

Ocean Policy Advisory Council (OPAC) Frequently Asked Questions about Marine Reserves

Introduction: *This document was drafted in an attempt to answer questions of concern that have been asked of OPAC regarding marine reserves. This document was drafted with input from OPAC members and state agency staff for the purpose of assisting Oregon Sea Grant in its public outreach process regarding marine reserves. This document is for informational purposes only for the public and should not be construed as an approval or decision by OPAC regarding marine reserves.*

Background: OPAC was established by state law to, in part: “Offer advice to the Governor, the State Land Board, state agencies and local governments on specific ocean resources management issues.” [ORS 196.443(1)(e)] A primary objective of this advisory body is to provide locally based knowledge and expertise in how coastal marine regulations affect Oregon’s ocean resources as well as its social and economic status. At the request of Governor Kulongoski, OPAC is seeking a uniquely Oregon-made approach to recommending no-take set-asides (marine reserves). OPAC is committed to working with ocean users and coastal communities, Oregon’s scientific community and with Governor Kulongoski’s guidelines, that include:

1. Recommend less than 10 sites for no-take marine reserves;
2. Recommend sites that will demonstrate avoidance of negative economic or social impacts;
3. Recommend sites that will avoid the loss of significant fishing opportunities;
4. Sites will not be implemented by agencies until funding is identified for the required monitoring, enforcement, and scientific research; and
5. These designations must benefit, not disrupt, existing economic and recreational uses of the ocean.

Why is Oregon introducing marine reserves in its Territorial Sea? Is there a problem marine reserves can help answer?

A healthy Territorial Sea is highly valued by all Oregonians. Yet we have a problem assessing the status of Oregon’s nearshore state waters due to a significant lack of information. For example, only 5% of the habitat in our state waters has been mapped in high resolution, and stock assessments have been completed for only 8 of 43 nearshore groundfish. Additional information is needed about the behavior, physiology, life stages, and ecology of many of the species we harvest. We need additional tools to assess the cumulative effects of human activities on ocean health, such as shoreland development, pollution, habitat disturbance, and ocean development.

Marine reserves can be a strategy to supplement our knowledge base in our efforts to sustain our state resources. Potential benefits include:

1. **Insurance/buffer:** Given our lack of information about nearshore marine ecosystems, marine reserves can be used as an additional buffer against the unknown. Since the full impact of our use and regulation of the ocean is not fully understood, it makes intuitive sense to establish some areas compatible with existing restrictions and regulations.
2. **Measuring our Current Efforts:** While we have significant regulatory constraints on fisheries in Oregon marine waters, without better stock status information on all species we cannot be sure the regulations are effective. Research in no-take areas can help us learn about the conservation efforts of our agencies and our fishery participants, and how well they are working.
3. **Providing Refuge:** While reserves offer research opportunities, it is clear that there are also inherent benefits such as stock enhancement, habitat, and biodiversity protections that have been documented world-wide.
4. **We Don’t Know it All:** There is some debate about the extent and nature of benefits that can be expected from marine reserves. The size, location, and level of support for monitoring, research, and enforcement of a habitat set-aside have much to do with what can be expected. By establishing refuges in a limited number of representative habitat types off Oregon under the guidelines put forward by Governor Kulongoski to protect Oregon’s coastal economy, we can learn more about the value of this mechanism.

In summary, marine reserves provide a tool we don’t currently use in Oregon that can help close the information gap and can assure protection of habitats that are currently not afforded such refuge. As we

seek ways to increase our knowledge of Oregon's nearshore, marine reserves can provide a precautionary habitat buffer and refuge for the fish and wildlife therein.

Why isn't the current set of state and federal regulations sufficient for ocean-health protection?

OPAC can and will factor in existing time- and area-based regulatory restrictions on Oregon's fisheries when considering recommendations for marine reserves. It is not our intent to duplicate or compound the impacts of current regulations, which are based on science and conservation principles.

Monitoring and peer-reviewed scientific research on our nearshore resource have historically been limited. Although we strive for Oregon's fishing restrictions to be precautionary and conservative, we cannot say that we know the full effect of the regulations or of human uses on the resource.

OPAC, with help from experienced ocean users and researchers, will try to determine if we have unique areas that contain important biodiversity and might help fill the knowledge gap in our current conservation efforts. The Governor has asked that these areas be large enough to conduct meaningful research and small enough to avoid negative economic impacts to coastal communities. Part of OPAC's charge is to assure that their recommendations result in an overall benefit to our ocean habitats while avoiding negative economic effects on ocean users and coastal communities

Why is OPAC only considering no-take reserves? Why not consider multiple uses or 'marine protected areas' also?

A marine reserve is the most protective type of Marine Protected Area (MPA). MPA's are area-based year-round restrictions on harvest or use. The Governor has asked OPAC to limit its recommendations to less than 10 marine reserve sites.

When the state agencies review these recommendations for implementation, some of the recommended no-take areas may benefit from associated restrictions that allow some place-based restricted harvest (i.e., MPA's). For example, low- or no-impact fisheries may be appropriate for areas surrounding, adjacent to, or otherwise associated with the no-take refuge.

For example: agencies could consider allowing inadvertent drifting of crab gear if the gear is removed as soon as is feasible (technically this would be an MPA provision to accommodate ocean currents). Another example of an associated MPA strategy would be to have a no-take marine reserve close to shore (where it is more easily enforceable) and an associated buffer in more distant waters where non-bottom-impact fishing is allowed.

How can marine reserves help local economics?

Economic activities that depend on fishing and other extractive activities must be sustainable. A limited number of marine reserves can be used as laboratories to help with other efforts to develop a better scientific understanding of how our marine ecosystems function when they are protected from extraction. Understanding is necessary to improve management programs to help in our efforts to ensure that both the resources and their uses endure into the future.

Increased research capacity will benefit the economy of many coastal communities through direct and secondary economic expansion and jobs that support these activities. Marine reserves planning and implementation can also create incentives for the creation of more community nearshore teams, so that public expertise can be coordinated and fed into the design and implementation of research contracts. This would enhance the already existing relationship between the Oregon communities, fishing industries, resources managers and scientists.

Information on potential economic effects of nominated sites will be requested from the communities and groups as a part of the nomination process. A set of preferred alternative sites may be recommended by OPAC, based on economic/social impact information provided to support nominations. However, due to resource constraints by nominating entities, economic information may be limited and in some cases, speculative. Once specific sites are recommended, it will be possible for the state, working with local communities, ports, and economists, to do a more thorough analysis of those suggested sites for economic, research, and habitat impacts and benefits. This will inform and be supplemented by the state agency process in the designation and regulation of the sites.

This is a product of the Ocean Policy Advisory Council (OPAC). These documents, prepared by and endorsed by OPAC, part of a community outreach and engagement program conducted by Oregon Sea Grant, Oregon State University, for OPAC. For further information please go to marinereserves@oregonstate.edu or call 541-737-8002.

