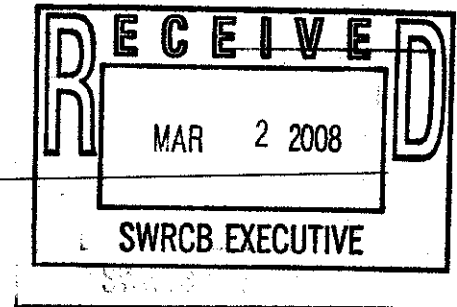


Jeanine Townsend - 596 ~Protecting the Protected Areas~ by joey racano

3/18/08 Bd. Mtg. Item 11  
Wetlands & Riparian Areas  
Deadline: 3/5/08 by 12 p.m.

**From:** Joey Racano <talkaboutthebay@yahoo.com>  
**To:** <talkaboutthebay@yahoo.com>  
**Date:** Sunday, March 02, 2008 11:25 AM  
**Subject:** 596 ~Protecting the Protected Areas~ by joey racano



Protecting the Protected Areas

By Joey Racano

For centuries, Morro Bay Rock has been a landmark for sailors and a breathtaking monolith for tourists. Now, in the face of recent events, Morro Bay Rock might also seem a place-marker for the health of our oceans, jutting skyward like a thermometer tucked beneath the tongue of a red-faced child.

Averting what might have been a much larger spill by re-directing 200,000 gallons to their old wastewater treatment plant during a power outage, the California Men's Colony still sent some 20,000 gallons of raw sewage from their brand new wastewater plant into Chorro Creek. CMC has a long history of spills into Chorro Creek and Morro Bay Estuary, but this spill is very different from previous CMC spills.

In 1999, faced with collapsing fisheries, shriveling ocean-based economies, and public pressure, the California Legislature passed the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA), subsequently signed into law by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, mandating creation of a series of Marine Protected Areas on the Coast of California.

The idea behind Marine Protected Areas (MPA's) is to identify marine or estuarine areas still ecologically intact, and designate them as such. This affords them varying levels of protection from fishing, pollution and other disturbances, allowing their bounty to regenerate and spread to nearby areas. This process seems to work, attested to by the fact that fisherman like to fish next to Marine Protected Areas.

During the process, scientists studying the possibilities for ocean recovery recommended large swaths of ocean be shut down from fishing and other activities such as once-through cooling intake of coastal power plants and sewage discharge.

Through a rigorous process of blue-ribbon panels and stakeholder groups, the large areas of ocean suggested for protection were whittled ever down, until the actual Marine Protected Areas adopted were mere pin-points of their former selves, tiny dots of hope flecked across the vast azure canvass of the sea.

On April 13th, 2007, the California Fish & Game Commission released its map of Central Coast Marine Protected Areas, a testament to hard work, hope and a lot of compromise. Although the MLPA process is still a work-in-progress in the rest of the State, here on the rugged Central Coast our newly created Marine Protected Areas are etched in stone and took effect on September 21st, 2007.

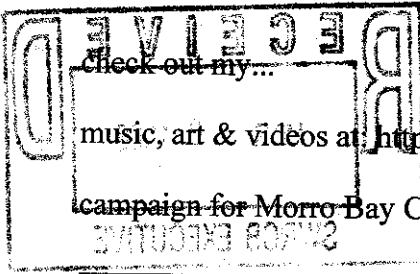
When California Men's Colony Prison spilled 20,000 gallons of raw sewage into Chorro Creek four months later on January 27th, 2008 at 4:10pm, it found its way into Morro Bay East Estuary, like many times before. But this time, that area was a State Marine Reserve, affording it the highest level of protection of any Marine Protected Area.

For sticklers for detail, page 52 of the Master Plan for Marine Protected Areas specifically mentions 'sewage discharge' as being a violation of an 'SMR' (State Marine Reserve). And Fish & Game Code 2850 mentions also that an SMR be kept in an 'unpolluted state'.

Alarmingly, the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's Enforcement Chief Harvey Packard has said that the prison's MPA violation was not considered when CMC was fined. Perhaps this is because the Central Coast Waterboard is reluctant to 'set a precedent'. In this case however, it seems a precedent will indeed be set, one way or the other.

One Central Coast newspaper headline recently proclaimed, 'Marine Reserves Take Effect as World Watches'. With the world watching the State and the State watching us, let's hope the precedent we set is the right one.

Joey Racano



music, art & videos at: <http://www.myspace.com/joeyracano>

campaign for Morro Bay City Council at: [www.stophwaiver.com](http://www.stophwaiver.com)

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