

Monterey's Areas of Special Biological Significance

Areas of Special Biological Significance Are Jewels of California's Coastline

California's 34 Areas of Special Biological Significance ("ASBSs") are jewels of the state's world-renowned coastline. These marine waters were given special protection status decades ago to protect the unique and sensitive biological species and communities found in these areas. The State Water Board adopted a pollution discharge prohibition to



Hydrocoral and Kelp in Carmel Bay.
Marc Shargel. Reprinted with permission.

protect these resources, which by definition thrive only in natural water quality. A rigorous exception process in the State Water Board's Ocean Plan allows for some discharge, but only where it is shown that natural water quality will be protected, that

the exception serves the public's interest, and that the exception will be phased out over a specific time frame.

Unfortunately, the clear prohibition on pollution into these biologically important areas has been largely ignored over the years. As a result, some of the areas have become so polluted that they cannot even be safely used for wading, let alone as habitats for sensitive species.

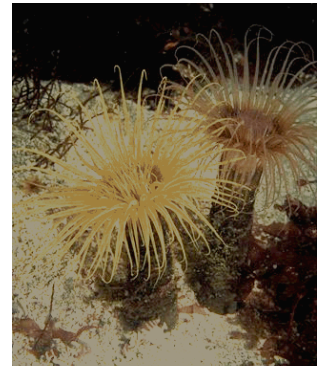
The State Water Board recently completed a study of the state's Areas of Special Biological Significance and

found **1,654 direct discharges** into these areas. Two of the areas affected are *Carmel Bay* and the *Pacific Grove Marine Gardens Fish Refuge/Hopkins Marine Life Refuge*. In response to its study, the State Water Board and its Regional Water Boards have begun enforcing in earnest the decades-old discharge prohibition to protect these valuable marine resources.

Carmel Bay was designated as an Area of Special Biological Significance due to the diverse and abundant species that live in the area, including sea otters, rare purple hydrocoral, and previously unstudied marine species.

The Pacific Grove Area of Special Biological Significance was designated because of its significant kelp and other habitats, its marine life biodiversity, and its rich source of food for the threatened California sea otter.

The Central Coast Regional Water Board, which regulates water quality from Santa Clara to Ventura Counties, recently took the first steps to stop pollution into these special areas. Other California communities have already taken action to stop pollution into their marine waters, and the Monterey Peninsula can do the same.



Tube Anemones in the Pacific Grove ASBS. Marc Shargel. Reprinted with permission.



Fitzgerald Marine Reserve ASBS and Tidepool, San Mateo County.
Found "Impaired" by Pollution. Linda Sheehan

