



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS NOMINATE FIRST NEW MARINE WATER QUALITY PROTECTIONS IN NEARLY 50 YEARS

**June 28, 2023 (Monterey, CA)** – Today, California Coastkeeper Alliance, Monterey Waterkeeper, and The Otter Project [submitted a nomination](#) to the Central Coast Regional Water Board to designate the Point Sur Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) as an Area of Special Biological Significance (ASBS). This is the first time the public has nominated a marine area to be protected as an ASBS, and if designated, the Point Sur MPAs will become the first ASBS since 1974.

An ASBS is a type of Marine Water Quality Protection Area monitored and maintained by the State Water Resources Control Board. ASBSs, like MPAs, serve as a tool to protect and preserve marine ecosystems from damage from human activities. While MPAs manage what activities can take place within the protected area (such as fishing or recreational diving), ASBS designation regulates the water pollution that washes off our coast and into these pristine areas. The California Ocean Plan requires protection of species or biological communities in ASBSs and prohibits polluted discharges.

Currently, only 45 of the 124 California MPAs have any overlap with an ASBS, but *all* MPAs would benefit from the additional water quality protections, given signs that coastal pollution is worsening in some areas. The Point Sur MPAs, which include Point Sur State Marine Reserve and Point Sur State Marine Conservation Area, protect approximately 20 square miles along the remote Central Coast and are known as biodiversity hot spots, boasting kelp forests, an offshore rocky reef, and the underwater Sur Canyon. They provide habitat for the threatened southern sea otter as well as migrating gray whales and valuable fishery species.

“Our Marine Protected Areas serve as ocean ‘hope spots’ in the face of climate change, but the state has left them vulnerable to pollution,” said **Sean Bothwell, Executive Director of California Coastkeeper Alliance and The Otter Project**. “We are hopeful that designating the Point Sur MPAs as an Area of Special Biological Significance would serve as a first step toward securing water quality protections for California’s network of protected ocean areas as a whole.”

“While Point Sur boasts some of the most iconic coastline and pristine marine ecosystems in California, it is threatened by highway runoff and agricultural pollution,” said **Chelsea Tu, Executive Director of Monterey Waterkeeper**. “Protecting the water quality of Point Sur MPAs means preserving these sensitive habitats for future generations.”

In 2010, California’s State Water Board stated its intention to designate new ASBSs to protect water quality in MPAs, and in 2020, the Ocean Protection Council’s Strategic Plan committed to strengthening water quality protections in MPAs by 2023, but statewide efforts have languished.

The California Ocean Plan allows any person to nominate areas of ocean waters for designation as ASBS to the appropriate Regional Water Board. Should the Central Coast Regional Water Board move forward with the designation, the State Water Board would need to approve the final designation within the

California Ocean Plan. If all goes as planned, the Point Sur ASBS will be the first publicly nominated water quality designation in California.

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**ABOUT CALIFORNIA COASTKEEPER ALLIANCE** – California Coastkeeper Alliance represents Waterkeepers programs statewide as they fight for drinkable, swimmable, fishable waters for all Californians. CCKA defends and expands California’s protective legislation and strengthens the function of our State Water Board. For more information, visit [www.cacoastkeeper.org](http://www.cacoastkeeper.org) or @CA\_Waterkeepers on social media.

**ABOUT MONTEREY WATERKEEPER** – Monterey Waterkeeper protects and restores fishable, swimmable and drinkable waters within the Monterey Region and along California's Central Coast for all to enjoy. For more information, visit [www.montereywaterkeeper.org](http://www.montereywaterkeeper.org).

**ABOUT THE OTTER PROJECT** – The Otter Project protects our watersheds and coastal oceans to promote the rapid recovery of the threatened California sea otter. The Otter Project is a program of California Coastkeeper Alliance. For more information, visit [www.theotterproject.org](http://www.theotterproject.org) or @TheOtterProject on social media.