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RATIONALE FOR MARINE HABITAT EVALUATION

If properly funded and completed, these studies would provide large amounts of data that have not been generated in previous artificial habitat studies. In the past, these studies have been completed on several artificial habitats, commencing from the date of their creation for some period of time thereafter. The missing data regards the sites prior to the artificial reefing events and the impact on nearby natural reefs.

In this study, we propose to evaluate a potential reefing site for as much as two years, and in some cases more, prior to a reefing event so that natural, baseline data can be accumulated over a period of seasons and years to enhance scientific accuracy. At the same time, we propose to accumulate data on one or more natural, nearby rocky reef structure(s), thereby accumulating the same baseline data for that site. These two sets of data can be studies statistically by any number of researchers. Once the reefing event has occurred, this study will continue to accumulate data for a number of years, possibly decades, thus making it possible to evaluate the impact of the artificial reef, not only on its own site, but on the surrounding natural reefs. Ultimately, it should be possible to determine the effect of artificial reefs on their local eco-systems with scientific accuracy.

Completing such a study on a single new artificial reefing site will generate many opportunities for biologists to complete any number of studies on that site. However, scientifically, the results cannot be considered convincing due to any unknown vagaries within that particular small ecosystem. For that reason, we propose to complete at least three and probably many more, exact replicates of this study on widely separated sites along the California coastline; potentially including the Central Coast, Santa Monica Bay and the Southern Coast.