

Assembly Bill 1407

Ocean Life Recovery Act

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SUMMARY

AB 1407 accelerates California's marine habitat restoration efforts by establishing recovery goals for critical ocean ecosystems and a state structure to develop and support restoration projects. **AB 1407** positions California as a leader in advancing coastal resilience and championing large-scale marine restoration efforts that benefit people and nature.

BACKGROUND

Kelp, eelgrass, and native oysters form the foundation of diverse nearshore ecosystems that support complex food webs and are a home to a variety of invertebrates, fishes, marine mammals, and birds. They provide habitat to juvenile species, including commercial species and forage fish that many species depend on for food. These healthy ecosystems are also of cultural importance to California's indigenous people and support the state's \$44 billion ocean economy.

These kelp forests, seagrass meadows, and native oyster beds also play an important role in the battle against climate change. Marine vegetation can sequester up to 20 times more carbon than terrestrial forests. Additionally, thriving estuaries can buffer against the effects of ocean acidification and prevent erosion and maintain shoreline stability. And as California works toward net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, the state has the opportunity to take advantage of natural climate solutions such as seagrass beds and kelp forest ecosystems as they capture and store carbon in soil sediments, and plant matter.

PROBLEM

Despite their economic, ecological and cultural importance, California's marine ecosystems are under threat. Losses of key habitats like kelp forests, eelgrass meadows, and oyster beds have been largely driven by pollution and climate change.

Recognizing the importance of recovering these ecosystems, California has made commitments to advance restoration of coastal ecosystems, including but not limited to, increasing biodiversity through the 30x30 initiative and implementing nature-based solutions to the climate crisis. Current

prioritized actions set by the Ocean Protection Council and the Department of Fish and Wildlife are well aligned.

Unfortunately, to achieve the necessary coastal restoration efforts to reduce threats to kelp, eelgrass, and oysters, the state must begin exploring new permitting approaches, improving interagency coordination, capacity building, and committing public funding to allow restoration to occur more quickly, simply, and cost-effectively.

SOLUTION

While California has not begun to advance large-scale marine ecosystem restoration, it has been successfully achieved in other parts of United States and around the world to meet the pace and scale of decline for critical biogenic habitats like kelp, oysters, and seagrass. Japan, Korea, Australia and several locations in the U.S., such as Virginia, Florida, and Texas have effectively scaled restoration of oyster reefs, kelp, and seagrass. Large-scale ecosystem restoration delivers multiple societal benefits including jobs, economic impact, and cultural connectivity.

AB 1407 effectively begins recovering California's coastal ecosystems by:

1. Establishing a clear, acreage-based definition for 'large-scale' restoration;
2. Developing clear restoration targets for acres of kelp forests, eelgrass meadows, and native oyster beds, and a creates a pathway to achieve and monitor progress towards goals;
3. Creating a working group to better facilitate interagency coordination to address hurdles that slow restoration efforts;
4. Forming an Ocean Restoration and Recovery Fund to support the development and execution of large-scale marine resource restoration and enhancement projects.

This critical legislation will set California on a path to restore our vital ocean habitats so we can preserve these cultural and natural wonders for the generations that come after us.

SUPPORT

Monterey Bay Aquarium (sponsor)

The Nature Conservancy (sponsor)

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