

Opinion: Today, sea life faces even more threats

Santa Barbara News-Press

January 27, 2006

You could argue that today's equivalent, at least in some respects, of the 1969 oil spill in the channel is the crisis facing sea life off our coast. Runoff, other pollution and overfishing have taken their tolls.

The no-fishing zones in the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary are far smaller than scientists say the reserves should be to have fisheries truly rebound.

The California Fish and Game Commission -- a body that gets far too little public attention -- continues to side against nature when making decisions.

The law requires the state to set up marine reserves and conservation areas by 2011. The commission may vote on a Central Coast plan by the end of the year.

Science, not politics or pressure from special interests, needs to win out.

Seventeen marine scientists, appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, met in San Jose earlier this month to consider five plans for no-fishing and limited-fishing zones in state waters from Monterey to Point Conception, according to a News-Press report. Next, on Tuesday in San Luis Obispo, news reports say the scientists will outline their thoughts to the gubernatorial task force.

Steve Shimek of the Otter Project hit the nail on the head: "I acknowledge that it impacts fishermen, but it's not about them," he says. "It's about people's kids. The creation of Yellowstone Park was not about loggers and hunters. Shouldn't we set aside some quality spots now, purely for the sake of our natural heritage?"

The answer: A resounding yes.

A year after the January 1969 oil blowout, demonstrators form a blockade at State Street and Cabrillo Boulevard to protest oil operations in the Santa Barbara Channel.