environment against oil spills, pollution, dumping etc. (20%) No other category response received more than 14%,

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- including responses of full protection—no human use (8%), protecting “some ocean waters” (3%), protecting a “percentage of ocean waters” (1%)
- The survey asked U.S. residents if they agree or disagree that some U.S. ocean waters should be fully protected from all human use, including sustainable harvest of seafood, even if doing so would reduce the ability of the U.S. to supply seafood to U.S. customers. A slight majority, (55%) agreed while 31% disagree.
 - The public’s slight majority interest in fully protecting some U.S. ocean waters is further qualified by the public’s sentiment that the areas to be protected in such a manner should be those which have rare and fragile habitats or species.
 - The survey asked respondents if they agree or disagree that some change to the natural biodiversity in U.S. ocean waters is acceptable in exchange for a continued food supply through fishing and shell fishing...agreement (71%) far exceeds disagreement (20%).
 - The survey, after informing respondents that approximately 85% of seafood consumed in the U.S. is imported, asked U.S. residents how important it is to them that the U.S. maintain its ability to supply seafood to U.S. residents rather than depend entirely on imported seafood. U.S. residents rated this quite high...89% said it is important to them, with most of them saying it is very important (70%).

Highlights of the Regional Survey of Opinions on the Management of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

- When asked if Monterey Bay area residents support or oppose the designation of certain areas of the U.S. ocean waters as Sanctuaries for special management to preserve marine habitats and/or cultural features, the overwhelming percentage of them (93%) support, with most of them (71%) strongly supporting.
- After hearing about options for managing Sanctuaries, Monterey Bay area residents were asked to choose among two management options for Sanctuaries...52% chose “Sustainable use of ocean resources” and 34% chose “preserving ocean resources” (neutral answers accounted for the remaining 14%).
- A large majority of Monterey Bay area residents rate the importance of accommodating the needs of communities/people who use the ocean when making management decisions as important...66% percent rate it as very important and 24% rate it at somewhat important for a sum of 90% support.
- The survey informed respondents that prior to the 1992 designation of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary, local recreational and commercial fishermen entered into an agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that the Sanctuary would not make additional regulations for recreational and commercial fishing and shell fishing. The survey also informed respondents that recently the Office of the National Marine

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Sanctuaries and the local Superintendent have indicated that they may make, or ask other agencies to make, additional fishing regulations for the Monterey Bay Sanctuary. The survey asked, “Knowing this, would you support or oppose additional regulations for recreational /commercial fishing and shell fishing in the Monterey Bay? Regarding recreational fishing Monterey Bay area residents are split 47% support while 39% oppose. Regarding commercial fishing residents are more in support (66%) than in opposition (32%)

- Support for additional regulations, however, is balanced by survey results which asked Monterey Bay area residents to agree or disagree that Sanctuary Managers should obtain the support of local fishing groups and organizations if they want to change the agreement and make additional fishing regulations. A large majority agree (81%) with most of them strongly agreeing (54%).
- In a series of questions regarding the public’s trust in the Sanctuary management, 67% said that they would have less trust in Sanctuary managers should the Sanctuary change the agreement made with the fishermen and create additional regulations without the support of local fishing groups and organizations.
- An overwhelming majority of Monterey Bay area residents (88%) agree that the Sanctuary Managers, if they address a problem with ocean resources or habitats in the Monterey Bay Sanctuary that affects fishermen in the area, should be required to work with leaders of local fishing groups and organizations to reach an agreement for a solution to the problem.
- The majority of Monterey Bay area residents (58%) support funding the creation and management of Marine Protected Areas through the General Revenue Fund from State taxes. Nearly a third, however, oppose (30%). In follow up, the survey asked if residents would support or oppose a tax increase to fund the creation and management of Marine Protected Areas, and the residents are about evenly split 45% would support, but 49% would oppose.
- A series of questions were also asked regarding the selection process for membership in the Sanctuaries Advisory Council. Agreement (84%) far exceeds disagreement (10%) that the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Superintendent should make sure that each Advisory Council member has an identified constituency or group that he or she represents
- Agreement (86%) far exceeds disagreement (9%) that the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Superintendent should make sure that each Advisory Council member has the support of the constituency or group that he or she represents.
- Agreement (89%) far exceeds disagreement (7%) that the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Superintendent should make sure that each Advisory Council member can be held accountable by his or her constituency for representing his or her constituency or group.
- Regarding specifically the selection of “At Large” Sanctuary Advisory Council representatives, representing the general public, a large majority (88%)

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agree that their County Board of Supervisors, as local elected officials, should select a representative of the general public to be on the Advisory Council, while only 20% agree that the Superintendent should be able to select whomever he or she wants as a representative to the general public.

- Currently the Sanctuary Advisory Council can only communicate to managers in the National Marine Sanctuary program. However poll results indicate overwhelming agreement (91%) that Monterey Bay Advisory Council members should be free to communicate with members of Congress, the media, the general public, or any other group to address issues regarding the Sanctuary.

Quotes:

“The National Poll confirms the same results we saw in the 2007 poll of California residents, which also showed the public to be very moderate and rational in their view of ocean management. They were reluctant to close areas off to human use and wanted ocean resources to be managed scientifically for sustainable use. That’s good news for fishermen and other ocean user, but it also shows that many State and Sanctuary officials are out of touch with public opinion, as they attempt to close areas of the ocean to human use.”

Kathy Fosmark, Co-Chair ACSF (831-373-5238)

“The way the Marine Life Protection Act was implemented affected my City hard. We always had the feeling the State was catering to a few individuals who wanted to express their intrinsic values at our expense. This poll confirms that the State’s actions are not in the mainstream of public support. Further, it is good to see that the public feels so strongly that the Sanctuary must obtain the fishermen’s support for any regulations or zones that they propose.”

Janice Peters, Mayor, City of Morro Bay

“I’m glad, but not surprised, to see such strong support for recreational and commercial fishing among the people of our country. I am especially pleased to see that they are concerned with our nation’s loss of ability to provide for our own seafood, and our new reliance on imported products. Hopefully this will translate into broader political support for the working fishing men and women of the nation.”

Mike Ricketts, Monterey Commercial Fisherman (831-595-0214)

“As the founding chair of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council, I can tell you that I and other leaders who helped establish the Sanctuary have been profoundly disappointed in the amount of control the Sanctuary management, including those in Washington D.C., have over the SAC. The Sanctuary management acts like it is afraid of a real public process. It’s good to see in the poll results, that the general public appears to want a stronger represented process.

Karin Strasser-Kaufman (831-359-2733)

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