

**STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD:  
CALIFORNIA OCEAN PLAN**

**SUMMARY**

Section 13170.2 of the California Water Code directs the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) to formulate and adopt a water quality control plan for ocean waters of California. The State Water Board first adopted this plan, known as the *California Ocean Plan*, in 1972. The California Water Code also requires a review of the California Ocean Plan at least every three years to guarantee that current standards are adequate and are not allowing degradation to indigenous marine species or posing a threat to human health. The amendments to the California Ocean Plan are reviewed and approved by the US Environmental Protection Agency under the Clean Water Act.

The current 2001 California Ocean Plan is available from the State Water Board web page at <http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/plnspols/oplans/index.html>. The State Water Board recently amended the plan in January 2005, and will be considering further amendments in April 2005. The 2005 California Ocean Plan will be posted on the web page in the near future.

The California Ocean Plan establishes water quality objectives for California's ocean waters and provides the basis for regulation of wastes discharged into the State's coastal waters. The plan applies to point and nonpoint source discharges. Both the State Water Board and the six coastal Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Regional Water Boards) implement and interpret the California Ocean Plan.

The California Ocean Plan identifies the applicable beneficial uses of marine waters. These beneficial uses include preservation and enhancement of designated Areas of Special Biological Significance (ASBS), rare and endangered species, marine habitat, fish migration, fish spawning, shellfish harvesting, recreation, commercial and sport fishing, mariculture, industrial water supply, aesthetic enjoyment, and navigation.

The California Ocean Plan establishes a set of narrative and numerical water quality objectives to protect beneficial uses. These objectives are based on bacterial, physical, chemical, and biological characteristics as well as radioactivity. The water quality objectives in Table B of the California Ocean Plan apply to all receiving waters under the jurisdiction of the plan and are established for the protection of aquatic life and for the protection of human health from both carcinogens and noncarcinogens. Within Table B there are 21 objectives for protecting aquatic life, 20 for protecting human health from noncarcinogens, and 42 for protecting human health from exposure to carcinogens.

The Ocean Plan also includes an implementation program for achieving water quality objectives. Effluent limitations are established for the protection of marine waters.

When a discharge permit is written, the water quality objectives for the receiving water are converted into effluent limitations that apply to discharges into State ocean waters. These effluent limitations are established on a discharge-specific basis depending on the initial dilution calculated for each outfall and the Table B objectives.

Implementation provisions are also established for bacterial assessment and remedial action requirements. These provisions provide a basis for determining the occurrence and extent of any impairment of beneficial uses due to bacterial contamination and for providing remedial actions necessary to minimize or eliminate any impairment of a beneficial use.

The California Ocean Plan clearly states that waste shall not be discharged to ASBS and that such discharges shall be located a sufficient distance from ASBS to assure maintenance of natural water quality conditions in these areas. It also provides that Regional Water Boards may approve waste discharge requirements or recommend certification for limited-term (*i.e.*, weeks or months) activities in ASBS.