

CALIFORNIA AND THE WORLD OCEAN '97
Taking A Look At California's Ocean Resources:
An Agenda For The Future

A Conference Report by Mark J. Spalding, J.D., M.P.I.A.

Marine and coastal protection is a concern of California's coastal and inland residents who see the coast as vital for recreation and for the state's economic well-being. For these reasons, California has dealt with ocean and coastal management issues from its earliest days as a state, while comprehensive management efforts began over 30 years ago with a state-sponsored conference on California and the World Ocean in 1964. During the three decades since then, California has developed, adopted and implemented some of the world's most well-respected coastal protection legislation. However, no comprehensive review of these efforts was undertaken during the interim.

In March 1997, the Coastal Zone Foundation and the California Resources Agency (CRA) sponsored a long overdue four day conference in San Diego to showcase Governor Wilson's report entitled "California's Ocean Resources: An Agenda For The Future" (Ocean Resources Agenda). According to the CRA, the report seeks to support ocean and coastal resource management goals addressing stewardship, economic sustainability, research, education and technology, as well as jurisdiction and ownership. Meeting these goals is intended to help ensure comprehensive and coordinated management, conservation, and enhancement of California's ocean and coastal resources for current and future generations. The document was developed by the CRA in conjunction with an inter-agency advisory council composed of California's Environmental Protection Agency and other state agencies.

Following the release of a draft Ocean Resources Agenda in 1995, a series of 12 public meetings in coastal cities was conducted to collect public comment. This input has been integrated into the final document. The major state and federal laws that affect California's ocean ecosystem are listed and described, as are the roles of the agencies charged with implementing these laws. Also included is an economic analysis prepared specifically for this project which reveals that seven ocean-dependent industries directly and indirectly contributed \$17.3 billion dollars to the State's economy in 1992, supporting over 370,000 jobs in California. Tourism alone accounts for \$10 billion of this total. Thus the health of the coastal and ocean ecosystem are coextensive with the state's economic health.

The Ocean Resources Agenda makes recommendations in nine areas for improving California's approach to such issues as habitat and fishery management, water quality protection, vessel traffic safety, and shoreline erosion. A key recommendation calls for the establishment of a state cabinet-level ocean resources management coordinating council to help integrate the multiple agencies and programs of ocean and coastal jurisdiction. This lengthy document is available at <http://ceres.ca.gov/cra/ocean/>

Unfortunately, the Wilson Administration's record of follow through on its environmental words with deeds is poor. For example, with only \$13 million in new appropriations suggested, the Ocean Resources Agenda is rather underfinanced.

Through 250 lectures and papers, the California and the World Ocean '97 conference itself reviewed marine and coastal issues and the Ocean Resources Agenda's goals. These matters were presented within six tracks of concurrent sessions: Economics, Ports and Vessels, Traffic, Managed Marine Areas, Fisheries Management, and Governance and Technology. The perspectives presented ranged from the regulated, the regulators, the legislators, and to the environmental NGO community. Information on the conference proceedings, to be released in July 1997, can be obtained from Sheila Robertson at sheila@guenoc.com.

The conference was a success in attracting many of the key players and presenting cutting edge information. It also became a celebration of the previous fall's election which had thrown out the Republican majority in the State legislature, in part as a result of Speaker Curt Pringle's packing the California Coastal Commission with anti-Commission representatives. A successful "vote the coast" campaign had not only unseated the majority and reversed the attempt to undermine the California's Coastal Act, but it unleashed an unprecedented flood of new legislation to save the coast and ocean. This proposed legislation included 30 new laws, some of which came with requests for significant new appropriations and bonds (unlike the Ocean Resources Agenda). However, some of the new legislation is intended to provide solutions and funding for many of the issues identified in the Agenda.

According to Fred Hansen, deputy administrator for the US Environmental Protection Agency, who attended the conference, "most pollutants eventually end up in the ocean." This nonpoint source pollution, which is created when rain, irrigation water, and other water sources run over the land, picking up pollutants and transporting them to the ocean, causes beach closings, habitat degradation, closed or harvest-limited shellfish beds, declining fisheries, red tides and other harmful plankton blooms, and threatens the drinking water of coastal communities. According to the Center for Marine Conservation, such nonpoint source pollution is virtually unaddressed by current legislation and enforcement efforts. This is unfortunate for California, because its coast and ocean are probably the state's most important natural habitats and are crucial for its economy. Only time will tell if the Ocean Resources Agenda and the wave of new legislation will help restore the cleanliness of California's coast and ocean.

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