



February 15, 2022

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*Sent via CNRA electronic contact page: <https://www.californianature.ca.gov/pages/contact-us>*

**Re: Draft Pathways to 30x30 Strategy**

Dear Mr. Crowfoot, Dr. Norris, and Dr. Gold,

On behalf of Azul, California Coastal Protection Network, California Coastkeeper Alliance, Creation Justice Ministries, Environmental Action Committee of West Marin, Environmental Defense Center, Heal the Bay, Marine Conservation Institute, Mission Blue, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), WILDCOAST, and our millions of members and online activists, we respectfully submit our comments in response to the California Natural Resources Agency’s (CNRA) draft Pathways to 30x30 Strategy (Pathways Strategy). We appreciate the opportunity to provide written feedback on the draft Pathways Strategy and look forward to working with CNRA to ensure that California’s ambitious 30x30 initiative meets its promise to protect biodiversity, enhance equity, and shore up the state’s resilience to climate change. Robust 30x30 implementation for the ocean and coast will protect California’s majestic ocean ecosystems, provide security for the millions of Californians who rely on a healthy ocean for their livelihood, and enhance the ocean experience for the tens of millions of coastal visitors to the state each year. In addition to considering these comments, we ask that CNRA factor in the previously submitted comment letter by California Coastkeeper Alliance, California Coastal Protection Network, Environmental Action Committee of West Marin, Environmental Defense Center, LA Waterkeeper, NRDC, Surfrider, and WILDCOAST (dated August 24, 2021) on 30x30 into the final Pathways Strategy.

The oft-repeated phrase, “Where goes California, so goes the nation,” applies to California’s leadership on 30x30. Because California is the first state in the nation to implement 30x30 for the ocean, the Biden Administration will look to California for guidance as it embarks on the America the Beautiful initiative. As an already established global leader in marine protections, California can show the world what meaningful 30x30 implementation looks like. We encourage the state to harness the overwhelming public support for 30x30 to help California’s marine habitats and wildlife thrive.

We congratulate CNRA on the ambitious vision the draft Pathways Strategy lays out. Elements of the draft of which we are strongly supportive include:

- CNRA’s commitment to advancing equity, access to nature, and to ensuring that California Native Tribes, communities of color, and disadvantaged communities are at the center of 30x30 decision making;
- The emphasis on protecting nature to build resilience to climate change;
- Acknowledgement of the necessity of monitoring and for adaptive management;
- Recognition that sustained funding will be needed for 30x30 to succeed;
- The proposal for Indigenous Marine Stewardship Areas; and
- Restoration of wetlands and kelp as a prospective conservation action.

To realize the equity and biodiversity gains the Pathways Strategy envisions, the final Strategy must go further with greater specificity and ambition. Here we highlight our chief recommendations to strengthen the final Pathways Strategy.

**1.) CNRA should ensure representation from all ocean stakeholders in 30x30 decisions and include tourism and recreation in its consideration of working waters.**

Nearly every Californian has a connection with the coast – regardless of where they live within the state. Polling data, year after year, show that the overwhelming majority of Californians identify coastal access and ocean health as highly important issues. In July 2021, 64 percent of Californians said that the condition of California’s ocean and beaches is “very important” to the state’s future.<sup>1</sup> The California Coastal Act codified Californians’ right of access to the coast, and to determine how the coast is used.

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<sup>1</sup> PPIC Statewide Survey, Californians and the Environment, July 2021. Available at <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/ppic-statewide-survey-californians-and-the-environment-july-2021.pdf>.

The 30x30 initiative is an opportunity to reinforce and demonstrate that these values of public access and decision-making extend from the coastline into state waters. Despite the inclusive language, the draft Pathways Strategy omits key ocean users. The final Pathways Strategy should specify how the state plans to ensure representation from a broad and diverse array of ocean stakeholder groups. In its discussion of enhancing protections within the California National Marine Sanctuary (NMS or Sanctuary) system, the Pathways Strategy suggests that government officials, California Native Tribes, scientists and fishers will form a working group to identify strengthened protections within Sanctuaries to achieve 30x30.<sup>2</sup> However, this list omits key ocean stakeholders (e.g., hotels, restaurants, boat tour operations, etc.) that form the backbone of California’s \$51.6 billion-dollar ocean economy, conservation organizations, and groups representing the millions of Californians who recreate and use our coastal areas regularly.<sup>3</sup>

The ocean is a public good whose benefits are enjoyed by a variety of ocean users. At least half of all Californians visit the coast each year, and the vast majority undertake non-consumptive activities like bird watching, tidepooling, beach walking, and swimming.<sup>4</sup> A healthy and vibrant ocean is important to their use and enjoyment of these activities. Experiencing nature and seeing wildlife enhances the visitor experience – a fact that science backs. A study of recreational boating behavior in the Channel Islands showed a demonstrable increase in kayak and dive boats around MPA boundaries.<sup>5</sup> Because most ocean users engage in non-consumptive experiences, and a healthy ocean enhances ocean enjoyment, it follows that a healthy ocean enhances equity. For example, protecting marine life in the La Jolla State Marine Reserve has meant that more coastal visitors get to enjoy the area’s leopard sharks, bat rays, Garibaldi, and sea lions than if the area had been depleted from higher impact uses like anchoring, fishing, or taking animals from tide pools. To advance the clearly stated equity goals in the Governor’s 30x30 Executive Order, the state must consider the millions of ocean stakeholders who use the coast for non-consumptive purposes.

The draft Pathways Strategy notes that California’s working lands and waters can contribute to the state’s biodiversity goals. We recommend that CNRA explicitly incorporate California’s substantial ocean tourism and recreation industry in its consideration of “working waters.” In 2019 California’s ocean tourism and recreation industry generated \$27 billion and provided over 446,000 jobs.<sup>6</sup> In comparison, fishing, fish hatcheries, and aquaculture industries generated \$127 million and provided 890 jobs.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pathways to 30x30: Accelerating Conservation of California’s Nature, December 2021, page 41.

<sup>3</sup> National Ocean Economics Program, Ocean Economy, California, All Sectors, <https://www.oceaneconomics.org/Market/ocean/oceanEconResults.asp?IC=N&dataSource=E&selState=6&selCounty=06000&selYears=All&selSector=8&selIndust=All&selValue=All&selOut=display&noepID=unknown>.

Note that oil and gas exploration generated \$1.3 billion in 2019 – just 2.5 percent of the total ocean GDP.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Colgan and Philip King, Coastal Recreation in California: Beyond the Beach, Center for the Blue Economy: Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, November 2021. Available at [https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/sites/www.middlebury.edu.institute/files/2021-12/California%20Recreation%20Report%20v8-final%20for%20web.pdf?fv=fv\\_okNTH](https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/sites/www.middlebury.edu.institute/files/2021-12/California%20Recreation%20Report%20v8-final%20for%20web.pdf?fv=fv_okNTH).

<sup>5</sup> S. Cabral et al., “Drivers of redistribution of fishing and non-fishing effort after the implementation of a marine protected area network,” Ecological Applications, October 2016.

<sup>6</sup> NOEP, Ocean Economy, California, Tourism and Recreation, <https://www.oceaneconomics.org/Market/ocean/oceanEconResults.asp?IC=N&dataSource=E&selState=6&selCounty=06000&selYears=All&selSector=6&selIndust=TO00&selValue=All&selOut=display&noepID=unknown>.

<sup>7</sup> NOEP, Ocean Economy, California, Living Resources, Fishing + Fish Hatcheries and Aquaculture, <https://www.oceaneconomics.org/Market/ocean/oceanEconResults.asp?IC=N&dataSource=E&selState=6&selCounty=06000&selYears=All&selSector=2&selIndust=LR04&selValue=All&selOut=display&noepID=unknown>; <https://www.oceaneconomics.org/Market/ocean/oceanEconResults.asp?IC=N&dataSource=E&selState=6&selCounty=06000&selYears=All&selSector=2&selIndust=LR03&selValue=All&selOut=display&noepID=unknown>.

It is crucial that the state work with California Native Tribes, scientists, conservation organizations, tourism-dependent businesses, and a wide array of ocean users to identify new areas for conservation. The final Pathways Strategy should be clear that 30x30 for the ocean includes all of these important groups.

**2.) The state’s definition of “conserve” should include the word “biodiversity” to underscore that the goal of the initiative is to protect and restore biodiversity.**

We are pleased that the proposed definition of “conserve” supports ecosystem function and requires durable protections; these are necessary elements to ensure the goal of biodiversity protection. As CNRA finalizes the definition of “conserve” we recommend adding the objective of protecting biodiversity to reflect the goals of EO N-82-20 – to “combat the climate and biodiversity crises.”<sup>8</sup> One potential reformulation is (addition in **bold**):

Land and coastal water areas that are durably protected and managed to support **biodiversity and** functional ecosystems, both intact and restored, and the species that rely on them.

Adding “biodiversity” to the definition gives specificity and ambition to the concept of a “functional ecosystem.” Given that the definition of conserve will shape and guide the state’s 30x30 efforts over the next eight years, it should enshrine 30x30’s central objective of conserving nature to stem biodiversity loss and address the climate crisis.

**3.) The final Pathways Strategy should articulate scientific criteria to guide 30x30 conservation decisions.**

The objectives of the global 30x30 target are to “save the diversity and abundance of life on earth.”<sup>9</sup> To protect humans’ ability to thrive, science –rather than politics– should drive 30x30 decision making. Falling short of what’s needed to attain conservation objectives by failing to define and implement conservation gains in a meaningful manner will only reinforce the *status quo*, limiting progress and eroding the public’s trust, as Californians continue to witness the loss of important habitats and wildlife. To guide this effort, CNRA should articulate the science-based criteria to ensure 30x30 is effective at stemming the disappearance of natural ecosystems and their many associated benefits to society.

The Executive Order requires this science-based approach for determining the baseline for conserved lands and coastal waters – the foundational first step of 30x30. It directs the state agencies to, “Establish a baseline assessment of California’s biodiversity that builds upon existing data and information, utilizes best available science and traditional ecological knowledge, and can be updated over time.” However,

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<sup>8</sup> In our August 24 comment letter we wrote that the state should adopt a clear, science-based definition of ‘conserve’ that will achieve the stated goals of the EO and enable the state to gauge progress over time. The definition should contain the following elements: (1) conservation measures are durable over time; (2) levels of protection are adequate to support biodiversity, climate resilience and/or climate mitigation; and (3) the natural structure and functions of the ecosystem are maintained or restored for generations to come.

Executive Order N-82-20, <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/10.07.2020-EO-N-82-20-.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> E. Dinerstein et al., “A Global Deal For Nature: Guiding principles, milestones, and targets,” *Science Advances*, April 2019, available at <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.aaw2869>.

neither CA Nature GIS nor the Pathways Strategy describe what, if any, scientific criteria CNRA used to make this assessment.

While the Pathways draft does not describe how it executed this directive, it states that California's MPA network meets the definition of conserved. It also states that another type of MPA, California's Sanctuaries, do not offer a level of protection (LOP) that is necessary to meet the state's definition of "conserved." We appreciate CNRA's recognition that an MPA's LOP will offer varying biodiversity outcomes and for committing to future protections for coastal waters that offer a higher LOP than that the NMS system affords. However, we urge the state to further examine the varying LOPs within the California MPA network.

California's coastal waters contain a patchwork of area-based management approaches with varying LOPs. The state's inventory of MPAs in coastal waters should first take stock of the LOP for each individual MPA, and its likely conservation outcome, accounting for existing protections and future proposed measures. We recommend CNRA form a 30x30 Marine Science Advisory Team (SAT) to undertake two assessments to evaluate the current MPA network:

- a) **Classify the MPA network by level of protection.** California's MPA network offers a range of biodiversity protections that are a direct result of the LOP established for each MPA. The Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) Master Plan clearly states that biodiversity outcomes depend on the LOP individual MPAs confer. Given that the state's MPA network includes LOPs ranging from "low" to "very-high" with corresponding expectations for biodiversity outcomes depending on the LOP, the state should conduct a science-based analysis before determining that the entire MPA network is conserved. This analysis would be a helpful complement to the ongoing MLPA Decadal Management Review (DMR).
- b) **Apply a science-based framework to existing protections, such as the [MPA Guide](#).** The MPA Guide is a peer-reviewed evaluation framework, developed by dozens of experts from around the world, and represents a synthesis of decades of empirical research on MPA design, implementation, and impacts. The MPA Guide classifies established MPAs according to four different levels of protection: fully protected, highly protected, lightly protected, and minimally protected. An important component of applying the MPA Guide to a region is that scientists with deep California marine ecosystem knowledge would vet the application of the MPA Guide to California's MPA network. CNRA should apply the MPA Guide to evaluate the **level of protection** and the **condition** of each California MPA to determine whether they qualify toward the state's 30x30 goal.

As part of the MPA DMR, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Ocean Protection Council, and California Sea Grant are reporting the outcomes of long-term monitoring of the MPA network. We recognize the importance of CNRA's established MPA network monitoring plan in evaluation and management of the state's MPAs. California's commitment to monitoring and researching network performance will result in invaluable information for future management of individual MPAs and the network as a whole. It could also set a global standard for sustained monitoring efforts. However, these monitoring data alone cannot be used to predict biodiversity outcomes. While monitoring data is extremely important, it should be used in conjunction with a predictive framework such as the MPA Guide to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the ecological efficacy of MPAs.

- 4.) **The final Pathways Strategy should commit to achieving 30x30 through fully and highly protected MPAs.**

Strong MPAs provide safe havens where ocean life can recover and thrive without additional pressures from environmentally damaging practices. Science shows that “fully” protected areas, such as California’s State Marine Reserves, where there are no extractive or destructive activities, are most effective at conserving biodiversity.<sup>10</sup> The state’s MLPA Master Plan notes:

An MPA that has been assigned a high LOP is likely to contain marine communities that resemble those in an unharvested ecosystem (i.e., no take area), even if allowed activities are intense within the MPA. MPAs with lower LOPs (especially those below moderate-high) are less likely to contain marine communities that resemble those in an unharvested ecosystem, especially if harvest activities are intense within the MPA. The lower the LOP, the greater the risk that activities allowed within the MPA could compromise the MPA’s ability to achieve the goals of the MLPA.”<sup>11</sup>

Highly protected MPAs that allow only light extractive activities with low total impact can also effectively protect biodiversity. Fully and highly protected MPAs are far more effective than other types of protections at conserving biodiversity, protecting ecosystem structure and function, and have the potential to enhance ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change.<sup>12</sup>

Species-rich communities are likely to be more resilient to climate and other human-related disturbances because in such systems, there is a higher chance that at least some species will survive.<sup>13</sup> For example, protected kelp stands that support an array of sea urchin predators — such as starfish, large sheephead, and sea otters — are likely to be more resilient to climate impacts than areas with a single urchin predator. Also, by harboring large populations and individuals in a variety of age groups, MPAs help to maintain genetic variation, which is the raw material for evolution. Populations that lack this genetic richness are more vulnerable to environmental change and at higher risk of extinction.

The draft Pathways Strategy states that, “limited-take State MPAs provide an excellent model for other jurisdictions looking to balance biodiversity conservation with sustainable, well-managed commercial and

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<sup>10</sup> Dinerstein et al.; California Department of Fish and Wildlife. (2008). California Marine Life Protection Act Master Plan for Marine Protected Areas Revised Draft. Retrieved from <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=113006&inline>.

<sup>11</sup> California Department of Fish and Wildlife. (2016). California Marine Life Protection Act Master Plan for Marine Protected Areas. Adopted by the California Fish and Game Commission on August 24, 2016. Retrieved from [www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs/Master-Plan](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs/Master-Plan).

<sup>12</sup> An MPA is defined as fully protected if “No extractive or destructive activities are allowed; all abatable impacts are minimized” and as highly protected if “Only light extractive activities are allowed with low total impact, with all other abatable impacts minimized.” See, “The MPA Guide Expanded Guidance: Level of Protection” at <https://mpa-guide.protectedplanet.net/resources>. Also, see, for example, the letter from 44 U.S. marine scientists to Secretary Raimondo, Secretary Haaland, Chair Mallory, Ms. McCarthy, and Administrator Spinrad on October 7, 2021. <https://willmcclintock.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/Scientist+Letter+-+MPAs+and+America+the+Beautiful.pdf>. See, for example, Marissa L. Baskett and Lewis A. K. Barnett, “The Ecological and Evolutionary Consequences of Marine Reserves,” *Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution, and Systematics* 46 (2015): 49-73, <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-ecolsys-112414-054424>.; Simonetta Frascchetti et al., “Protection Enhances Community and Habitat Stability: Evidence from a Mediterranean Marine Protected Area,” *PLOS ONE* 8, no. 12 (2013): e81838, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0081838>.; Simon Levin and Jane Lubchenco, “Resilience, Robustness, and Marine Ecosystem-based Management,” *BioScience* 58, no. 1 (2008): 27-32, <https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/58/1/27/233362>.; R.D. Holt, “The microevolutionary consequences of climate change,” *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 5, no. 9 (1990): 311-315, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21232381/>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

recreational fishing” concerns us. Decades of research, including the body of science that supported designation of the state’s MPA State Marine Reserves, shows that minimal or no-take MPAs are necessary to protect high levels of biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.<sup>14</sup>

### **5.) California should use the full extent of its authorities to enhance and create new protections within National Marine Sanctuaries that overlap with state waters.**

The draft Pathways Strategy proposes to strengthen protections within California’s existing National Marine Sanctuaries as an avenue to achieve 30x30 marine protections. The Pathways Strategy notes correctly that the Sanctuaries, without additional conservation management actions, do not currently qualify as conserved. CNRA offers some ideas to strengthen protections within NMS, such as vessel speed limits, action to improve water quality, and phasing out harmful fishing gear. We note that any of these actions alone may not be sufficient to meet 30x30 objectives. We support adding necessary additional protections to NMSs and urge CNRA to use the full suite of the state’s authorities to ensure that any protections elevate these waters to being either fully or highly protected.

For federal waters, the draft identifies President Biden’s 30x30 initiative as a valuable opportunity to collaborate and coordinate with federal conservation efforts, setting dual conservation objectives. We support federal and state collaboration to implement 30x30 in California, yet note that the state’s narrow emphasis on NMS to fulfill its 30x30 marine objectives brings a host of concerns.

According to the most recent NMS condition reports, all California sanctuaries have suffered “measurable degradation” in several aspects of ecological integrity.<sup>15</sup> More specifically, three of California’s four NMS (Channel Islands, Cordell Bank, and Monterey Bay) have seen measurable degradation in biodiversity in the past 15 years.<sup>16</sup>

While fishing has socio-economic benefits, it is essential that the state be clear-eyed about the impacts of fishing on marine resources, including within the Sanctuary system. Fishing is the number one driver of biodiversity loss in the oceans over the past 50 years.<sup>17</sup> Permitted fishing activity within an MPA is linked directly to the LOP assigned to MPAs under the MLPA and the MPA Guide. Both the LOPs established under the MLPA and the criteria that form the basis of the MPA Guide explicitly link LOP and expected biodiversity outcomes to the intensity of fishing that occurs within an MPA. We support the state’s interest in addressing harmful fishing gears through this 30x30 effort and note that broad changes are needed. If the Sanctuaries are to serve as true sanctuaries for ocean life, select individual fixes (e.g., gear restrictions, vessel speed limits), while they increase protection, are not enough to allow these areas to achieve the biodiversity benefits necessary to count toward the state’s 30x30 effort. With marine climate stressors increasing in intensity, it is imperative that CNRA use all possible tools to fight the loss of biodiversity and the potential synergistic interactions between biodiversity loss and climate change, including considering limiting harmful fishing practices in “conserved” state waters.

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<sup>14</sup> Kirsten Grorud-Colvert et al., “The MPA Guide: A framework to achieve global goals for the ocean.” *Science* 373, eabf0861. DOI: 10.1126/science.abf0861.

<sup>15</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *Rating Scheme for System-Wide Monitoring Questions*, Condition Reports Rating Criteria 2014, <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/condition/rating.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Gittings, S.R., M. Tartt, and K. Broughton, National Marine Sanctuary System Condition Report 2013, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, <http://www.sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/condition/>.

<sup>17</sup> Eduardo Brondizio et al., "Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services," p.xxxii, 2019, <https://zenodo.org/record/3831674#.YR7FpIhKg2w>.

In general, the California NMS designation documents do not provide NMS managers with adequate authority to address and regulate activities in federal waters that threaten biodiversity within sanctuary boundaries. If NMS are to achieve meaningful protections, the state must use its authority to push for additional protective measures within sanctuary boundaries that overlap with California state waters. The state should fully use its authority to further regulate fishing, vessel speed restrictions, and close loopholes on seabed alteration before NMS are considered and labeled as “conserved” under the 30x30 initiative.

#### **6.) CNRA should commit to enhancing ecological representativeness of 30x30 marine protections.**

We urge CNRA to expand its geographic scope beyond established NMS to identify prospective areas for enhanced conservation. During the MLPA MPA designation process, the MLPA Science Advisory Team recommended that “for an objective of protecting the diversity of species that live in different habitats and those that move among different habitats over their lifetime, every ‘key’ marine habitat should be represented in the MPA network.”<sup>18</sup> The Global Deal for Nature, which sets the interim target of 30 percent by 2030, states that conservation action must address one of five goals, the first of which is “representation.”<sup>19</sup>

Future marine sites should represent the diversity of California’s ocean habitats and serve to advance equitable access to the ocean across the state’s extensive coastline. As part of the DMR, the state should consider whether the state MPA network adequately protects all representative marine habitats.<sup>20</sup> For example, the 2016 MLPA Master Plan review found that deep rock, marsh, rocky shores, and mid-depth rock are the most represented habitats, and shallow sand and estuary habitats have the least representation.<sup>21</sup>

As CNRA further develops California Nature GIS, it should make publicly available the percentage and area of key coastal/ocean habitats (e.g., eelgrass habitat, salt marsh and other habitats with high potential carbon storage) that are currently included in existing MPAs to help identify priorities for 30x30 conservation decisions.

#### **7.) Treatment of other effective area-based conservation measures for marine areas.**

The Pathways Strategy notes that “other effective area-based conservation measures” (OECMs) could potentially count as conserved under 30x30. CNRA should evaluate ocean areas that are not dedicated primarily to the long-term conservation of nature as potential OECMs based on the International Union

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<sup>18</sup> California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative Excerpts from Guiding Documents for Designing a System of MPAs, September 2008. Retrieved from [https://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/binders\\_sc/b2a.pdf](https://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/pdfs/binders_sc/b2a.pdf), p 4.

<sup>19</sup> Dinerstein et al.

<sup>20</sup> Bethan O’Leary et al., “The first network of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the high seas: the process, the challenges and where next.” *Marine Policy* 36, no. 3 (2012): 598-605, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2011.11.003>.

<sup>21</sup> California Department of Fish and Wildlife. (2016). California Marine Life Protection Act Master Plan for Marine Protected Areas. Adopted by the California Fish and Game Commission on August 24, 2016. Retrieved from [www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs/Master-Plan](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs/Master-Plan), p 25.

for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) definition and criteria.<sup>22</sup>

For the final Pathways Strategy, we recommend that CNRA establish a clear position on OECMs with a definition and criteria consistent with the international CBD and IUCN definition and criteria. Guidance could require more stringent evidence to support whether a site qualifies as an OECM, but, at a minimum, a site should meet the CBD and IUCN definition and criteria. Any OECMs should:

- a. Deliver effective and long-term biodiversity protection to the natural structure and function of the ocean ecosystem in which it is situated. It must not only protect a single species or species complex and the associated habitat.
- b. Have a clear governance mechanism.
- c. Be in place for the long term and be designed to provide enduring benefits to ocean biodiversity.<sup>23</sup>
- d. Have clear boundaries.
- e. Have ongoing monitoring (yearly or every other year) with periodic review (for example, every 7-10 years) to determine whether the area continues to provide significant biodiversity protection and resilience, including in the face of climate change, and outline a clear process for removal of the OECM status if the area no longer qualifies according to the criteria outlined herein.
- f. Protect ecologically important species (for example, endangered, threatened, keystone and/or foundational species such as forage species) and their habitats within the area.
- g. Prevent existing and reasonably foreseeable threats to the area's biodiversity, including by:
  - i. Prohibiting environmentally damaging activities from occurring in OECMs.
  - ii. Prohibiting human activities, including across multiple sectors, which have demonstrable negative impacts on the OECM's ability to conserve biodiversity, including activities that may occur or are foreseeable in the near-term.
- h. Take account of the management of adjacent areas.

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<sup>22</sup> Twenty ENGOs have signed onto a letter stressing the importance of this approach for the federal 30x30 effort. National Ocean Protection Coalition, NRDC et al., Letter to Chair Mallory, and Secretaries Raimondo and Haaland. 12 Dec. 2021. <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/nopc-oecm-letter-20211214.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> The IUCN guidance on privately protected areas provides that "long-term" means "when measures for an area have been or will be in place for at least 25 years and where there is an intent to conserve the area in perpetuity". Stolton, S., et al., "The Futures of Privately Protected Areas." Gland, Switzerland: IUCN, (2014). The Canadian guidance applicable to OECMs clarifies "long-term" to mean that the measure must either "be entrenched via legislation or regulation" or "there must be clear evidence that the management measure is intended for the long-term (minimum 25 years)" Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, "Operational Guidance for Identifying 'Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures' in Canada's Marine Environment" Ottawa (2020).

## Conclusion

We hope these comments are instructive in helping CNRA develop a rigorous and ambitious final Pathways to 30x30 Strategy. Our organizations stand by with enthusiasm for the most inclusive, conservation-oriented implementation of 30x30 and encourage you to “eschew reticence, avoid sugar-coating the overwhelming challenges ahead, and ‘tell it like it is.’”<sup>24</sup> This initiative infuses us with hope and excitement about the potential to together realize our shared vision for a thriving and climate resilient future for California and the planet.

Sincerely,

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NRDC

Sean Bothwell  
Executive Director  
California Coastkeeper Alliance

Avery Davis Lamb  
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<sup>24</sup> J.A. Bradshaw et al., “Underestimating the Challenges of Avoiding a Ghastly Future, *Frontiers in Conservation Science*,” January 2021, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcosc.2020.615419>.

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