

2013

**Annual Report of the Status of Condition C:
Kelp Reef Mitigation**

**SAN ONOFRE NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION (SONGS)
MITIGATION PROGRAM**



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1.0 Executive Summary

Condition C of the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station's (SONGS) coastal development permit requires Southern California Edison (SCE) and its partners to construct an artificial reef that is large enough to support a minimum of 150 acres of functioning and sustainable kelp forest habitat as partial mitigation for the adverse impacts of SONGS operations to the San Onofre kelp forest. The artificial reef (named the Wheeler North Reef) was constructed in two phases: an initial small-scale experimental phase used to test different reef designs and a larger mitigation phase used to meet the mitigation requirement of creating at least 150 acres of kelp forest habitat. Construction of the mitigation phase of the Wheeler North Reef was completed in 2008 and post construction monitoring of the physical and biological attributes of the Wheeler North Reef and two nearby reference reefs (San Mateo and Barn kelp beds) has been completed each of the five years since then.

Evaluation of the Wheeler North Reef is based on its performance with respect to four absolute standards and 11 relative standards. The absolute standards are evaluated only at the Wheeler North Reef, whereas the relative standards are evaluated in comparison with the two natural reference reefs (San Mateo and Barn) in the San Onofre region. The success of the Wheeler North Reef in meeting the mitigation requirement for a given year is based on its ability to meet all four absolute performance standards and as many relative performance standards as the lower performing reference reef. Annual monitoring is done to determine whether the Wheeler North Reef has met these standards. The monitoring is overseen by the California Coastal Commission (CCC) and is done independently of SCE. This report summarizes the monitoring results through 2013.

In 2013 the Wheeler North Reef met three of the four absolute standards used to judge its performance and seven of the 11 relative performance standards in 2013, which was one less than it met in 2012. The seven relative performance standards met by the Wheeler North Reef matched the number of relative standards met by San Mateo; it was less than the nine relative standards met by Barn. Thus the Wheeler North Reef was judged successful with respect to its ability to meet the relative performance standards because it was found to be similar to a natural reef in the region. However, because the Wheeler North Reef met only three of the four absolute performance standards it did not earn any mitigation credit for 2013. So far the Wheeler North Reef has accumulated zero years of mitigation credit because it has never met all four absolute performance standards in a single year.

The absolute standard that the Wheeler North Reef has consistently failed to meet requires that it support a fish standing stock of at least 28 tons. 28 tons is the average reduction in the standing stock of kelp bed fish caused by the operations of SONGS Units 2 and 3 as determined by the impact assessment studies conducted by the Marine Review Committee. To date the Wheeler North Reef has produced at most half of this amount, and there is no indication from the monitoring results that it is on a trajectory to meet the fish standing stock standard any time soon. Results of analyses using longer-term data collected from the reference reefs and the smaller

modules constructed during the initial experimental phase indicate that the present size and configuration of the Wheeler North Reef is not sufficient to consistently support 28 tons of kelp bed fish. The conclusions drawn from these analyses are that some form of remediation will be needed for the Wheeler North Reef to consistently meet its current mitigation requirements over the long term.

The four relative standards not met in 2013 were the percent cover and number of species of understory algae, the number of species of sessile invertebrates and benthic food chain support for fishes. Monitoring results show that the number of species of benthic invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef has increased substantially during the first five years of its existence suggesting that the artificial reef is likely to meet this performance standard in the near future. Results of analyses from experiments and monitoring data indicate that the sparse cover and low diversity of understory algae at Wheeler North Reef is a natural phenomenon and can be explained by the dense canopy of giant kelp that shades the bottom community, and to a lesser extent by the lower percent cover of rock at Wheeler North Reef relative to that at the two reference reefs.

Despite the above noted deficiency in performance, the Wheeler North Reef has shown considerable promise in meeting many of its objectives. Importantly, the absolute performance standard pertaining to the area of adult giant kelp has been met continuously since 2010. Impressively, at least 174 of Wheeler North Reef's 176 acres were estimated to support medium to high densities of adult giant kelp since 2010. This indicates the Wheeler North Reef currently is meeting the objective of compensating for the loss of giant kelp caused by SONGS operations. As noted above, over the last several years the Wheeler North Reef has also met as many or more of the relative performance standards as the natural reef at San Mateo. Finally, in contrast to other artificial reefs in the region, there is no evidence that invasive or undesirable species, including the sea fan *Muricea* spp. pose a threat to the important ecological functions of Wheeler North Reef.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Purpose of Report

This report focuses on Condition C of the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station's (SONGS) coastal development permit (6-81-330-A), which pertains to mitigation for SONGS impacts to giant kelp and associated biota. Southern California Edison (SCE) and the California Coastal Commission (CCC) have clear and distinct roles in the implementation of Condition C. Under the condition, SCE is required to construct an artificial reef that creates a minimum of 150 acres of functioning and sustainable kelp forest habitat. The CCC is to provide scientific oversight and monitoring of the artificial reef mitigation that is independent of SCE. This report presents the results from the CCC's monitoring of the performance of the SONGS artificial reef (hereafter referred to as the Wheeler North Reef) during 2009 – 2013 and summarizes the status of the project's compliance with Condition C of the SONGS permit for this period.

2.2 Background

SONGS Operations

In 1974, the California Coastal Zone Conservation Commission issued a permit (No. 6-81-330-A, formerly 183-73) to SCE for Units 2 and 3 of the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS). SONGS is located on the coast in north San Diego County. Construction of SONGS Units 2 and 3 was completed in 1981. Operation of Units 2 and 3 began in 1983 and 1984, respectively and each unit generated up to 1,100 MW of electric power. Both reactors were shut down in January 2012 due to excessive wear in the cooling tubes of the steam generators, and in June 2013 both units were permanently retired. SCE's operating license has been modified to "possession only" and they are no longer authorized to operate the reactors. Full retirement of the units prior to decommissioning is expected to take several years in accordance with customary practices; actual decommissioning will take many years until completion.

The SONGS Unit 2 and 3 reactors are cooled by a single pass seawater system and have separate intake lines, each 18 feet in diameter, that are located in about 30 feet of water offshore of the power plant. The volume of water taken in each day by these two intake lines when Units 2 and 3 were fully operational was about 2.4 billion gallons, equivalent to a square mile 12 feet deep. Since the shutdown, the flow in each unit has been reduced to about 49 million gallons a day or roughly 4% of the normal operating flow.

The discharge pipe for Unit 2 terminates 8,500 feet offshore, while the discharge pipe for Unit 3 terminates 6,150 feet offshore. The last 2,500 feet of the discharge pipes for Units 2 and 3 consist of a multi-port diffuser that rapidly mixes the cooling water with the surrounding water. The diffusers for each unit contain 63 discharge ports angled offshore that increase the velocity of the discharge. Under normal operations the discharge water is approximately 19°F warmer than the intake water temperature. To cool the discharge water, the diffusers draw in ambient seawater at a rate of about ten times the discharge flow and mix it with the discharge water. The surrounding water is swept up along with sediments and organisms and transported

offshore at various distances. Mixing caused by the diffuser system results in the formation of a turbid plume in the vicinity of the San Onofre kelp forest, which is located adjacent and south of the two diffuser lines.

SONGS Impacts

A condition of the SONGS permit required study of the impacts of the operation of Units 2 and 3 on the marine environment offshore from San Onofre and mitigation of any adverse impacts. The impact assessment studies found that the SONGS cooling water system for Units 2 and 3 had major adverse impacts to living marine resources, which included:

- Projected reductions in populations of adult fish throughout the Southern California Bight based on losses of fish eggs and immature fish entrained by the cooling water intakes and killed inside the power plant.
- Measured reductions in local populations of adult fish caused by the mortality of fish impinged against the cooling water screens inside the power plant.
- A substantial reduction in the size of the giant kelp forest and its associated community adjacent to the SONGS diffusers.

Mitigation Requirements

As a result of the impact studies, in 1991 the CCC added new conditions to mitigate the adverse impacts of the power plant on the marine environment that require SCE and its partners to: (1) create or substantially restore at least 150 acres of southern California wetlands as out-of-kind mitigation for the losses of immature fish (Condition A), (2) install fish barrier devices at the power plant to reduce the losses of adult fish killed in the plant (Condition B), and (3) construct a 300-acre kelp reef as in-kind mitigation for the loss of giant kelp forest habitat (Conditions C). The 1991 conditions also required SCE and its partners to provide the funds necessary for CCC to contract marine scientists to perform technical oversight and independent monitoring of the mitigation projects (Condition D). In 1993, the CCC added a requirement for SCE to partially fund construction of an experimental white sea bass hatchery. Due to the experimental nature of the hatchery, the CCC did not assign mitigation credit to its operation.

After extensive review of new kelp impact studies, in April 1997 the CCC approved amended conditions that revised the kelp mitigation requirements in Condition C. Specifically, the revised Condition C requires SCE to construct an artificial reef large enough to sustain 150 acres of medium to high density kelp bed that supports 28 tons of reef fish (which could result in a reef larger than 150 acres) together with funding for a mariculture/marine fish hatchery as compensation for the estimated loss of 179 acres of a medium to high density kelp bed and associated community resulting from the discharge of cooling water from SONGS Units 2 and 3. Condition C requirements for the artificial reef consist of two phases, an initial small experimental reef (~22 acres) and a subsequent mitigation reef that is large enough to meet the 150-acre kelp and 28 ton fish standing stock requirements. The purpose of the Phase 1 Experimental Reef was to determine which combinations of substrate type and substrate coverage would most likely achieve the performance standards

specified in the permit. The design of the Phase 2 Mitigation Reef was to be contingent on the results of the Phase 1 Experimental Reef.

The CCC also confirmed in April 1997 its previous finding that independent monitoring and technical oversight were required in Condition D to ensure full mitigation under the permit. Condition D requires SCE and its partners to fund scientific and support staff retained by the CCC to oversee the site assessments, project design and implementation, and monitoring activities for the mitigation projects. Scientific expertise is provided to the CCC by a technical oversight team hired under contract. The technical oversight team members include three Research Biologists from UC Santa Barbara: Steve Schroeter, Ph.D., marine ecologist, Mark Page, Ph.D., wetlands ecologist (half time), and Dan Reed, Ph.D., kelp forest ecologist (half-time). In addition, a science advisory panel advises the CCC on the design, implementation, monitoring, and remediation of the mitigation projects. Current science advisory panel members include Richard Ambrose, Ph.D., Professor, UCLA, Peter Raimondi, Ph.D., Professor, UC Santa Cruz, and Russell Schmitt, Ph.D., Professor, UC Santa Barbara. In addition to the science advisors, the technical oversight team is aided by a crew of marine biologists hired under a contract with the University of California, Santa Barbara to collect and assemble the monitoring data. The technical oversight team is also assisted on occasion by independent consultants and contractors when expertise for specific tasks is needed. The CCC's permanent staff also spends a portion of their time on this program, but their costs are paid by the CCC and are not included in the SONGS budget.

3.0 Project Description

Mitigation for SONGS impacts to the San Onofre kelp forest through the construction of an artificial reef is being done in two phases: a short-term, small-scale experimental phase for testing different reef designs, followed by a longer-term, larger-scale mitigation phase that is intended to compensate for the kelp forest resources lost due to SONGS operations. The information gained from the Phase 1 Experimental Reef was used to design the larger Phase 2 Mitigation Reef. The mitigation phase is to have a minimum duration equivalent to the operating life of SONGS Units 2 and 3 including the decommissioning period to the extent there are continuing discharges.

The CCC decided that the goal of in-kind compensation for kelp forest resources lost due to SONGS operations will most likely be met if: (1) The artificial reef is built near SONGS, but outside its influence in order to ensure that the compensation for the lost resources will occur locally rather than at a distant location far from the impacts, and (2) The artificial reef is configured to mimic the natural reef at San Onofre, which is a low relief boulder field.

3.1 Experimental Phase

The Phase 1 Experimental Reef was constructed in August and September 1999 on a mostly sand bottom at 13 to 16 m depth approximately 1 km offshore of the city of San Clemente, CA, USA (Figure 3.1.1).



Figure 3.1.1. Location of the artificial reef mitigation site (shown as the yellow rectangle) in relation to SONGS and the impacted San Onofre kelp forest and the naturally occurring kelp forests at San Mateo and Barn.

It consists of 56 modules clustered at seven locations (eight modules / location) spaced relatively evenly along 3.5 km of coastline encompassing an area of approximately 144 ha (Figure 3.1.2). Each artificial reef module measured roughly 40m x 40m and the 56 modules collectively covered about nine hectares (22.2 acres) of the sea floor when initially constructed.

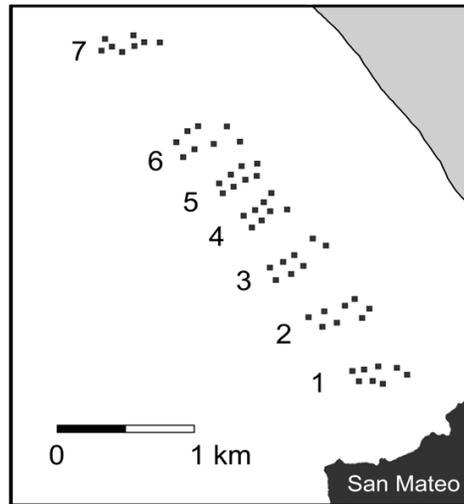


Figure 3.1.2. Design of the Phase 1 Experimental Reef. The black squares represent the 56 modules. Numbers indicate the seven sampling locations.

The modules at each location were built either from quarry rock or concrete rubble and were constructed to form low-lying reefs (i.e., < 1 m tall) that mimicked natural reefs in the region. These two types of materials were chosen because: (1) they are the two materials most preferred by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for building artificial reefs in California, and (2) little information existed on their relative effectiveness in supporting reef biota. Four modules at each location were built from quarry rock and four were built from concrete rubble. These two construction materials differed with respect to their size and shape; the quarry rock was boulder-like in appearance, while the concrete rubble consisted primarily of pieces of flat slabs that tended to be longer, wider, and slightly shorter than quarry rocks (Reed et al. 2004). The different sizes and shapes of the two materials caused rock and concrete modules to differ somewhat with respect to small-scale topography. The slabs used to build concrete modules resulted in modules that had a greater proportion of horizontal substrate and a surface that was slightly more regular than modules constructed from quarry rock (Reed et al. 2004). By design, the amount of quarry rock and concrete rubble used to build the modules was systematically varied to produce a wide range in the bottom coverage of hard substrate (~30 to 90%) on modules of the two reef types within each location. This was done to evaluate the extent to which the bottom coverage of reef substrate influenced the abundance and species richness of colonizing biota.

Five years of post-construction monitoring were completed in December 2004. Results from the five-year experimental phase of the artificial reef mitigation project were quite promising in that all six artificial reef designs and all seven locations

tested showed nearly equal tendencies to meet several of the performance standards established for the mitigation reef (Reed et al. 2005). It was concluded from these findings that a low relief concrete rubble or quarry rock reef constructed off the coast of San Clemente, California had a good chance of providing adequate in-kind compensation for the loss of kelp forest biota caused by the operation of SONGS Units 2 and 3. These findings formed the basis of the CCC Executive Director's determination that: (1) the mitigation reef shall be built of quarry rock or rubble concrete having dimensions and specific gravities that are within the range of the rock and concrete boulders used to construct the SONGS experimental artificial reef, and (2) the percent of the bottom covered by quarry rock or rubble concrete on the mitigation reef shall average at least 42%, but no more than 86%. The CCC concurred with the Executive Director's determination for the type and percent cover of hard substrate on October 12, 2005.

3.2 Mitigation Phase

On April 17, 2006 the California State Lands Commission acting on a request from SCE adopted a resolution declaring that the SONGS Mitigation Reef be named in honor of Dr. Wheeler North. Construction of Wheeler North Reef was completed in 94 days on September 11, 2008. Approximately 126,000 tons of boulder-sized quarry material was deposited in 18 polygons that collectively covered 152 acres of sea floor as determined from bathymetry using multibeam sonar (Figure 3.2.1).

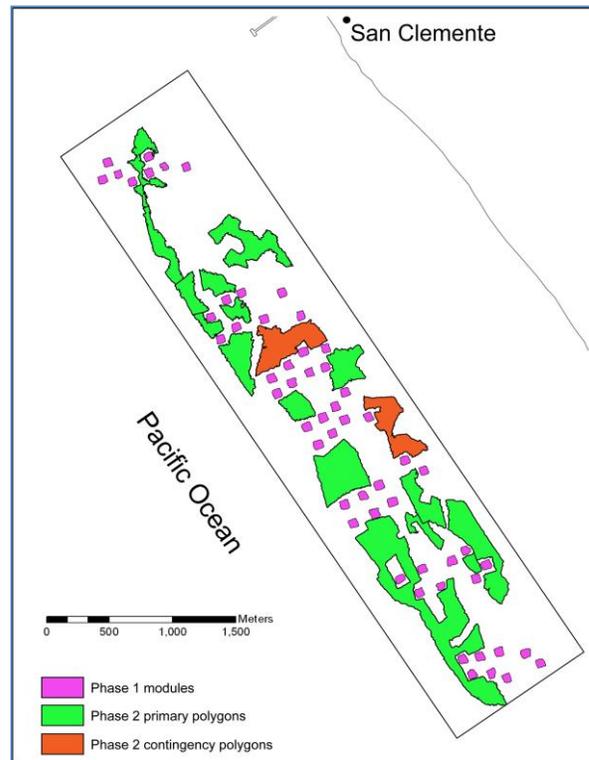


Figure 3.2.1. The 178 acre Wheeler North Artificial Reef, which includes the Phase 1 modules and the Phase 2 primary and contingency polygons.

Boulder length varied from 1 to 4 ft, with an average length of 2.3 ft; width varied from 0.5 to 3 ft, with an average width of 1.8 ft; and height varied from 0.5 to 2.5 ft, with an average of 1.4 ft. When added to the experimental reef a total of 178 acres (as estimated from multibeam sonar surveys in 2008 and 2009) of artificial reef were constructed. The CCC found that the average cover of quarry rock on the Phase 2 reef was slightly below the 42% minimum requirement specified in SCE's Coastal Development Permit. To address this inadequacy the Executive Director of the CCC accepted a scenario in which 16 of the 18 polygons of the Phase 2 reef comprising 130 acres (hereafter referred to as primary polygons) were combined with the 26 acres of the Phase 1 reef (as determined in 2009, Elwany et al. 2009) to fulfill SCE's permit requirement that they construct a minimum of 150 acres of reef with an average of at least 42% cover. The 22 acres in the remaining two polygons (hereafter referred to as contingency polygons) are included in evaluations assessing the biological performance standards that pertain to giant kelp and fish standing stock (see 6.0 Performance Assessment of the Wheeler North Reef).

4.0 Methods of Project Evaluation

4.1 Performance Standards

Performance standards for reef substrate, giant kelp, fish, and the benthic community of algae and invertebrates specified in Condition C are used to evaluate the success of the Wheeler North Reef in meeting the intended goal of replacing the kelp forest resources damaged or lost by SONGS operations. Monitoring independent of the permittee is done in accordance with Condition D of the SONGS permit to: (1) determine whether the performance standards established for Condition C are met, (2) determine, if necessary, the reasons why any performance standard has not been met, and (3) develop recommendations for appropriate remedial measures. The performance standards fall into two categories: absolute standards, which are measured only at the Wheeler North Reef and require that the variable of interest attain or exceed a predetermined value, and relative standards, which require that the value of the variable of interest on Wheeler North Reef be similar to that measured on natural reference reefs. Among other things these performance standards require the Wheeler North Reef to support at least 150 acres of medium to high density kelp, 28 tons of fish, and assemblages of algae, invertebrates and fishes that are similar to nearby natural reference reefs.

The evaluation of each absolute performance standard in any given year is based on the greater value obtained from either: (1) data collected at the Wheeler North Reef that year, or (2) a four-year running average calculated from data collected at the Wheeler North Reef for that year and the previous three years. A running average recognizes that short-term fluctuations in kelp forest biota are the norm, and it is used to allow mitigation credit to be given for excess reef biota in good years to compensate for occasional years when values for the biota are slightly below those required by the absolute standards. All absolute standards must be met in a given year in order for that year to count towards compliance with Condition C, based on either a single-year or a four-year running average is used to evaluate the standards.

The evaluation of each relative performance standard is based solely on a four-year running average calculated from data collected at the Wheeler North Reef for that year and the previous three years. An either /or criterion (i.e., using data from either a single year or a running average) is not appropriate in this case because the desired goal for the relative standards is not to achieve a specified value that is linked to estimated losses at the San Onofre kelp forest, but rather to evaluate whether the abundances and numbers of species of kelp forest biota at the Wheeler North Reef are similar to those at the reference reefs. This is best accomplished using a short-term (4-year) running average that accounts for natural variation in time. Natural kelp forests vary greatly in their species composition and abundance and it is likely that even the reference reefs will not consistently meet all the relative standards in a given year. To avoid requiring the Wheeler North Reef to perform better than the reference reefs the Wheeler North Reef is required to meet at least as many of the relative standards as the lowest performing reference site (which by

definition is an acceptable measure of comparison; see section 2.2 below) in a given year for that year to count towards compliance with Condition C.

4.2 Reference Sites

Requiring resource values at Wheeler North Reef to be similar to those at natural reefs is based on the rationale that to be successful, Wheeler North Reef must provide the same types and amounts of resources that occur on natural reefs. Resources on natural reefs, however, vary tremendously in space and time. Differences in physical characteristics of a reef (e.g., depth and topography) can cause plant and animal assemblages to differ greatly among reefs while seasonal and inter-annual differences in oceanographic conditions can cause the biological assemblages within reefs to fluctuate greatly over time. Ideally, the biological assemblages at a successful artificial reef should fluctuate in a manner similar to those at the natural reefs used for reference. One way to help ensure this is to select reference reefs that are physically similar to Wheeler North Reef and located relatively close to it. The premise here is that nearby reefs with similar physical characteristics should support similar biota, which should fluctuate similarly over time. Thus, in addition to proximity, other criteria used to select the reference reefs included that they: (1) not be influenced by the operation of SONGS, (2) be located at a depth similar to Wheeler North Reef, (3) be primarily low relief, preferably consisting of cobble or boulders, and (4) have a history of sustaining giant kelp at medium to high densities. The criterion that the reference reefs have a history of supporting persistent stands of giant kelp is important because communities on reefs without giant kelp can differ dramatically from those with kelp. Based on these criteria, San Mateo kelp bed (located adjacent to the southern end of Wheeler North Reef) and Barn kelp bed (located approximately 12 km south of San Mateo kelp bed) were chosen as reference reefs for evaluating the performance of the Wheeler North Reef (Figure 3.1.1).

Temporal variability, especially of the sort associated with changes in oceanographic conditions, can be accounted for more easily by sampling Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn concurrently. Concurrent monitoring of the mitigation and reference reefs helps to ensure that regional changes in oceanographic conditions affecting Wheeler North Reef will be reflected in the performance criteria, since nearby San Mateo and Barn will be subjected to similar regional changes in oceanographic conditions.

4.3 Determination of similarity

A requirement of the SONGS permit is that many of the response variables used to assess the relative performance standards of the Wheeler North Reef (hereafter referred to as “relative performance variables”) be “similar” to those at nearby natural reference reefs. Evaluating whether the performance of Wheeler North Reef is similar to that at the San Mateo and Barn reference reefs requires that the mean (or median) value for a given relative performance variable at Wheeler North Reef not be significantly lower than the mean (or median) value at the lower performing of the two reference reefs. We use a one-sample, one-tailed approach for all comparisons. Significance is determined using a method that utilizes both a formal probability

value and an effect size. This is generally done by means of a t-test (except in the case of the performance standard pertaining to fish reproductive rates where significance is determined by a resampling procedure). The performance at Wheeler North Reef with respect to a given relative performance standard is considered to be worse than the lower of the two reference reefs if the p-value for the comparison is \leq to the proportional effect size (i.e., the proportional difference between the Wheeler North Reef and the lowest performing reference reef). The only exception to this rule is when both the p-value and the proportional effect size are greater than 0.5, in which case assessment for the period is considered inconclusive and additional studies will be done (see **3.2 Methods for assessing the performance standards** for details). As an example, if the proportional effect size for a given variable was 0.25 (i.e., the mean value at Wheeler North Reef was 75% of the mean value at the lower of the two reference reefs), then a t-test yielding a p-value \leq 0.25 would indicate the Wheeler North Reef did not meet the performance standard, whereas p-values $>$ 0.25 would indicate that it did meet the performance standard. The rationale for using the lower of the two reference reefs is that both reference reefs are considered to be acceptable measures of comparison for Wheeler North Reef. Hence, if Wheeler North Reef is performing at least as well as one of the reference sites, then it should be judged successful. The scaling of the p-value (α) to the effect size recognizes sampling error when estimating mean values and balances the probability of a Type I error (falsely concluding that Wheeler North Reef is not similar to the reference reefs when it is) with the probability of a Type II error (falsely concluding that the Wheeler North Reef is similar to the reference reefs when it is not).

To insure that the Wheeler North Reef is not held to a higher standard than the reference reefs the above procedure is also applied to San Mateo and Barn to evaluate whether they would have met the relative performance standards. This is done by treating San Mateo (or Barn) as the mitigation reef and using the Wheeler North Reef and Barn (or San Mateo) as the two reference reefs. The Wheeler North Reef is considered similar to the reference reefs if the number of relative standards met by the Wheeler North Reef is equal to or greater than the number of relative standards met by either San Mateo or Barn.

The above approach ensures that the assessment of similarity is consistent with the SONGS permit requirement that the performance standards be met without the unreasonable requirement that Wheeler North Reef outperform San Mateo and Barn for every performance standard. Importantly, this approach deals realistically with the inherent variability of nature in a manner that best serves the interests of the public and SCE.

4.4 General Sampling Design

Eighty two monitoring locations, each defined by a fixed 50m x 20m area, are sampled at Wheeler North Reef in the primary polygons, and at San Mateo and Barn in areas that are known to support persistent kelp (Figure 4.4.1). An additional 10 monitoring locations are sampled in the two contingency polygons at Wheeler North Reef.

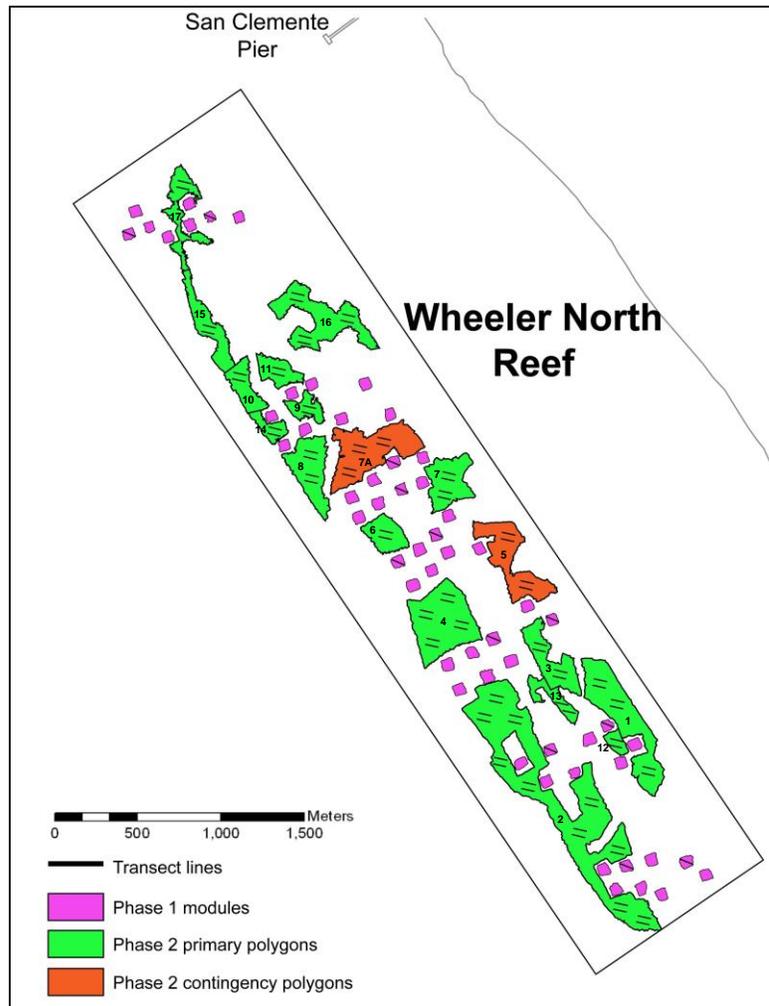


Figure 4.4.1. Schematic map of the Wheeler North Reef showing the location of the paired transects that are monitored to assess the performance standards. Numbers indicate polygon ID.

Data collected from these additional 10 transects are used with data from the 82 transects when evaluating the absolute performance standards pertaining to giant kelp and fish standing stock. Transects on each reef are arranged in pairs with the two transects in each pair spaced 25m apart. The lone exception to this are the single transects located on 12 of the Phase 1 modules of Wheeler North Reef. Pairing of transects is done to increase sampling efficiency. Maps of kelp persistence and hard substrate were used to strategically distribute the 41 transect pairs at San Mateo and Barn across areas of reef known to support giant kelp. Transects at Wheeler North Reef were allocated to the polygons and the existing experimental reef modules in proportion to their area.

Sampling of the Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn is done concurrently from late spring to early autumn on an annual basis. Each sampling area is identified by

unique differential GPS coordinates that marks the “zero end” of a 50m transect and a compass heading along which divers lay out a 50m measuring tape. A 20m wide swath centered along the 50m transect defines the sample area at each sampling location. Different sized sampling units (e.g., 0.5m^2 , 1m^2 , 20m^2 , and 100m^2) within this sampling area are used to evaluate different performance variables (Figure 4.4.2).

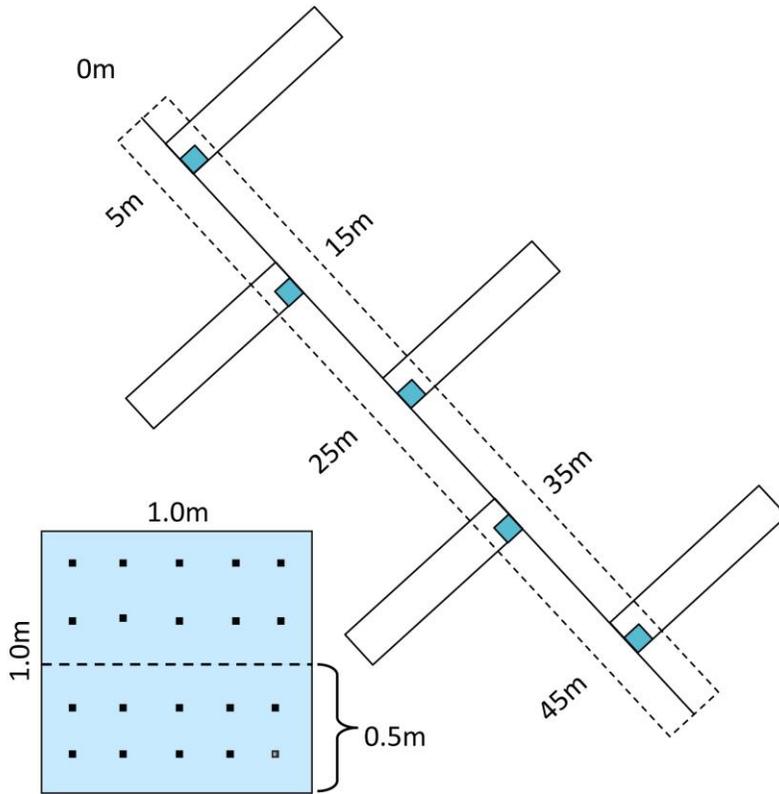


Figure 4.4.2. Schematic diagram of a sampling station. Fish are sampled in 50m x 3m band transects that extend 1.5m off the bottom (outlined with a dotted line). Adult giant kelp > 1m tall, large understory algae, and large mobile invertebrates are counted in the five 10m x 2m rectangular quadrats positioned perpendicular to the main transect at 10 m intervals (outlined with solid lines). The percent cover of invertebrates, algae and bottom substrate is estimated using a grid of 20 points in the five 1m x 1m quadrats (shown in blue). Smaller mobile invertebrates and small cryptic fish are counted either in 1m x 1m or 1m x 0.5m quadrats depending on their size and abundance.

5.0 Trends in the Development of the Wheeler North Reef

This section provides a brief summary of temporal patterns of change in the physical and biological attributes of the Wheeler North Reef and the two reference reefs, San Mateo and Barn for 2009 – 2013, which represents the 5-year period following the construction of the 152 acre Phase 2 Mitigation Reef.

5.1 Physical Characteristics

Exposed hard reef substrate is necessary for the establishment and persistence of giant kelp and other reef biota. The percent cover of exposed rock on the bottom can decline as a result of sedimentation and burial, or increase due to scour caused by waves and currents. Knowledge of the extent, type and persistence of exposed rock is essential to understanding how the Wheeler North Reef will function over the long term. Overall the mean percent cover of exposed rock averaged over all the primary polygons at the Wheeler North Reef has been relatively constant over time ranging from a low of 42% in 2011 to a high of 46% in 2013 (Figure 5.1.1).

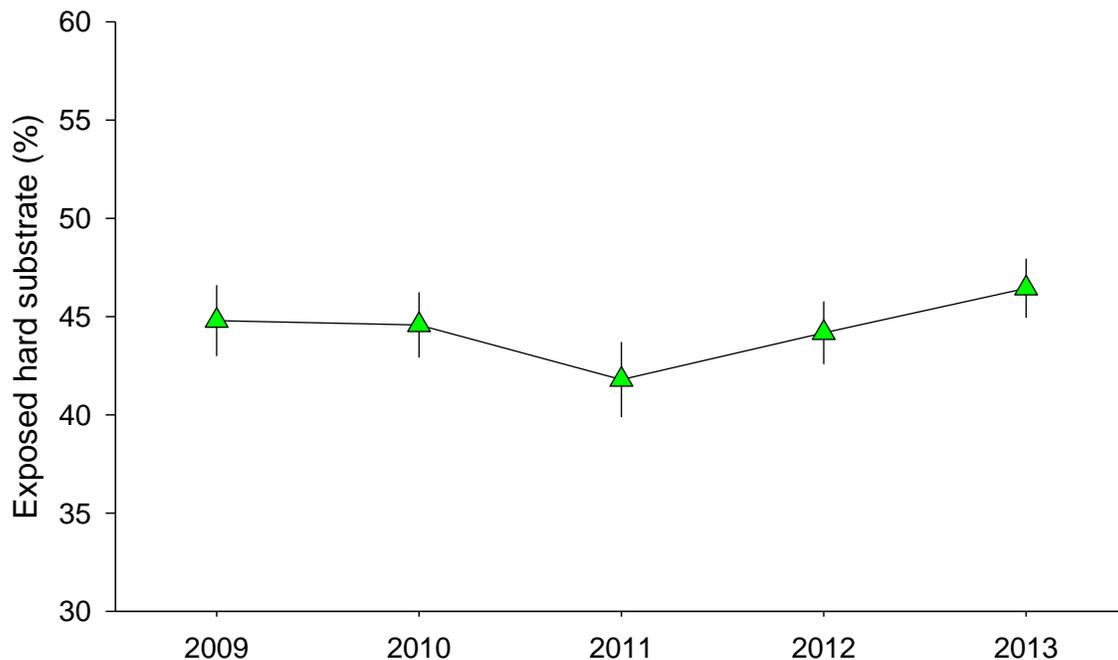


Figure 5.1.1 Mean percent cover (± 1 standard error) of exposed hard substrate at Wheeler North Reef for 2009 - 2013.

The percent cover of exposed rock at Wheeler North Reef is spatially heterogeneous and varies substantially among the polygons of ranging from 35 to 70% cover in 2013 (Figure 5.1.2). Although the percent cover of rock averaged across the entire reef has varied little over time, rock cover of the individual polygons has fluctuated substantially over time. The largest changes (increases) in the percent cover of exposed rock in 2013 were observed for polygons that had relative small footprint areas (e.g., # 6, 11, and 13 which had corresponding areas of 4.2, 3.5, and 2.9 acres), while the largest polygons (# 2 with an area of 38.9 acres) and the collective

average of the 12 older Phase 1 modules have showed relatively little departure from their mean percent cover of rock over the five year period.

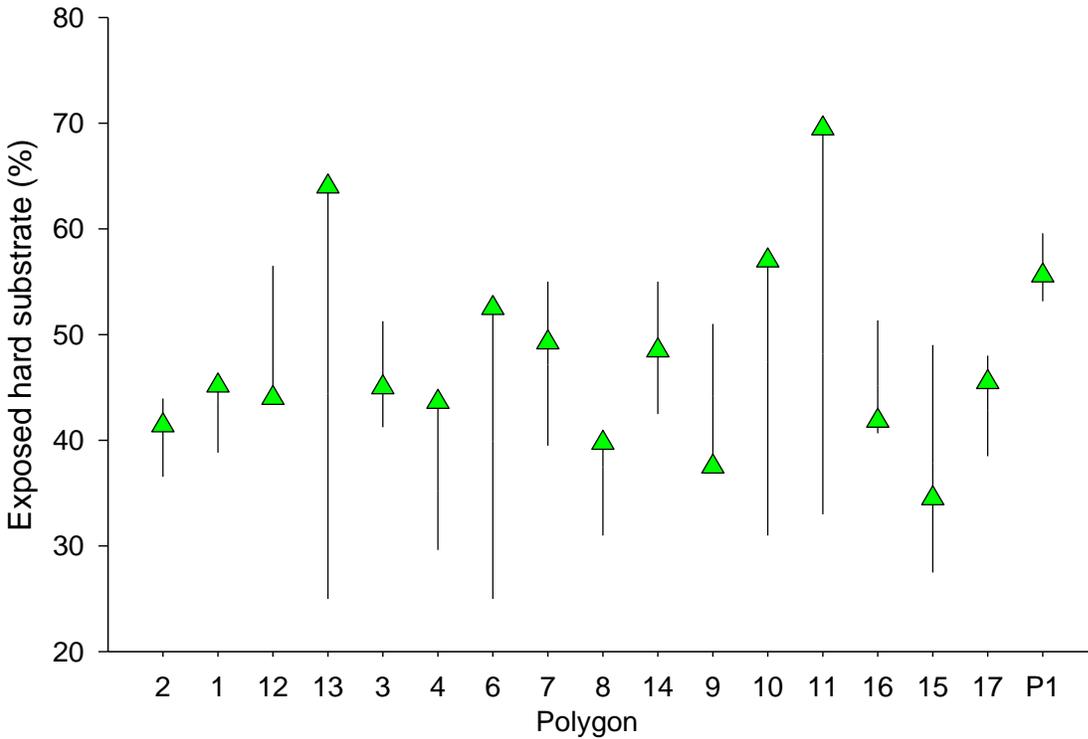


Figure 5.1.2. Mean percent cover of exposed hard substrate at Wheeler North Reef in 2013. Vertical lines represent the range of values observed from 2009 - 2013. Polygon numbers are ordered from south to north. P1 is equal to the mean of the twelve Phase 1 modules.

Not surprisingly, the hard substrate at Wheeler North Reef consists of mostly boulder, which is what was intentionally produced at the quarries that supplied the rock for the construction of the reef (Figure 5.1.3). A small amount of cobble (much of which is a by-product of the quarry rock preparation) and natural bedrock also contributes to the hard substrate on the reef. Soft substrates consisting primarily of sand with some shell hash cover approximately half the bottom within the footprint area of the Wheeler North Reef. The relative amounts of the different bottom substrates have changed little since 2009.

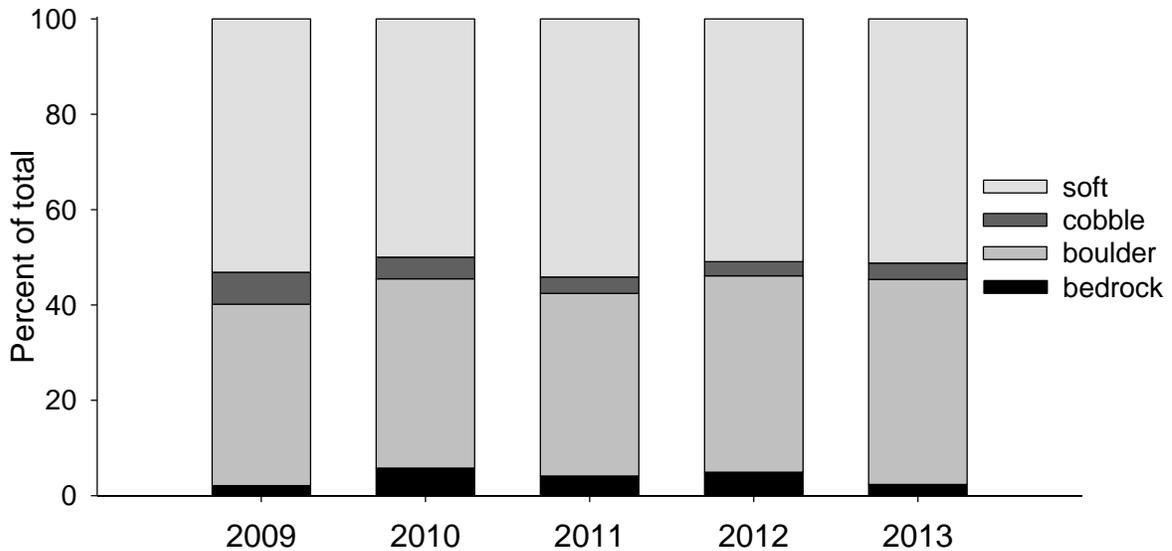


Figure 5.1.3. Distribution of substrate types on Wheeler North Reef for 2009 - 2013.

5.2 Biological Characteristics

Giant kelp

The giant kelp, *Macrocystis pyrifera* is the world's largest alga and it displays some of the fastest elongation rates on Earth. Once established, small plants grow rapidly into large adult plants that extend throughout the water column to produce a floating canopy at the sea surface. It is considered the foundation species of the kelp forest because it provides food and shelter for a wide diversity of species. A primary goal in designing the Wheeler North Reef was to make it suitable for the establishment, growth, and persistence of giant kelp.

Results from the Phase 1 Experimental Reef indicated that giant kelp would readily colonize the newly constructed Phase 2 Mitigation Reef and that transplanting kelp would not be needed to insure it became established (Reed et al. 2006). This prediction proved to be true as very high densities of giant kelp recruits were observed at Wheeler North Reef in the summer of 2009, one year after construction (Figure 5.2.1). Densities of newly recruited giant kelp at Wheeler North Reef since 2009 have been near zero. A similar pattern of extremely low recruitment of giant kelp in years following initial high rates of colonization was also observed during the development of the Phase 1 Experimental Reef (Reed et al. 2006). This pattern is a common occurrence in kelp forests generally as the canopy formed by large plants suppresses the development of small young plants by reducing the amount of light reaching the bottom.

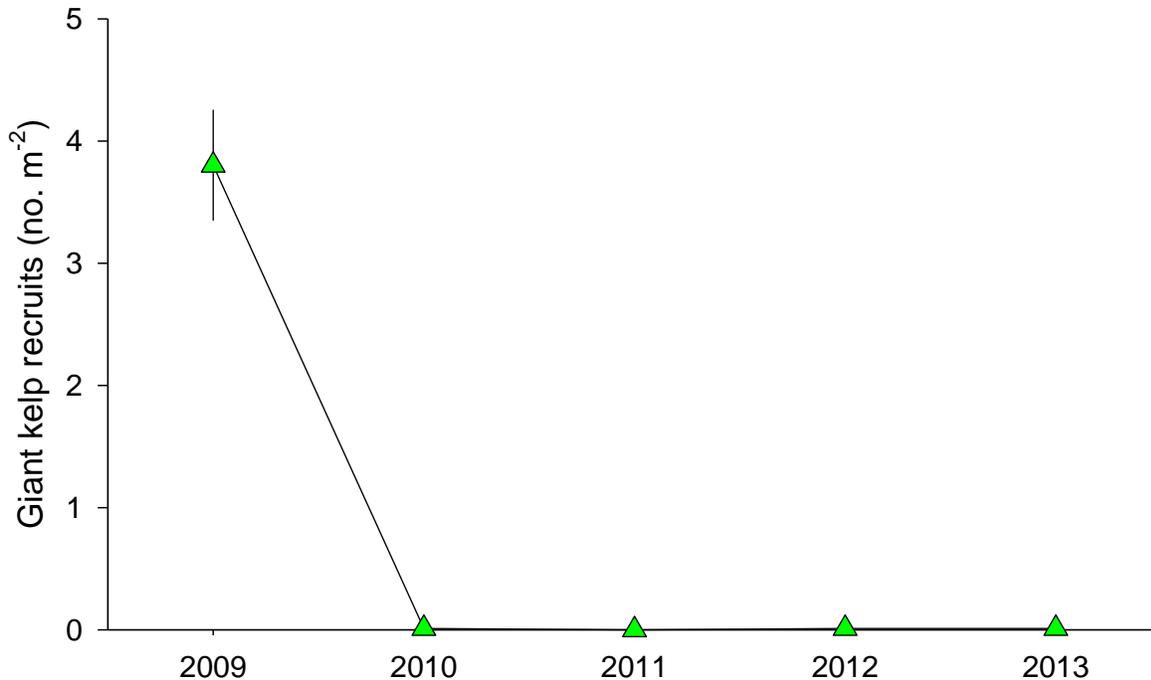


Figure 5.2.1. Mean density (± 1 standard error) of newly recruited giant kelp plants (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn for 2009 - 2013.

The dense recruitment of giant kelp observed in 2009 occurred across the entire Wheeler North Reef (see the high values of the ranges in Figure 5.2.2). All of the newly constructed polygons were colonized by giant kelp regardless of location. That kelp recruitment in 2009 was lowest on the experimental Phase 1 modules where adult kelp was already established is further evidence of suppression of recruitment of young plants by an established surface canopy.

The large kelp recruitment event at Wheeler North Reef in 2009 led to a large cohort of older large plants in 2010, which gradually declined to approximately 2 individuals per 10 m² in 2012 (Figure 5.2.3). The small change in adult density from 2012 to 2013 coupled with low recruitment in 2012 indicates that there has been little mortality of adult kelp since 2012. Like the small recruits in 2009, adult kelp in 2013 occurred at high densities across all areas of the Wheeler North Reef (Figure 5.2.4).

The canopy of giant kelp that developed at Wheeler North Reef during the summer of 2010 was extensive in comparison with the nearby kelp beds at San Mateo (reference reef) and San Onofre (the kelp bed impacted by SONGS), and was easily seen when viewed from space (Figure 5.2.5).

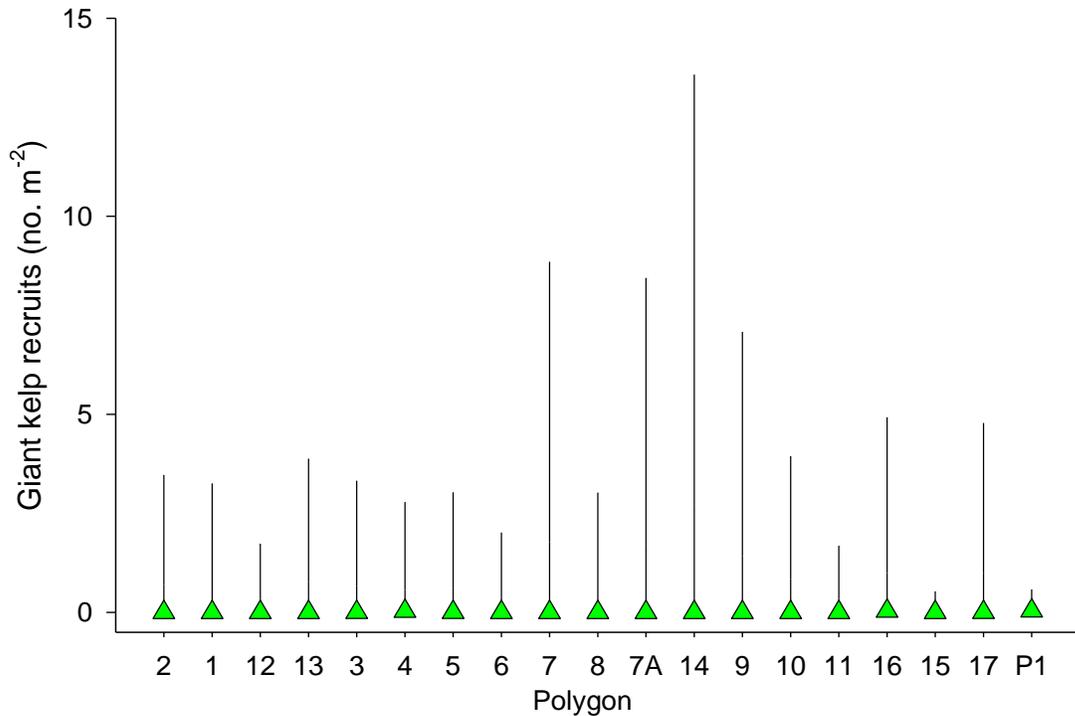


Figure 5.2.2 Mean density of newly recruited giant kelp plants (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) at Wheeler North Reef in 2013. Vertical lines represent the range of values observed between 2009 - 2013. Polygon numbers are ordered from south to north. P1 is equal to the mean of the twelve Phase 1 modules.

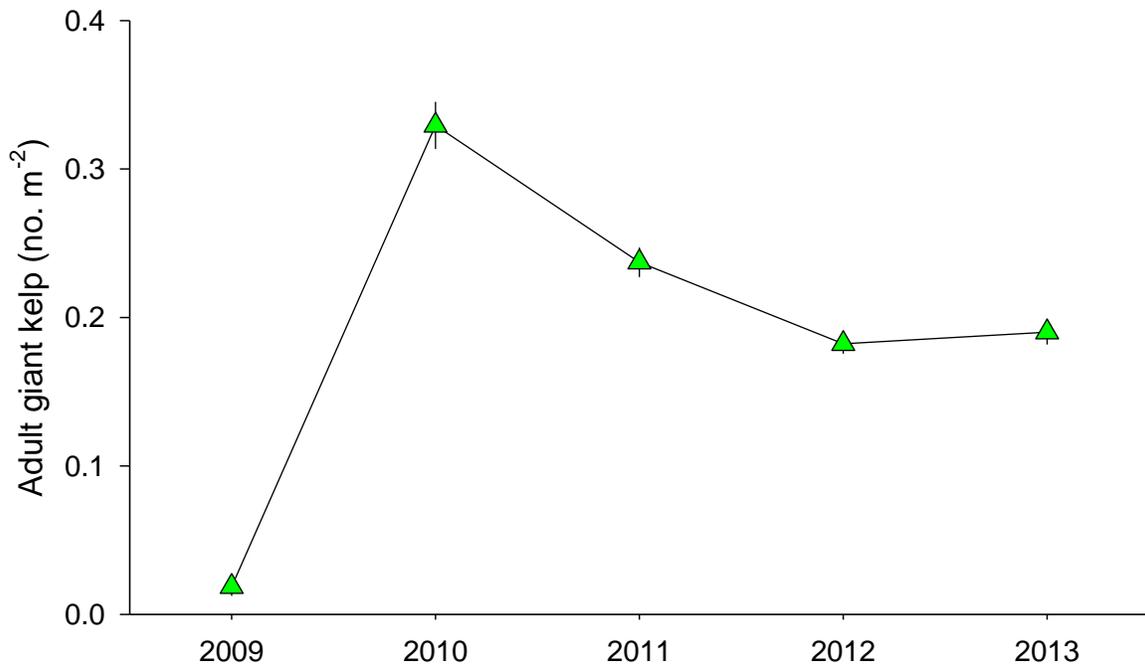


Figure 5.2.3. Mean density (± 1 standard error) of adult giant kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) at Wheeler North Reef for 2009 - 2013.

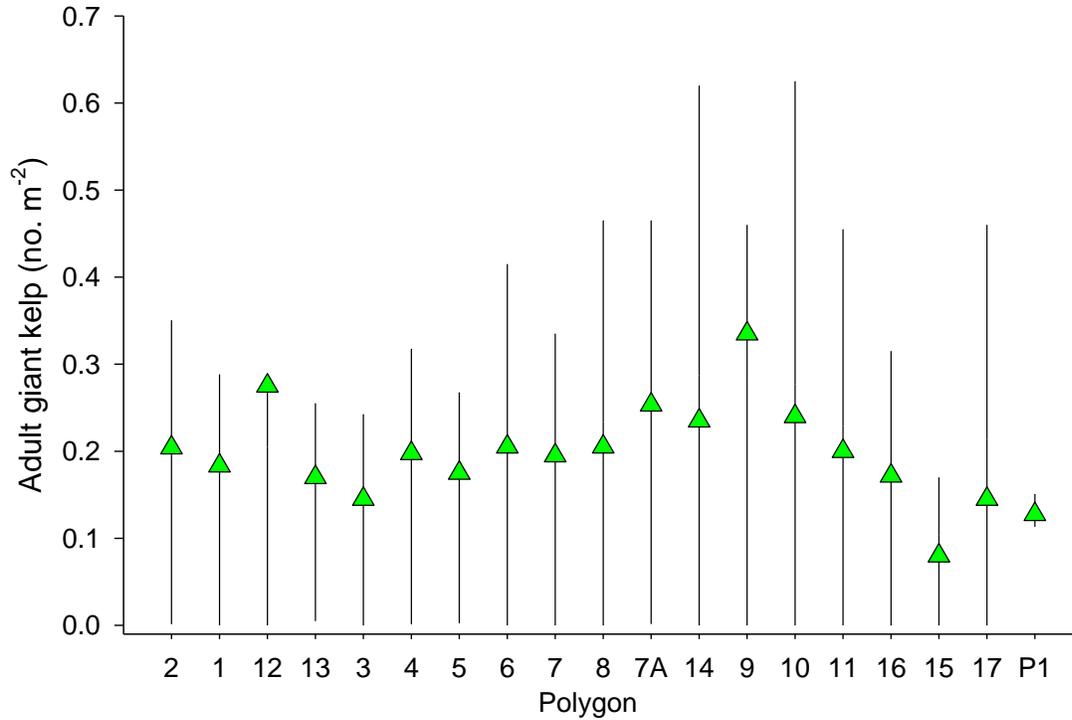


Figure 5.2.4 Mean density of adult giant kelp plants (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) at Wheeler North Reef in 2013. Vertical lines represent the range of values observed between 2009 - 2013. Polygon numbers are ordered from south to north. P1 is equal to the mean of the twelve Phase 1 modules.



Figure 5.2.5. Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and San Onofre kelp beds as seen from the Landsat 5 satellite in May 2010. The red in the image is a false color representation of the surface canopy of giant kelp. The image shows the large extent of giant kelp at Wheeler North Reef relative to San Mateo and San Onofre.

Giant kelp plants are made up of individual fronds that consist of a vine-like stipe to which blades are attached via a small gas-filled float. The number of fronds per plant is a good indication of a plant's size. As expected the average size of kelp plants has increased dramatically at Wheeler North Reef since 2009 as small plants grew into adults (Figure 5.2.6). By 2011, mean plant size at Wheeler North Reef was similar to that of nearby natural reefs and averaged about 21 fronds per plant. The mean number of fronds per plant at Wheeler North Reef has gradually increased to about 24 in 2013, while it has fluctuated greatly during this time at San Mateo and Barn.

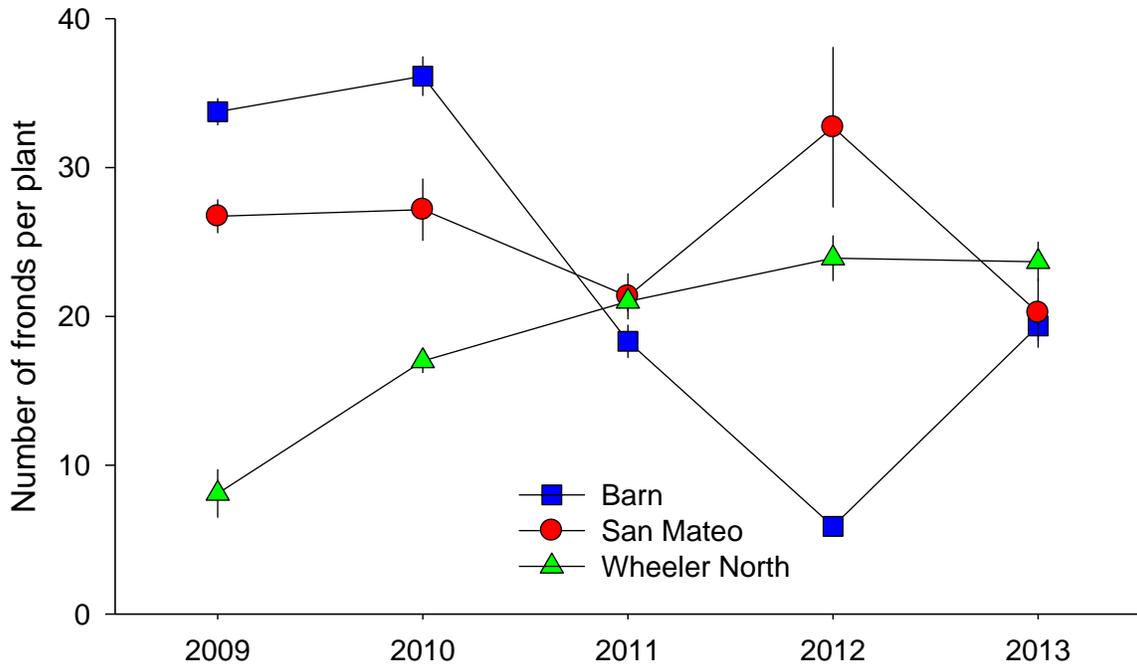


Figure 5.2.6 Mean number (± 1 standard error) of fronds per *Macrocyctis* plant at Wheeler North Reef, Barn and San Mateo from 2009 - 2013.

Because giant kelp plants can differ greatly in size from small recruits to large adults, the density of fronds tends to be a better predictor of the standing biomass of giant kelp than the density of plants (Reed et al. 2009). The biomass of kelp as indicated by the density of fronds increased six fold at Wheeler North Reef from 2009 to 2010, and remained relatively high through 2013, which has been higher than that observed at San Mateo and Barn (Figure 5.2.7).

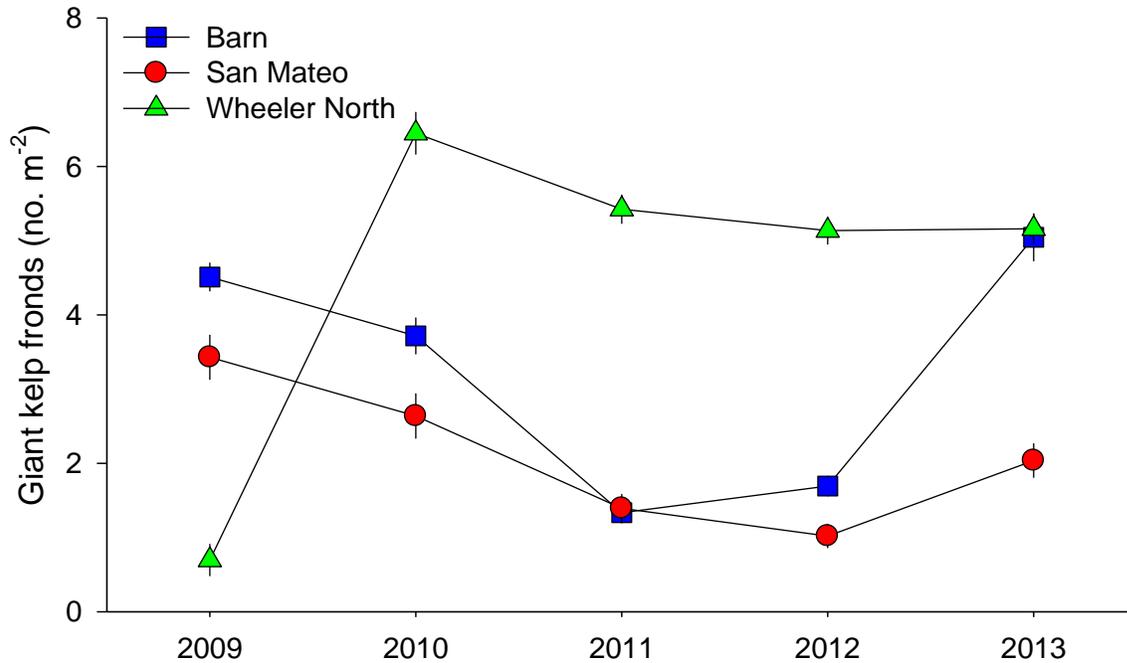


Figure 5.2.7. Mean density (± 1 standard error) of giant kelp fronds at Wheeler North Reef, Barn and San Mateo from 2009 - 2013.

Benthos

The benthic community on the shallow reefs off California typically include a diverse group of low-lying red, brown and green algae that occur on the bottom beneath the canopy of giant kelp (often referred to as understory algae) and a large number of sessile and mobile species of invertebrates. Like understory algae, sessile invertebrates attach themselves to the reef. However, unlike algae that obtain their nutrition via photosynthesis, sessile invertebrates (which include organisms such as sponges, sea anemones, feather duster worms, bryozoans, rock scallops and sea squirts) feed by filtering plankton from the water column. The amount of the rock that becomes occupied by algae and sessile invertebrates increases over time during the normal development of a kelp forest community.

Such has been the case at Wheeler North Reef, which has shown a substantial increase in the percent cover of the benthic community since it was constructed in 2008 (Figure 5.2.8). Within one year of construction ~ 80% of the rock surface of Wheeler North Reef was covered by algae and sessile invertebrates. This cover of benthic biota on the reef has increased gradually to ~ 96% in 2013.

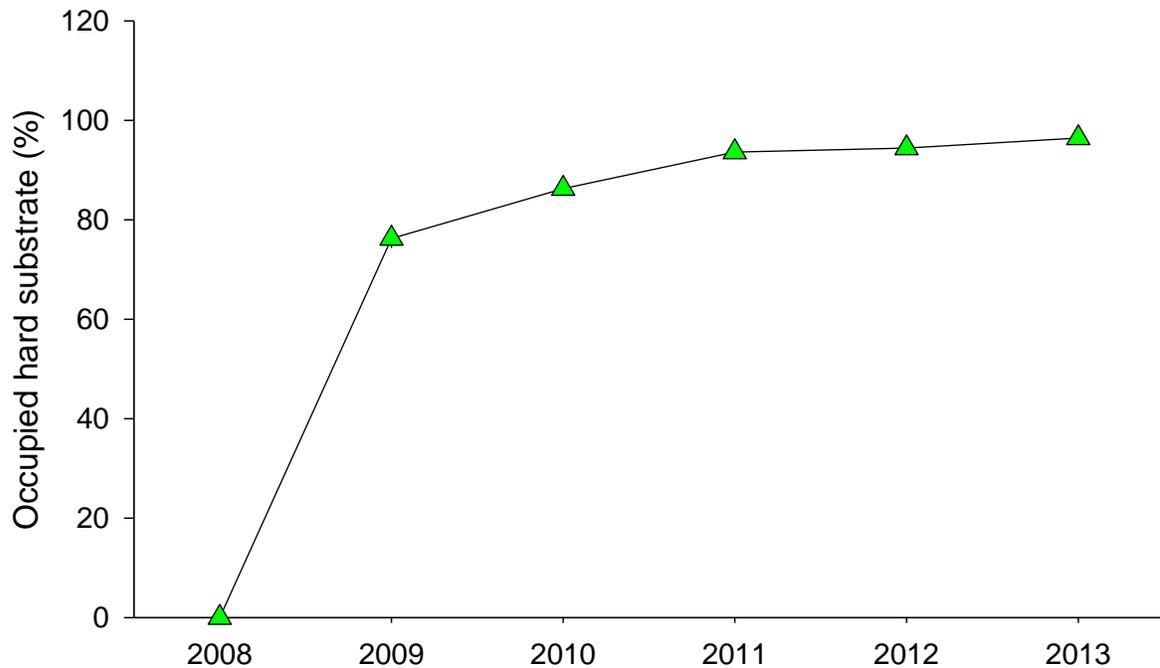


Figure 5.2.8 Mean percent cover of hard substrate occupied by sessile reef biota (i.e. understory algae and sessile invertebrates) at Wheeler North Reef for 2009 - 2013.

As occupiers of primary space, understory algae and sessile invertebrates compete for hard substrate on the bottom. Understory algae tend to be the stronger competitor except in low light environments where photosynthesis and growth are suppressed. Such is the case under a dense canopy of the giant kelp, which has a negative effect on understory algae by significantly reducing the amount of light reaching the bottom (Reed and Foster 1984). Experiments done at the Phase 1 Experimental Reef found that giant kelp had an indirect positive effect on sessile invertebrates due to its direct negative effect on understory algae (Arkema et al. 2009). These experiments demonstrated that the relative abundance of understory algae and sessile invertebrates on a reef is greatly affected by the presence of giant kelp. Understory algae are favored in the absence of giant kelp, while sessile invertebrates are favored in the presence of giant kelp.

The percent cover of and number of species of algae at Wheeler North Reef declined 3-4 fold from 2009 to 2011 with only slight increases since then (Figure 5.2.9). The percent cover of algae in 2013 varied spatially across Wheeler North Reef ranging from 4 to 25% (Figure 5.2.10). Algal per cover in 2013 was near or at the low the end of the ranged for most polygons.

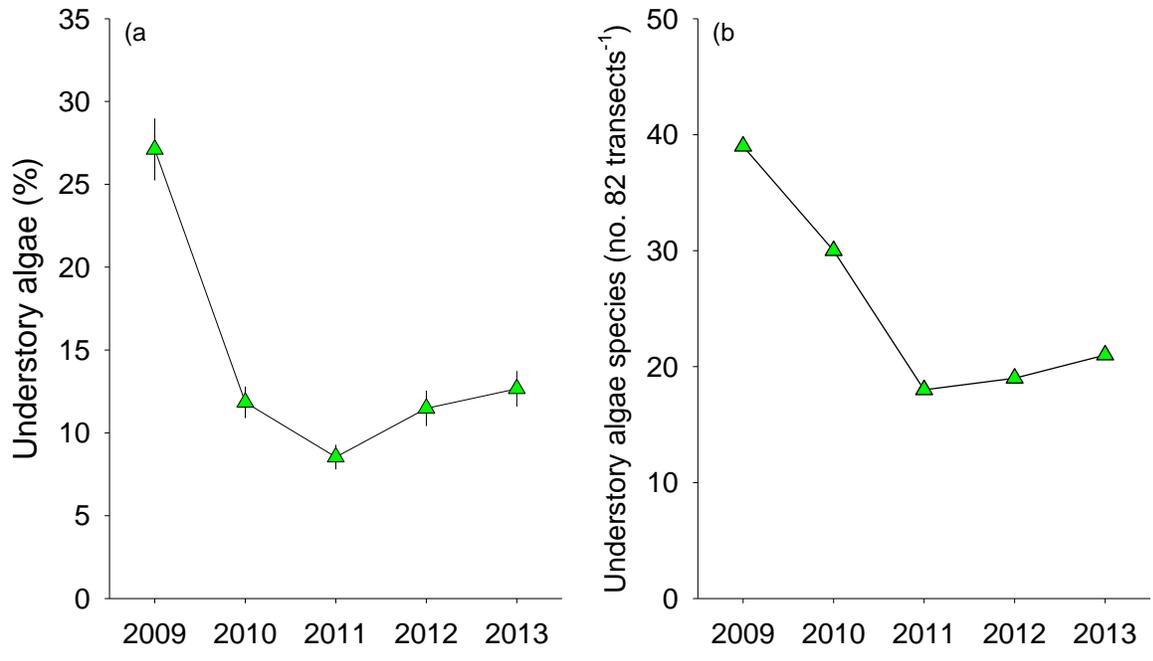


Figure 5.2.9. (a) Mean percent cover (± 1 standard error) and (b) total number of species of understory algae at Wheeler North Reef from 2009 - 2013.

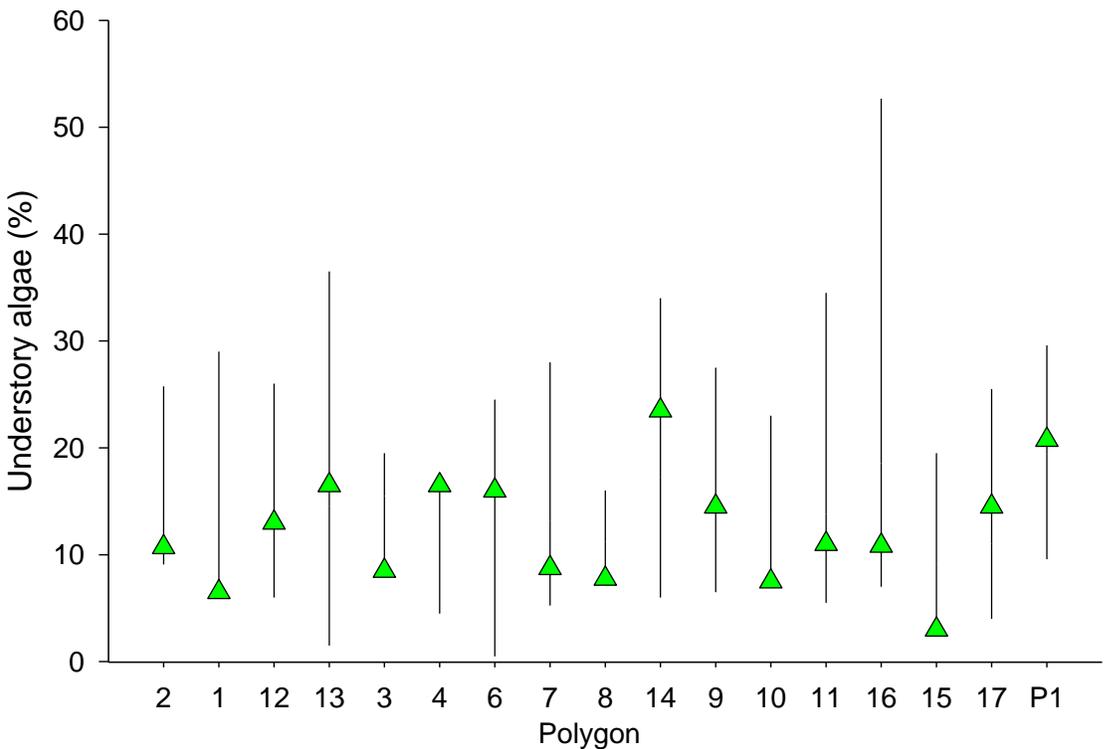


Figure 5.2.10 Mean percent cover of understory algae at Wheeler North Reef in 2013. Vertical lines represent the range of values observed between 2009 - 2013. Polygon numbers are ordered from south to north. P1 is equal to the mean of the twelve Phase 1 modules.

The decline in understory algae at Wheeler North Reef since 2009 is to be expected given the dramatic increase in the abundance (and consequent shading) of adult giant kelp that has occurred since 2009. This large increase has led to giant kelp becoming the most dominant alga occupying primary space on the bottom as the holdfasts of giant kelp averaged 46% of the algal cover from 2009-2012 (Figure 5.2.11). The dominance of giant kelp has continued to increase and in 2013, it accounted for 84% of the algal cover on Wheeler North Reef. Other common but much less abundant algae included the brown algal *Desmarestia ligulata* algae and several taxa of red algae including *Rhodymenia californica* and *Polysiphonia* spp.

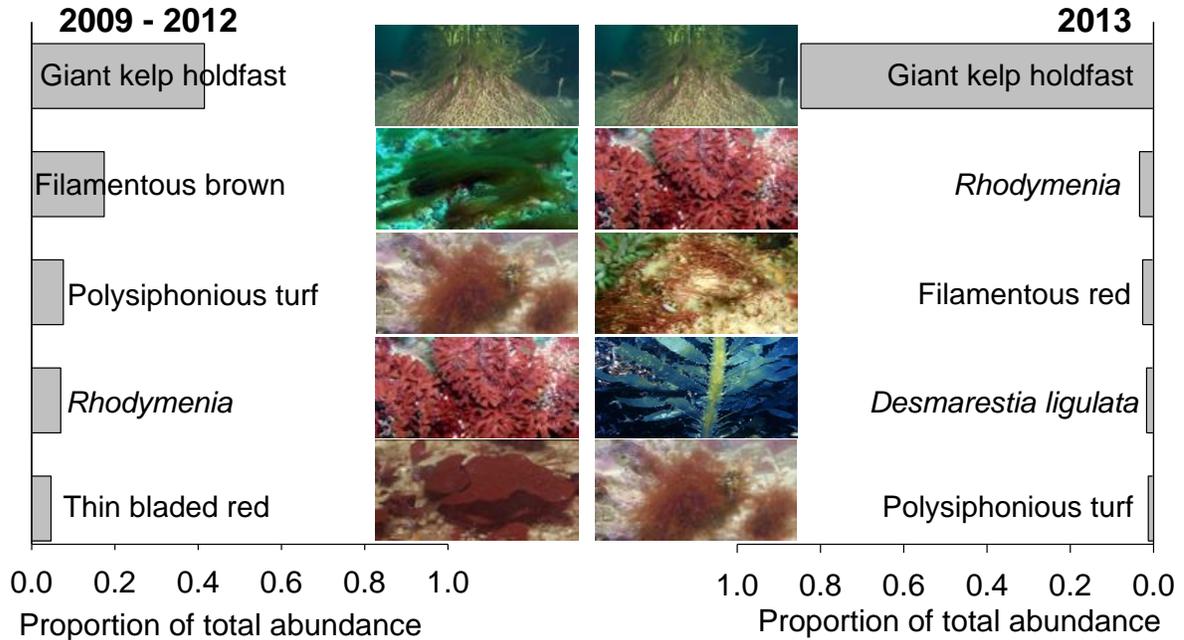


Figure 5.2.11. Proportion of total abundance of the five most abundant algal species at Wheeler North Reef averaged for 2009 - 2012 and 2013.

The abundance of sessile invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef showed a pattern opposite to that of understory algae; their percent cover has more than doubled since 2009 (Figure 5.2.12a). Interestingly the total number of species of sessile invertebrates observed in the 82 transects at Wheeler North Reef did not change appreciably between 2009 and 2010 despite their large increase in the percent cover (Figure 5.2.12b). In 2011 species number increased by ~33% to 80 species and has remained at this level through 2013.

The percent cover of sessile invertebrates on the Phase 2 polygons has increased at all the Phase 2 polygons since 2009 and values in 2013 were at or near the highest values recorded for most polygons (Figure 5.2.13). By contrast, the percent cover of sessile invertebrates on the older Phase 1 modules has remained relatively constant during this time (note the much smaller range).

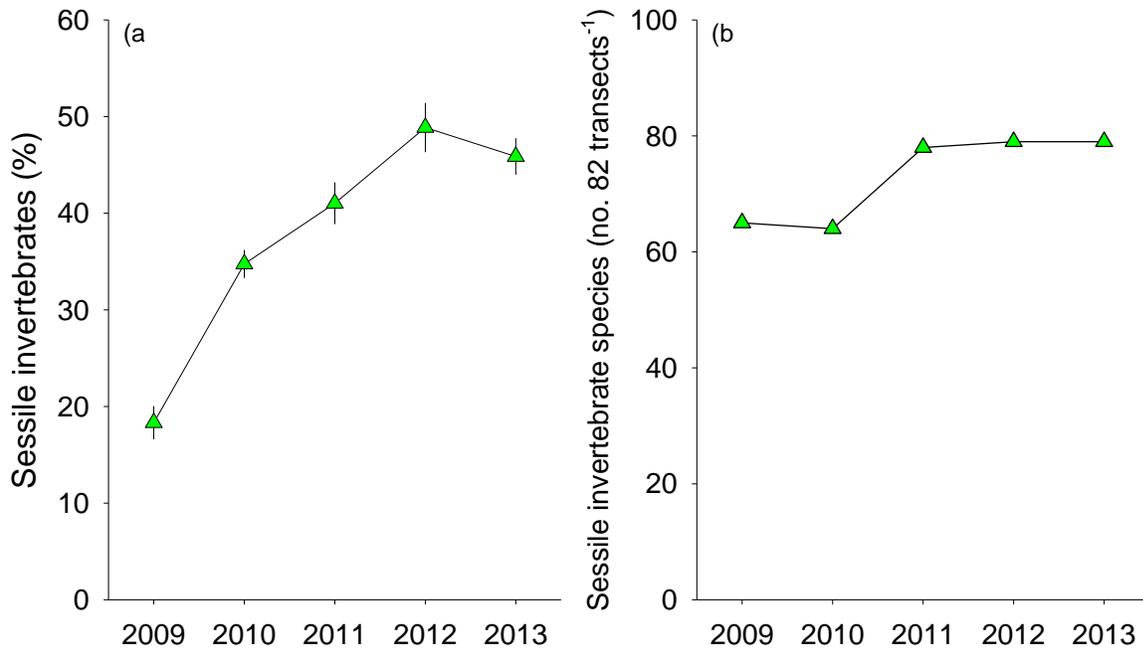


Figure 5.2.12. (a) Mean percent cover (± 1 standard error) and (b) total number of species of sessile invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef from 2009 - 2013.

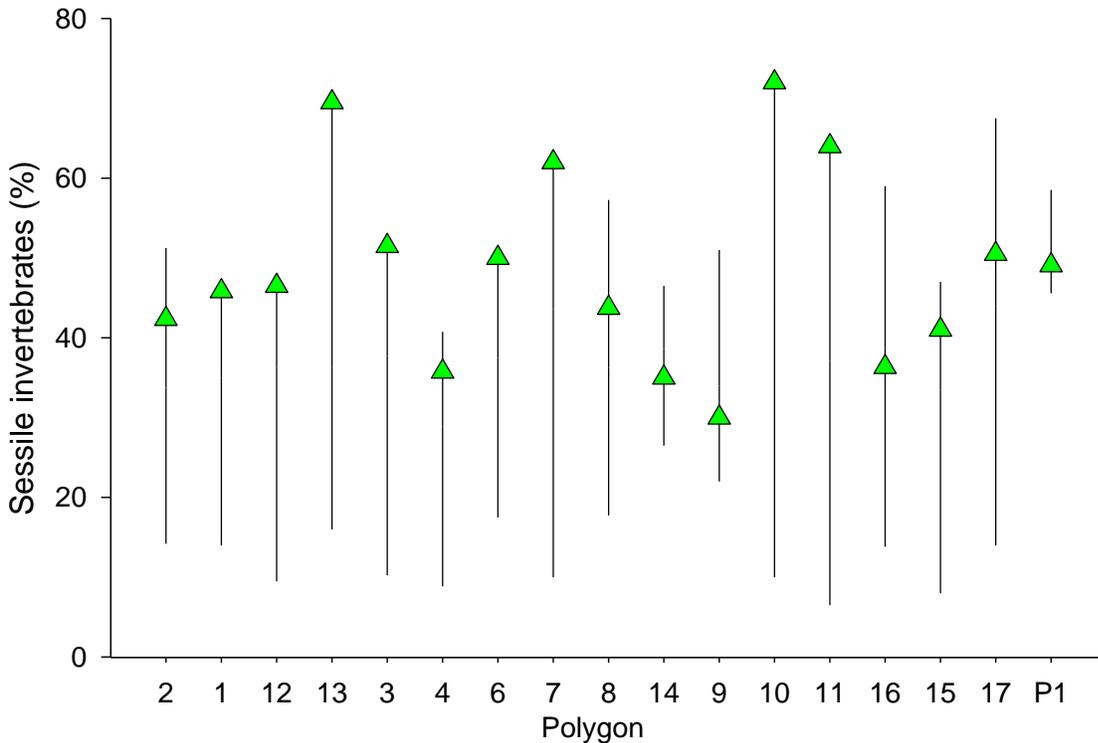


Figure 5.2.13 Mean percent cover of sessile invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef in 2013. Vertical lines represent the range of values observed between 2009 - 2013. Polygon numbers are ordered from south to north. P1 is equal to the mean of the twelve Phase 1 modules.

The mix of common species of sessile invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef has not changed dramatically since 2009, despite the sharp increase observed in their abundance over the past five years (Figure 5.2.14). Sponges (especially an unidentified orange encrusting sponge and *Leucilla nuttingi*) and sea squirts (especially *Chelyosoma productum* and *Pycnoclavella stanleyi*) have been dominant sessile invertebrate taxa at Wheeler North Reef since 2009. The vast majority of these species are believed to be relatively short-lived, suggesting that the high percent cover of sessile invertebrates at the Wheeler North Reef is maintained by replacement via the colonization of new individuals rather than by the survival of older long-lived individuals.

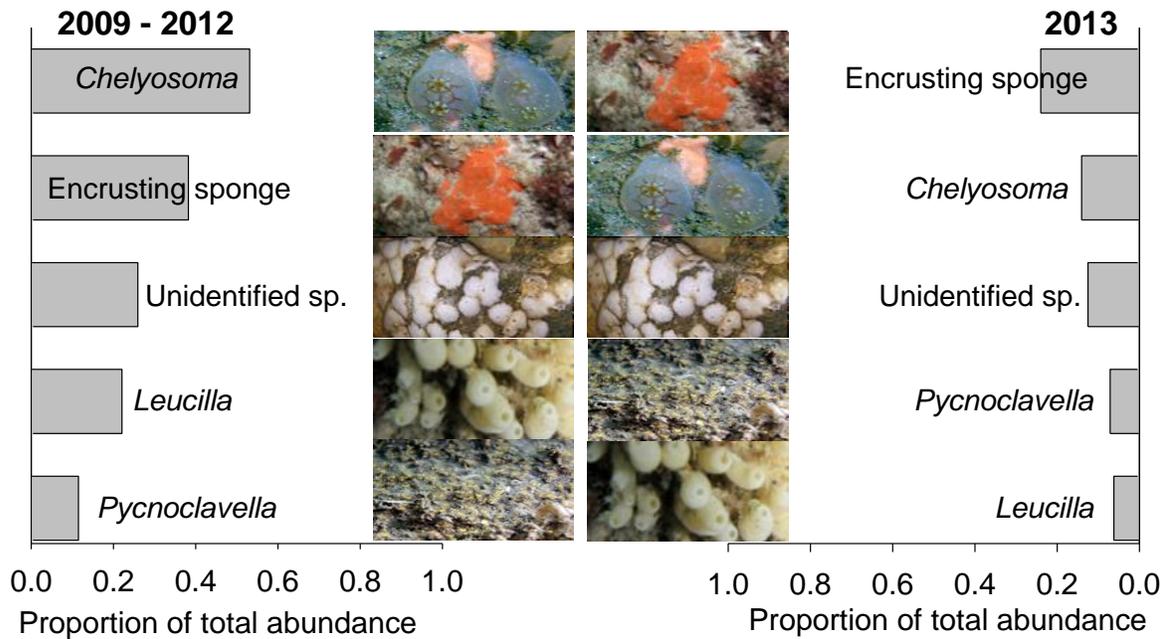


Figure 5.2.14. Proportion of total abundance of the five most abundant sessile invertebrate species at Wheeler North Reef averaged for 2009 - 2012 and in 2013.

A diverse array of mobile invertebrates are also common on kelp forest reefs including a variety of herbivorous and predatory snails, octopus, crabs, lobster, and many different kinds of brittle stars, sea stars and sea urchins. Like sessile invertebrates, the abundance of mobile invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef increased dramatically (~ 10 fold) since 2009 (Figure 5.2.15a). Mean densities of mobile invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef peaked at 109 m⁻² in 2012, declining slightly to 99 m⁻² in 2013. The total number of species of mobile invertebrates observed in the 82 transects at Wheeler North Reef also increased steadily from a total of 42 in 2009 to a maximum of 67 in 2012; declining slightly to 61 species in 2013 (Figure 5.2.15b).

The five-fold increase in the density of mobile invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef from 2009 to 2012 resulted primarily from an increase in the density of the brittle star *Ophiohrix*, which has consistently accounted for ~85% of all mobile invertebrates

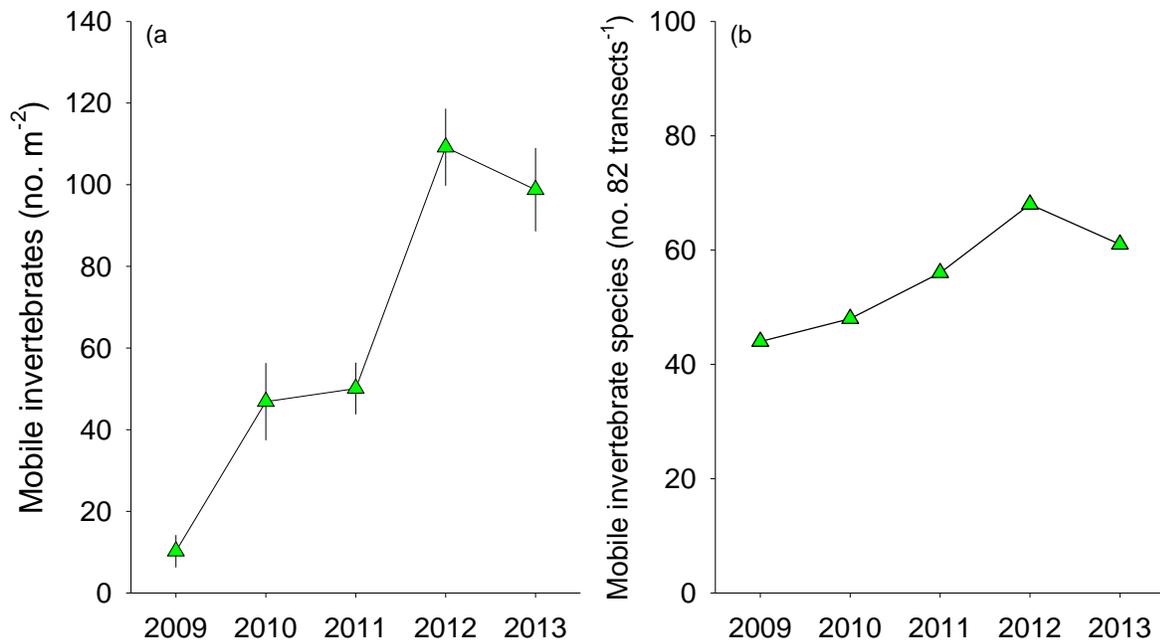


Figure 5.2.15. (a) Mean density (± 1 standard error) and (b) total number of species of mobile invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef from 2009 - 2013.

since 2009 (Figure 5.2.16). Brittle stars commonly inhabit the holdfasts of giant kelp and the increase in percent cover of kelp holdfasts on Wheeler North Reef has led to an increase in the density of brittle stars. Other mobile invertebrates that consistently

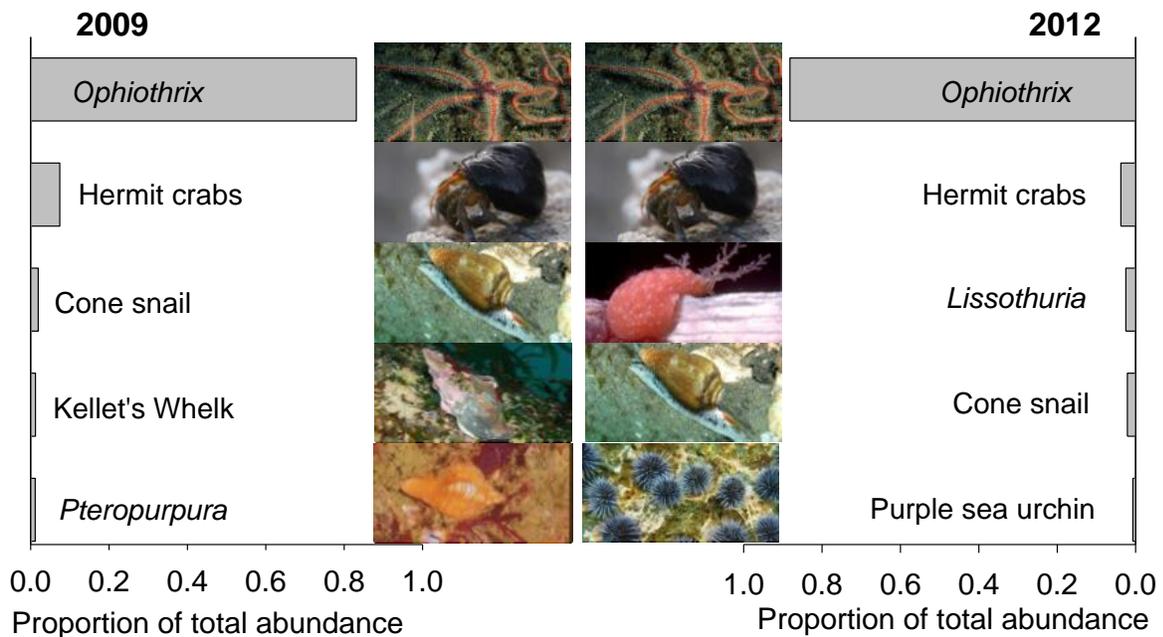


Figure 5.2.16. Proportion of total abundance of the five most abundant mobile invertebrate species at Wheeler North Reef in 2009 and 2012.

have been abundant include hermit crabs, cone snails, and the predatory whelk *Pteropurpura*.

Larger, economically important species of mobile invertebrates such as lobster, warty sea cucumbers, giant keyhole limpets and red sea urchins, while not as abundant as small brittle stars, are also commonly observed at Wheeler North Reef (5.2.17).

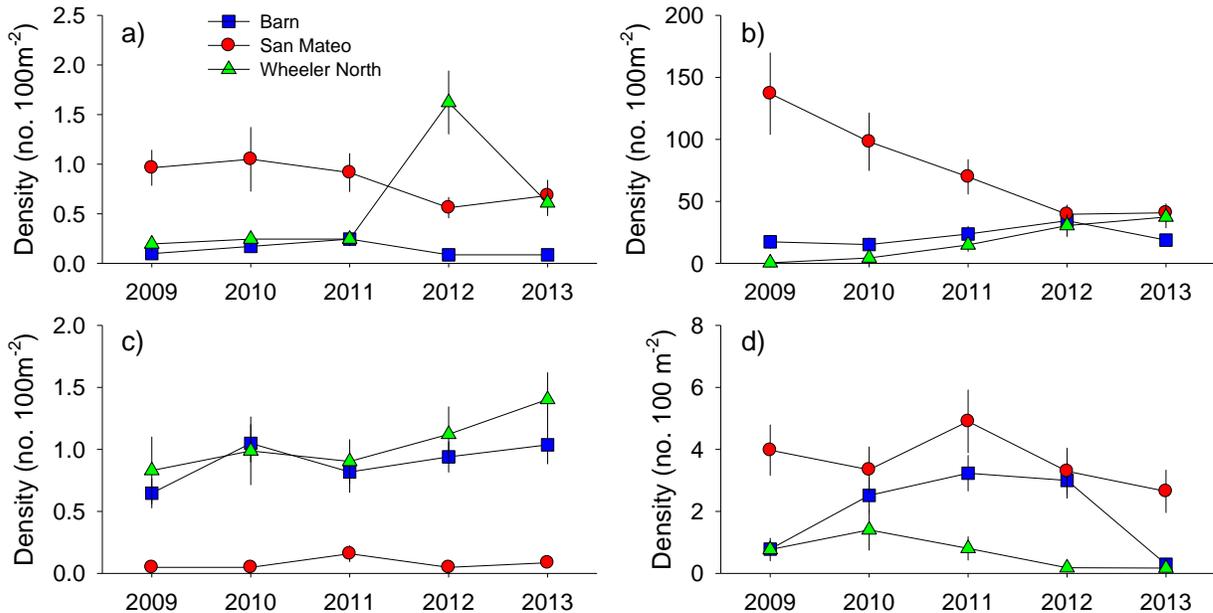


Figure 5.2.17. Mean density (± 1 standard error) of (a) spiny lobster, (b) red sea urchin, (c) giant keyhole limpet, and (d) warty sea cucumber at Wheeler North Reef, Barn and San Mateo from 2009 - 2013.

Fish

Abundances of fishes living near the bottom at Wheeler North Reef have fluctuated greatly during the first five years of monitoring. Fish rapidly colonized the Wheeler North Reef with densities reaching about 70 m⁻² in the first year following construction, which is the highest level that has been observed (Figure 5.2.18a) over the time series. Fish densities declined precipitously in 2010, steadily increased to about 50 m⁻² in 2012 before declining to ~ 30 m⁻² in 2013. Unlike fish density, fish diversity has increased over time. The total number of species of reef fish observed on the 82 transects has doubled between 2010 and 2012 followed by a slight decline in 2013 (Figure 5.2.18b).

With two exceptions, there has been no obvious spatial pattern observed in the density of kelp bed fish, which has varied unpredictably among the polygons (Figure 5.2.19). The first exception is polygon 9 which showed markedly higher interannual variability over the time series, due in large part to variation in the abundance of schools of pile perch. The other exception has to do with the older

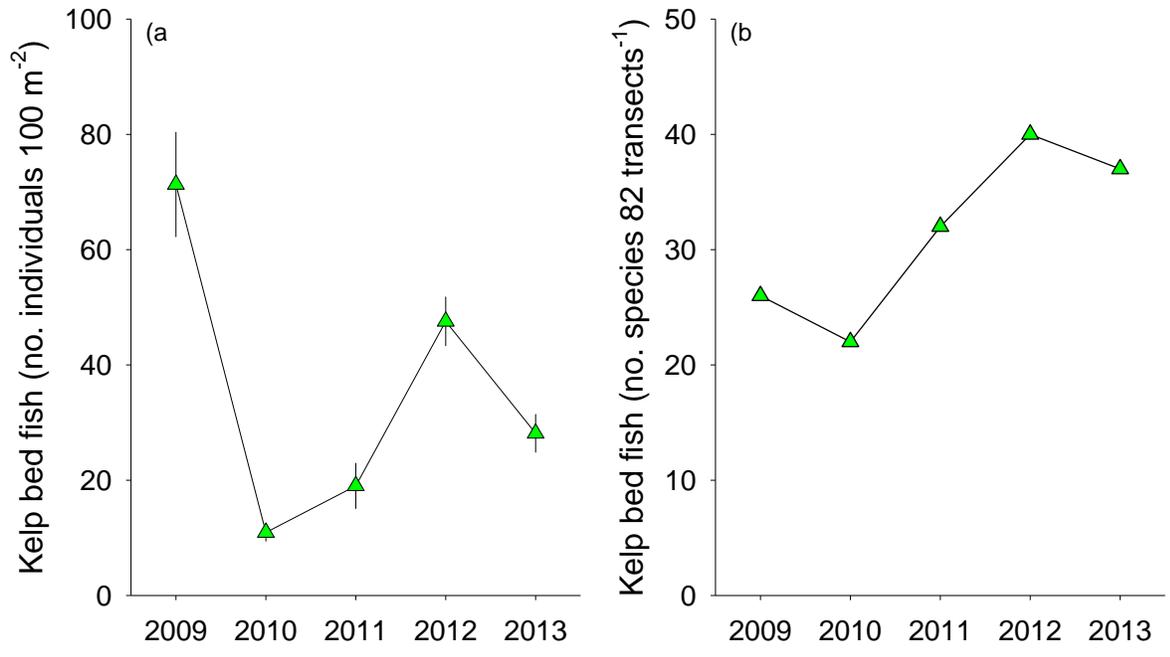


Figure 5.2.18. (a) Mean density (± 1 standard error) and (b) total number of species of kelp bed fish near the bottom at Wheeler North Reef for 2009 - 2013.

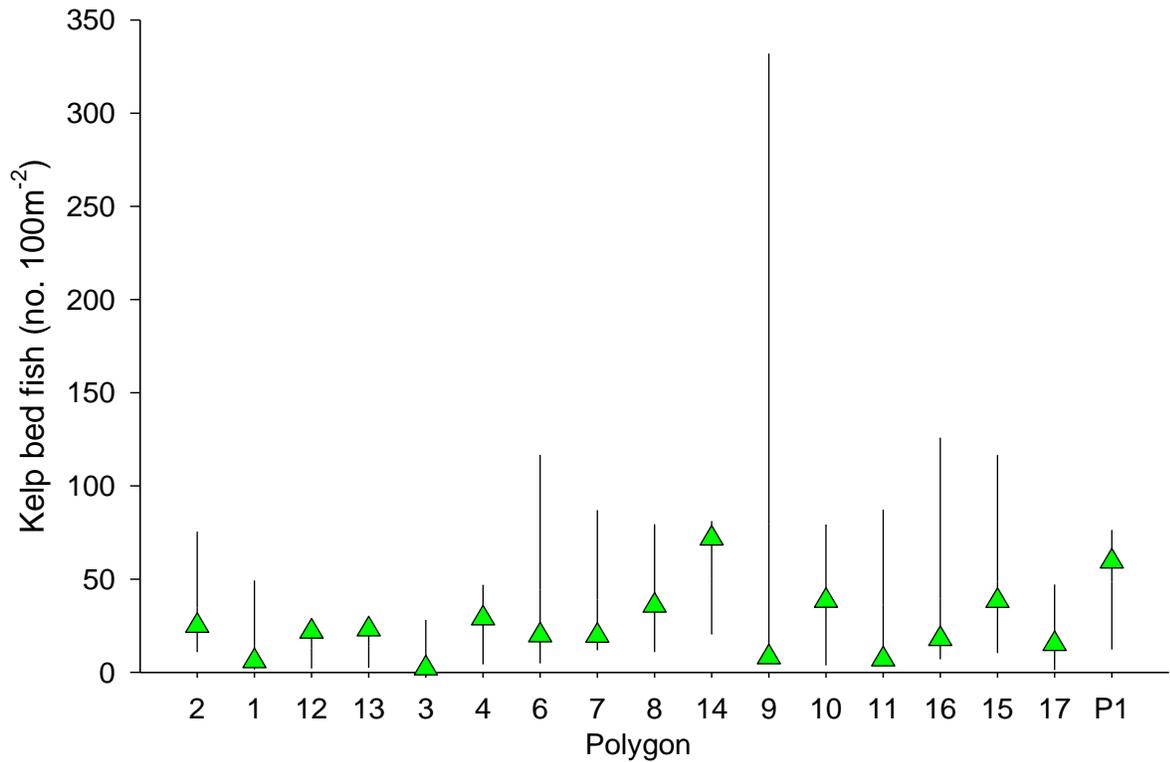


Figure 5.2.19 Mean density of kelp bed fish at Wheeler North Reef in 2013. Vertical lines represent the range of values observed from 2009 - 2013. Polygon numbers are ordered from south to north. P1 is equal to the mean of the twelve Phase 1 modules.

and smaller Phase 1 modules where densities at the older and smaller Phase 1 modules in 2013 averaged 2.5 times higher than the average densities observed at the newer larger Phase 2 polygons (59.5 100 m⁻² vs. 23.7 100 m⁻²) suggesting that reef age and footprint area (or reef perimeter : edge ratio) influences the abundances of reef fish at Wheeler North Reef.

The species composition of reef fish at Wheeler North Reef has remained relatively constant despite the large fluctuations in density. The blackeye goby, a small fish that lives on the bottom and feeds on small crustaceans, has consistently been the most numerically abundant species at Wheeler North Reef throughout the study period. On average it accounted for more than 80% of the fish on the reef from 2009-2012 (Figure 5.2.20). Its proportional abundance declined to ~50% in 2013. Other common taxa of reef fish observed near the bottom in 2013 include the stripedfin ronquil and smoothhead sculpin (a small fish that feed on small invertebrates), California sheephead (a large wrasse that feeds on large invertebrates) and barred sand bass (a predator that feeds near the bottom on invertebrates and other fish). Large predatory species of fish that are valued both economically and ecologically such as the kelp bass and California halibut were also commonly observed during surveys at Wheeler North Reef, but because of their large size and high trophic status they are not as numerically abundant.

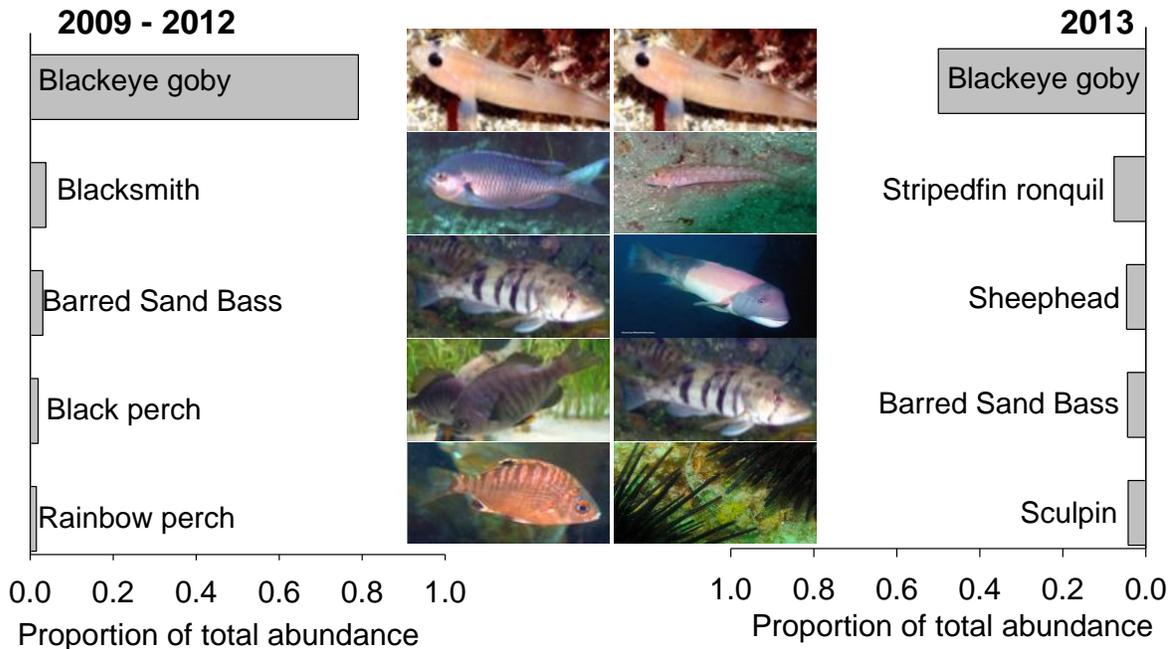


Figure 5.2.20. Proportion of total abundance of the five most kelp bed fish species at Wheeler North Reef averaged for 2009 - 2012 and 2013.

Because different species of fish vary tremendously in size it is often desirable to have information on the amount of biomass of fish in a given area. This term is often referred to as biomass density to distinguish it from numerical density, which is the number per unit area. As observed for numerical density, the biomass density of fish declined at Wheeler North Reef in 2010, but did so at a lower rate than numerical

density; Figure 5.2.21 vs Figure 5.2.18a) Fish biomass density showed a steady increase to a maximum of 18 g /m² (± 2.3 SE) in 2012 with little change in 2013.

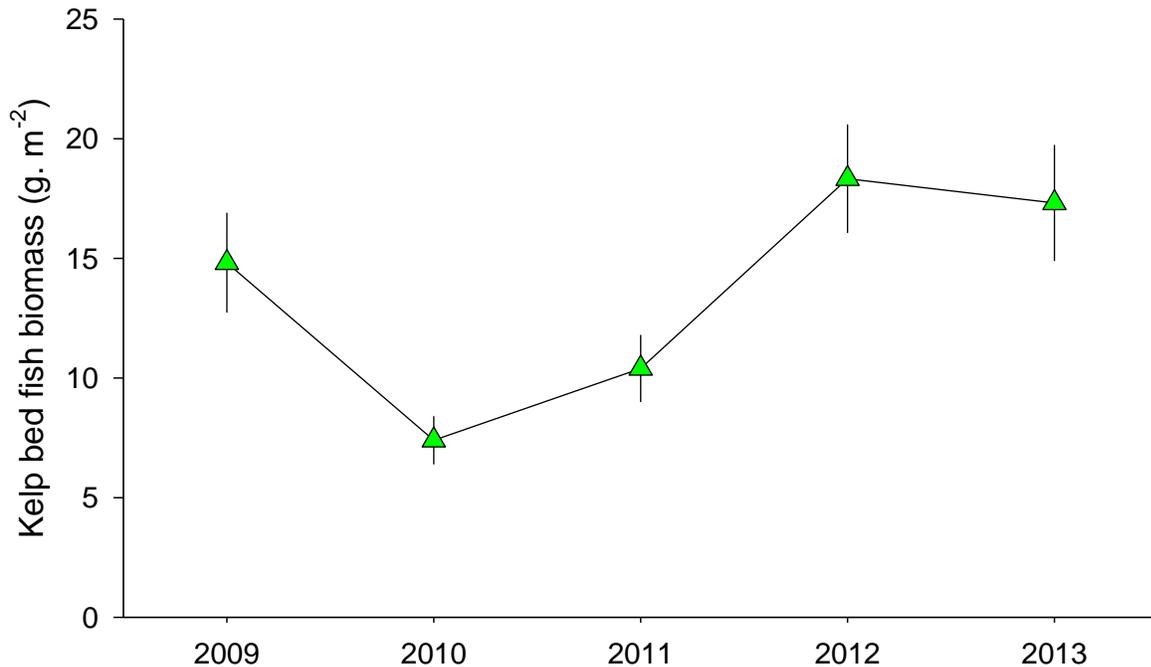


Figure 5.2.21. Mean biomass density (± 1 standard error) of kelp bed fish within 2 m of the bottom at Wheeler North Reef from 2009 - 2013.

The relatively low biomass density at Wheeler North Reef in 2009 when the numerical density was extremely high can be explained by the fact that blackeye gobies, which were the most numerically abundant species, are relatively small (~ 3 grams in weight) and composed a small proportion of the biomass (~ 10 % in 2009). The most dominant reef fish species at Wheeler North Reef in 2013 in terms of biomass density was the barred sand bass and California sheephead which accounted for ~50% of the reef fish biomass. The blackeye goby, while still the most numerically abundant species at Wheeler North Reef in 2012, accounted for only 6% of the reef fish biomass (Figure 5.2.22).

The biomass density of kelp bed fish was relatively uniformly distributed across the Phase 2 polygons of Wheeler North Reef in 2013 (Figure 5.2.23). Of particular note was the 2.6 fold higher biomass density of fish on the older and smaller Phase 1 modules relative to the average of Phase 2 polygons (34.0 g m⁻² vs. 12.9 g m⁻²) which closely matches the differences observed in numerical density, (Figure 5.2.19).

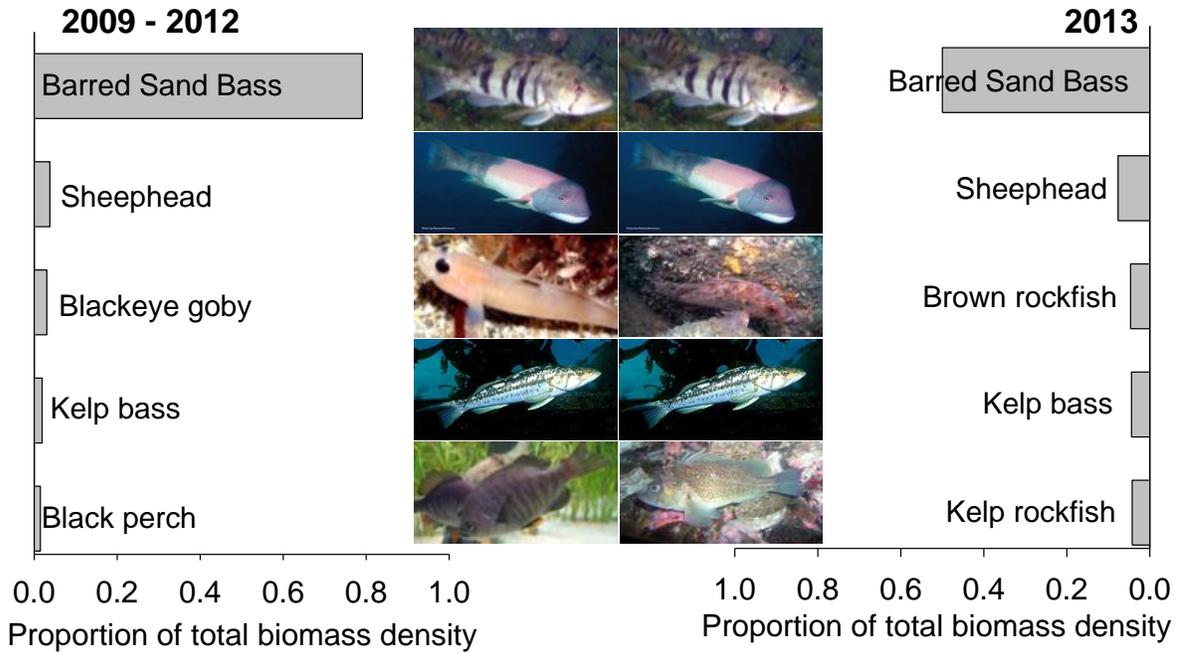


Figure 5.2.22. Proportion of total biomass density of the five most abundant kelp bed fish species at Wheeler North Reef averaged for 2009 - 2012 and 2013.

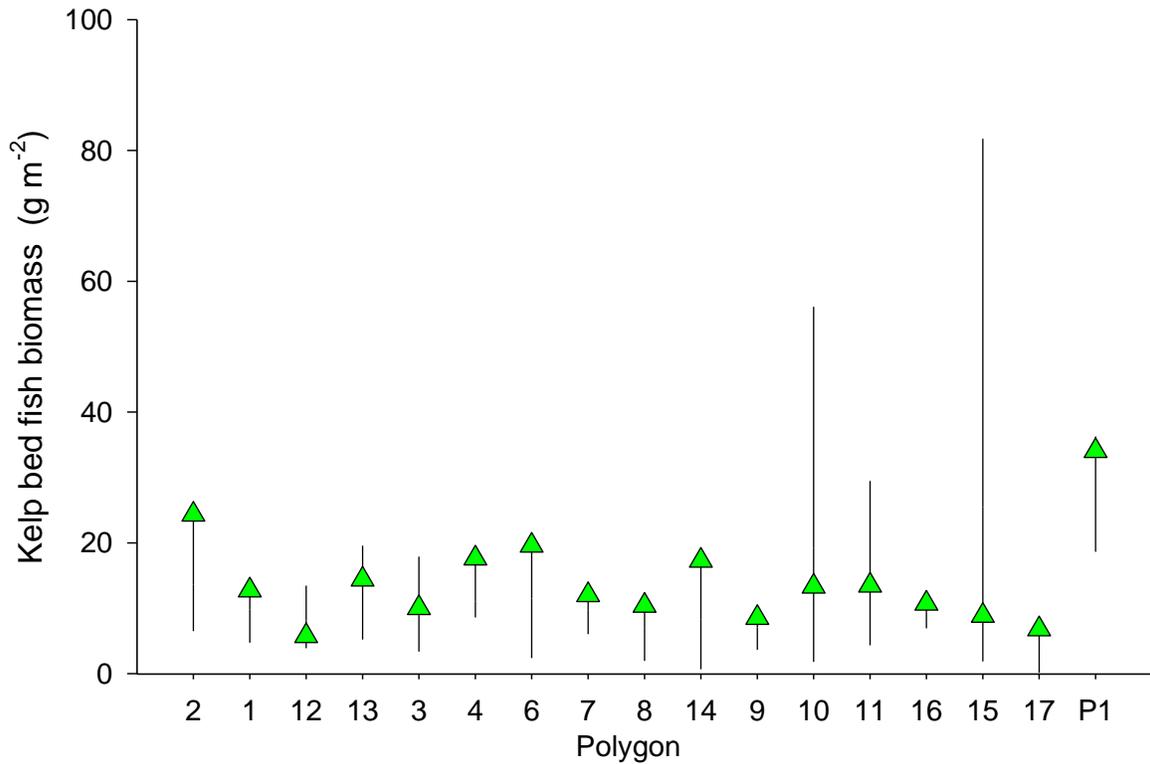


Figure 5.2.23 Mean biomass density of kelp bed fish within 2 m of the bottom at Wheeler North Reef in 2013. Vertical lines represent the range of values observed from 2009 - 2013. Polygon numbers are ordered from south to north. P1 is equal to the mean of the twelve Phase 1 modules.

6.0 Performance Assessment of Wheeler North Reef

Listed below are the absolute and relative performance standards that are used to evaluate whether the Wheeler North Reef meets the goals and objectives of the reef mitigation set forth in Condition C of the SONGS coastal development permit. We describe the methodological approach used to monitor and evaluate each performance standard and present a determination of the performance of Wheeler North Reef for each standard based on the results obtained from these sampling methods. More detailed methods can be found in the monitoring plan for the SONGS reef mitigation project (Reed et al. 2014).

6.1 Absolute Performance Standards

1. AT LEAST 90 PERCENT OF THE EXPOSED HARD SUBSTRATE MUST REMAIN AVAILABLE FOR ATTACHMENT BY REEF BIOTA

Approach: The percent cover of hard substrate is measured using a uniform grid of 20 points placed within the five 1m² quadrats uniformly positioned along each of the 50m long transects in the primary polygons of Wheeler North Reef (Figure 4.4.2). The observer sights along an imaginary line through each of the points that is perpendicular to the bottom and records the substrate type intercepted by the line extending below the point. Substrates are classified as natural or artificial and categorized as bedrock (continuous rocky reef), mudstone, large boulder (largest diameter ≥ 100 cm), medium boulder (≥ 50cm and < 100cm), small boulder (≥ 26cm and < 50cm), cobble (≥ 7cm and ≤ 25cm), pebble (≥ 2mm and < 7cm), sand (< 2mm), and shell hash. Only bedrock, boulders and cobbles are considered as exposed hard substrate when assessing this performance standard. Hard substrates covered with a thin layer of silt or sand are noted as being silted, but are nonetheless considered available for the attachment of reef biota for the purpose of evaluating this performance standard.

The total area of the exposed hard substrate (S) that is available for the attachment of reef biota during any given year t is determined as:

$$S_t = A_t P_t$$

where A_t is the total area of the footprint of the Wheeler North Reef in year t , and P_t is the proportion of the Wheeler North Reef covered by hard substrate in year t . A_t is determined from backscatter in the most recent multibeam sonar survey using a horizontal grid size of 0.25 meters with an isobath interval of 0.5 meters as described in Elwany et al. (2009). P_t is determined from data collected in diver surveys. The proportion of area covered by hard substrate in the as-built condition in 2008 immediately after construction ($S_0 = A_0 P_0$) that is remaining at time t can be expressed as S_t/S_0 . The value of S_t/S_0 based on the current year or a four-year running average of the current year and the preceding three years (whichever is larger) must be ≥ 0.9 for the Wheeler North Reef to successfully meet this standard.

The reef footprint area used to evaluate this standard includes the Phase 1 modules and the Phase 2 primary polygons, which collectively met the construction criteria of $\geq 42\%$ cover of rock. The area of the Phase 2 primary polygons in the as-built survey done immediately after construction in 2008 was 130 acres (Elwany et al. 2009). Because the footprint area of the Phase 1 modules was not measured during the 2008 as-built survey, their footprint area measured in 2009 (26 acres) is used as their footprint area in 2008. Hence the initial footprint area of the Wheeler North Reef that is used to evaluate this performance standard (A_0) is 155 acres. The mean percent cover of rock of this initial footprint area in 2008 (P_0) was 45.6%

Results: There was a slight decrease in the footprint area in 2009, the year following construction (Figure 6.1a), which is not unexpected as rocks settle into the soft sandy bottom. Because the footprint area of the reef is not expected to change much from year-to-year, multi-beam sonar surveys are only done once every five years. The last sonar survey was done in 2009. Thus the value for reef footprint area is assumed to be the same from 2010 through 2013 as it was in 2009. Unlike footprint area, the percent of the bottom covered by rock is measured every year by divers. The percent cover of rock declined from $\sim 45.5\%$ in 2008 to $\sim 42\%$ in 2011, before steadily increasing to $\sim 46.5\%$ in 2013 (Figure 6.1b).

The initial amount of hard substrate at Wheeler North Reef used to judge this performance standard was 70.6 acres in 2008. The 2 acre decrease in footprint area in 2009 (Figure 6.1a) coupled with a continued decline in the percent cover of hard substrate through 2011 (Figure 6.1b) resulted in nearly a 10% decrease in the total area of hard substrate on Wheeler North Reef by 2011 (Figure 6.1c). An increase in the percent cover of rock since then has resulted in the total area of hard substrate increasing to about 72 acres in 2013, or roughly 1/2 acre larger than that initially constructed (Figure 6.1c). Thus Wheeler North Reef met the performance standard for reef area in 2013 regardless of whether the evaluation was based on data from 2013 alone or the 4-year running average (Figures 6.1c and 6.1d).

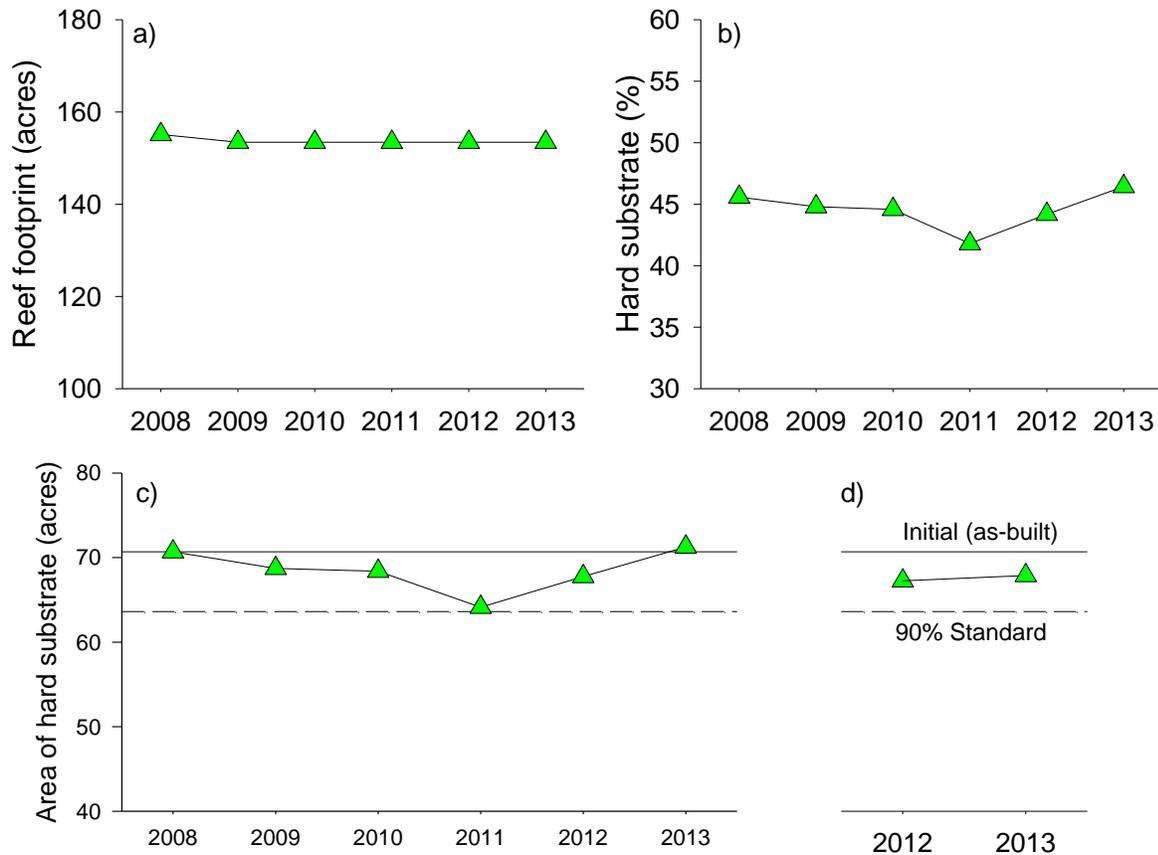


Figure 6.1. Variables used to calculate exposed hard substrate. (a) Reef footprint area, (b) Percent cover of hard substrate, (c) Area of exposed hard substrate and (d) 4-year running average of the area of exposed hard substrate.

2. THE ARTIFICIAL REEF(S) SHALL SUSTAIN 150 ACRES OF MEDIUM-TO-HIGH DENSITY GIANT KELP.

Approach: The abundance of giant kelp *Macrocystis pyrifera* is monitored by divers once per year in the summer in five replicate 10m x 2m plots arranged at 10m intervals along each of the 92 50m transects at Wheeler North Reef (Figure 4.4.2). For the purpose of this performance standard, medium-to-high density giant kelp is defined as more than four adult plants per 100m² of ocean bottom and adult giant kelp plants are defined as having eight or more fronds (these criteria are the same ones used to assess the impacts of SONGS on giant kelp). The summed total of adult plants in the five 10m x 2m quadrats provides an estimate of the number of adult plants per 100m² at each transect. The proportion of transects with a density >4 adult plants per 100m² is used as an estimate of the proportional area of the artificial reef occupied by medium to high density giant kelp. The total area A_k of Wheeler North Reef occupied by medium to high density giant kelp in a given year is determined as:

$$A_k = (N_k/N_r) * A_r$$

Where A_r is the area of Wheeler North Reef based on the most recent sonar survey (in this case 2009), N_k = number of transects at Wheeler North Reef with >4 plants per 100m², and N_r is the total number of transects sampled at Wheeler North Reef (n=92). Unlike the standard for hard substrate, the data used to evaluate the performance standard for giant kelp are collected over the entire Wheeler North Reef (Phase 1 modules + Phase 2 primary polygons + Phase 2 contingency polygons). The reason for this is that the requirement for sustaining 150 acres of giant kelp is not tied to a specific coverage of hard substrate.

The value of A_k is calculated each year of the monitoring period and used to determine whether Wheeler North Reef has successfully met this performance standard. If for a given year the value of A_k is ≥ 150 acres, then the Wheeler North Reef is considered to have met this performance standard for that year. Because the abundance of giant kelp fluctuates naturally from year to year the Wheeler North Reef will also be considered to have met this performance standard for a given year if the mean value of A_k averaged over that year and the three preceding years ≥ 150 acres.

Results: The area of medium-to-high density adult kelp on Wheeler North Reef increased dramatically from 19 acres in 2009 to 173 acres in 2010 (Figure 6.2a). This large increase represented the growth of the young kelp that colonized in 2009. The large area of high density kelp observed in 2010 was sustained through 2013 when 91 of the 92 transects sampled had at least 4 adult plants per 100m² (Figure 6.2a). The acreage of giant kelp at the Wheeler North Reef exceeded the 150 acre threshold when evaluated using data from only 2013 or the 4-year running average of 2010-2013 (Figures 6.2a and 6.2b).

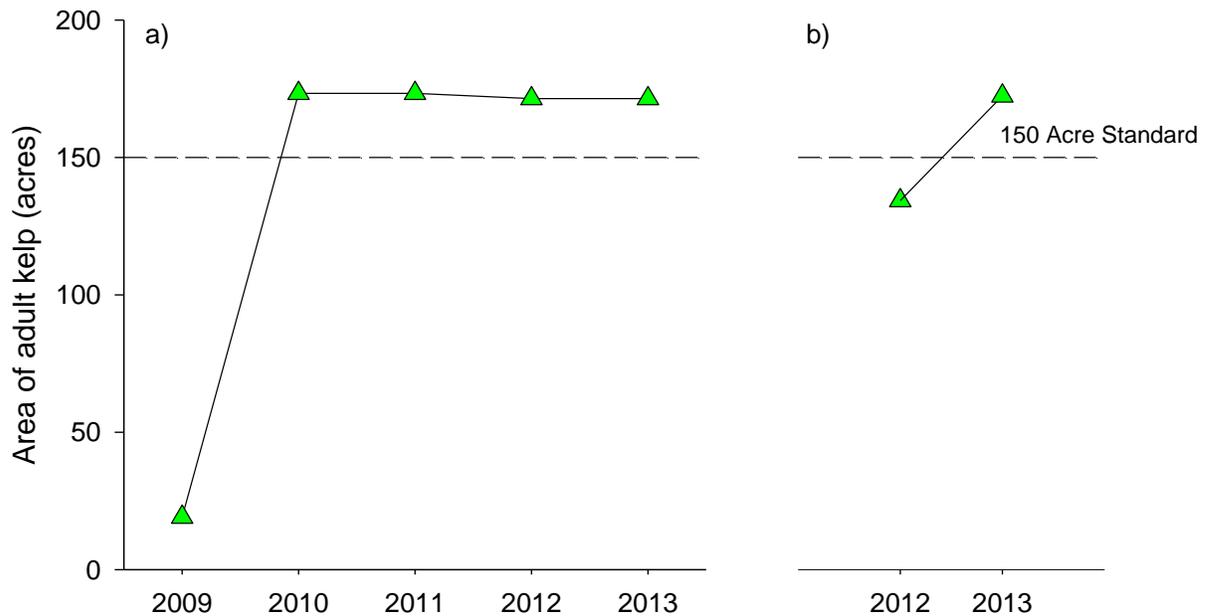


Figure 6.2. The number of acres of medium to high density adult kelp at Wheeler North Reef (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

3. THE STANDING STOCK OF FISH AT THE MITIGATION REEF SHALL BE AT LEAST 28 TONS

Approach: The standing stock of fish at Wheeler North Reef is estimated using data on total fish density, individual lengths, and the relationships between fish length and fish mass. Data on fish density and length are recorded on the bottom along replicate fixed transects at Wheeler North Reef in summer to early autumn of each year. Divers count, identify to species and estimate the total length (to the nearest cm) of each fish observed in a 3m wide x 1.5m high x 50m long volume centered above a measuring tape placed along the bottom and extending the length of each replicate 50 m transect (Figure 4.4.2). For aggregating species such as the blacksmith (*Chromis punctipinnis*) and salema (*Xenistius californiensis*), the number and mean length of individuals in a group are estimated. Smaller fish that shelter on or near the bottom are recorded in a 2m wide swath centered along the transect as divers return after completing the sampling of larger more visible fish. Small cryptic species (e.g. cottids, gobies, blennies) are recorded in the five 1m² quadrats used to sample invertebrates and algae. These data are augmented with data from additional surveys of fish lengths if more information is needed to accurately characterize population size structure.

Length data are used to assign each fish to one of three life stages (juvenile, subadult, and adult) using data from the literature (e.g. Love 2011) or best professional judgment by reef fish experts (e.g., Milton Love UCSB and Mark Steele CSUN). The biomass of each species within a transect is calculated by multiplying the number of fish in each life-stage by the average weight of the life stage and summing over all life stages. Fish weights are estimated from fish lengths using species-specific length- weight regressions obtained either from the literature (Gnose, 1967; Quast, 1968a, 1968b; Mahan, 1985; Wildermuth, 1983; Stepien, 1986; DeMartini et al., 1994, Love 2011) or from data collected as part of this project. The biomass densities of all species encountered on a transect are summed to produce an estimate of the total biomass of fish within each transect in units of g wet weight m⁻². This value is averaged across all transects, converted to US tons per acre, and multiplied by the total reef area (in acres) to obtain an estimate of the standing stock of bottom-dwelling fish at the Wheeler North Reef (this same approach was used by the Marine Review Committee (MRC, 1989) when they determined that SONGS operations caused a 28 ton reduction in the standing stock of bottom-dwelling kelp bed fish).

The Wheeler North Reef is considered to have met this performance standard if its standing stock of bottom-dwelling fish in a given year \geq 28 tons or its mean fish standing stock of bottom-dwelling fish averaged over that year plus the three preceding years \geq 28 tons.

Results: In 2013, five years after its construction, the Wheeler North Reef has yet to meet the performance standard for fish standing stock, regardless of whether it was evaluated using 1-year or the 4-year average. The standing stock of bottom-dwelling fish on the Wheeler North Reef has been far below the fixed performance standard of 28 tons in all five years of sampling (Figure 6.3a). The highest value was in 2012 when standing stock was estimated at 14.5 tons, about half of that required by the performance standard. A slight decline to 13.5 tons was observed in 2013. The four-

year running averages in 2012 and 2013 were only about one-third of the required 28 ton standard (Figure 6.3b). Thus after five years the Wheeler North Reef has yet to meet the performance standard for fish standing stock, regardless of whether it was evaluated using the current year or a 4-year average.

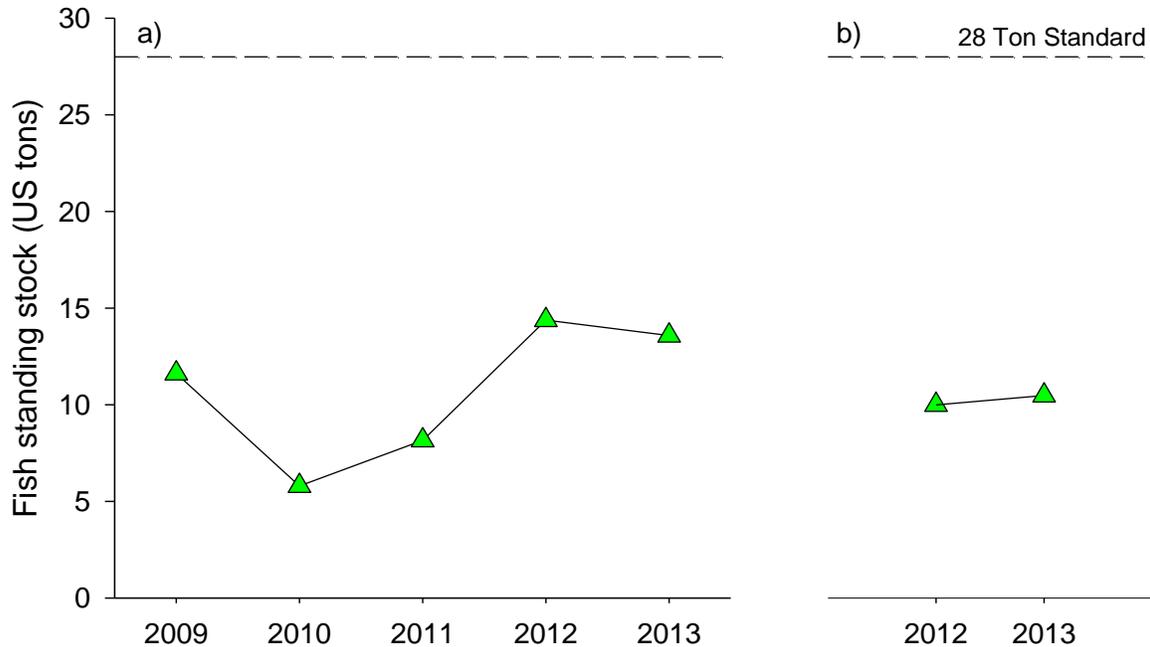


Figure 6.3. Estimated standing stock of fish at Wheeler North Reef (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

4. THE IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS OF THE REEF SHALL NOT BE IMPAIRED BY UNDESIRABLE OR INVASIVE BENTHIC SPECIES (E.G., SEA URCHINS OR CRYPTOARACHNIDIUM).

Approach: Reefs in southern California provide many important ecological functions that pertain to the production of food and the provision of habitat for reef associated species. Undesirable or invasive species have the potential to impair these functions and thus prevent the Wheeler North Reef from attaining its mitigation goal of compensating for the loss of marine resources caused by SONGS operations. Undesirable or invasive reef species may include introduced or non-native taxa such as the green seaweed *Caulerpa taxifolia*, which escaped from the aquarium trade to invade many marine habitats worldwide, including some in southern California, and the brown seaweed *Sargassum horneri*, which was accidentally introduced from Asia and has become increasingly abundant at some reefs off southern California. Undesirable or invasive reef species may also include native species that attain very high abundances. This is the case when dense aggregations of sessile invertebrates such as sea fans monopolize space and exclude other species, or when high densities of sea urchins overgraze the bottom and create large deforested areas commonly called sea urchin barrens. Data on the abundance of undesirable and invasive species are collected as part of the monitoring done to evaluate the biological performance standards pertaining to the benthic community.

Examples of key ecological functions provided by shallow reefs of southern California include the provision of nursery habitat for fishes, the production of invertebrate prey sufficient to support populations of predatory reef fish, and primary productivity by macroalgae. The first of these two functions are monitored for the purpose of evaluating the performance standards pertaining to the density and number of species of young-of-year fishes and benthic food chain support and thus incur no added cost to evaluate. By contrast, measuring primary productivity by reef macroalgae is very time consuming (e.g., see Rassweiler et al. 2008, Harrer et al. 2013) and is not required for evaluating the performance of Wheeler North Reef. However, more easily measured estimates of kelp frond density (which are made as part of the evaluation of the performance standard pertaining to giant kelp area) can be used to accurately predict net primary productivity by giant kelp (Reed et al. 2009), which constitutes the vast majority of biomass on reefs in California (Graham et al. 2007).

The evaluation of this performance standard involves a two-step approach. First, the performance of Wheeler North Reef with respect to giant kelp, young-of-year fish and benthic food chain support is used to determine whether these important functions of Wheeler North Reef are impaired. Second, data on the abundance of sea urchins, sea fans or other potentially undesirable or invasive species are used to evaluate whether any impairment in these reef functions has resulted in increases in the abundance of invasive or undesirable species.

Results: As noted above, the density of giant kelp fronds was much lower at Wheeler North Reef in 2009 compared to San Mateo and Barn due to the young age of kelp (as indicated by plant size) that was present on the reef at this time (Figure 5.2.6). Since 2010, the density of kelp fronds at Wheeler North Reef has been higher than that at San Mateo and Barn indicating very high levels of kelp primary productivity at Wheeler North Reef and no evidence of impairment in this important function (Figure 5.2.7). Wheeler North Reef consistently met the performance standard pertaining to young-of-year fishes (Figure 6.12a, b) indicating that there has been no impairment of this key ecological function at Wheeler North Reef since sampling began in 2009. In contrast, the function of the benthic community of Wheeler North Reef in providing food chain support for fishes was similar to or greater than that of the reference reefs in 2009 and 2010, but substantially less than that of the reference reefs in 2011 and 2012 (Figure 6.16a, b). While the specific reason for this decline in the food chain support at Wheeler North Reef is unknown, it does not appear to be caused by an increase in the abundance of undesirable or invasive species as indicated by the relatively low abundances of such species in the monitoring data.

Invasive and potentially undesirable species of particular interest are native sea fans (*Muricea* spp.), which are known to attain high abundances on artificial reefs in California. In a broad survey of artificial and natural reefs in southern California Ambrose et al. (1987) found that giant kelp was rare or absent at reefs where sea fan abundance exceeded 10 m^{-2} . We refer to a density of sea fans greater than 10 m^{-2} as the “Ambrose line” which indicates a potential concern for a reef with respect to its ability to support giant kelp. 2010 was a good year for sea fan recruitment and

the densities of sea fans at Wheeler North Reef increased dramatically to about 6m^{-2} (Figure 6.4). There was a slight decline in density in 2011 with a steady increase since then to a density of ~ 8 individuals m^{-2} , which is approaching the Ambrose line. It is worth noting that sea fans observed in the earlier study by Ambrose et al. (1987) were mostly very large individuals that occupied a large amount of space on the reef. In contrast, sea fans on Wheeler North Reef are much smaller and occupied only about 5% of the rock surface area in 2013, which was not sufficient to significantly affect the abundance of other species in the benthic community or affect reef functions.

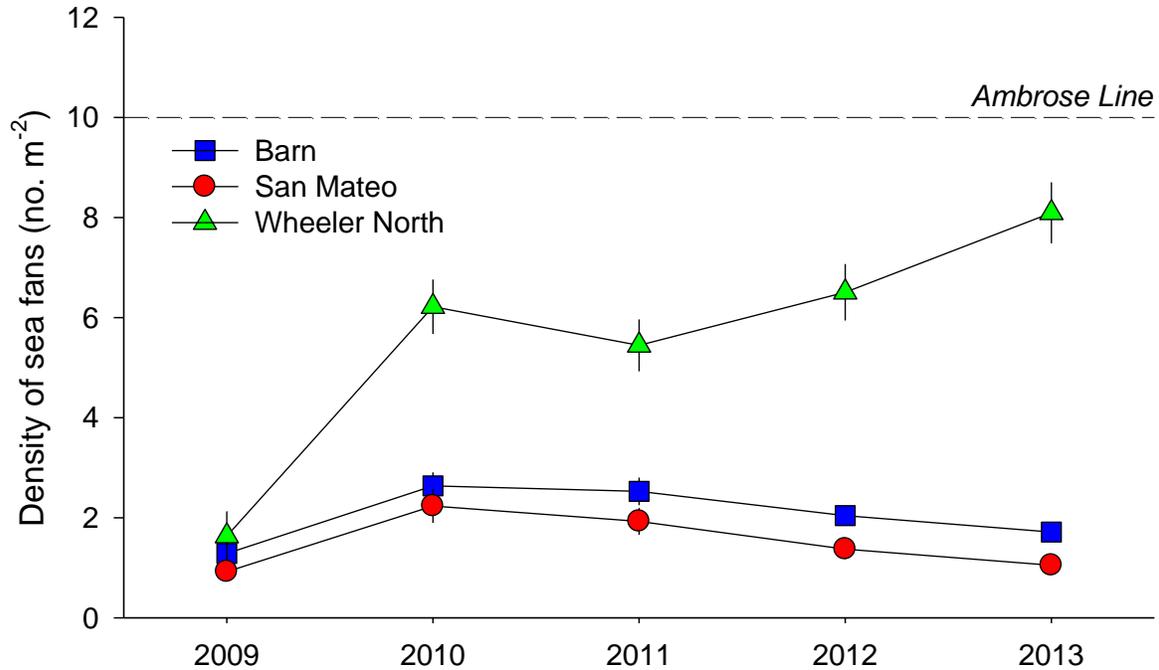


Figure 6.4. Mean density (± 1 standard error) of sea fans, *Muricea* spp. at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn for 2009 - 2013.

Much like sea fans, high densities of sea urchins can prevent the establishment of giant kelp and other organisms. For example, Arkema et al. (2009) found that giant kelp was absent on reefs where sea urchin densities exceeded 35m^{-2} (labeled the *Arkema Line* in Figure 6.5). Monitoring data from 2009-2013 show that sea urchin densities have been consistently low at Wheeler North reef averaging < 1 individual m^{-2} (Figure 6.5). This density is far below that needed to significantly impact giant kelp and other components of the benthic community (i.e., the *Arkema Line*).

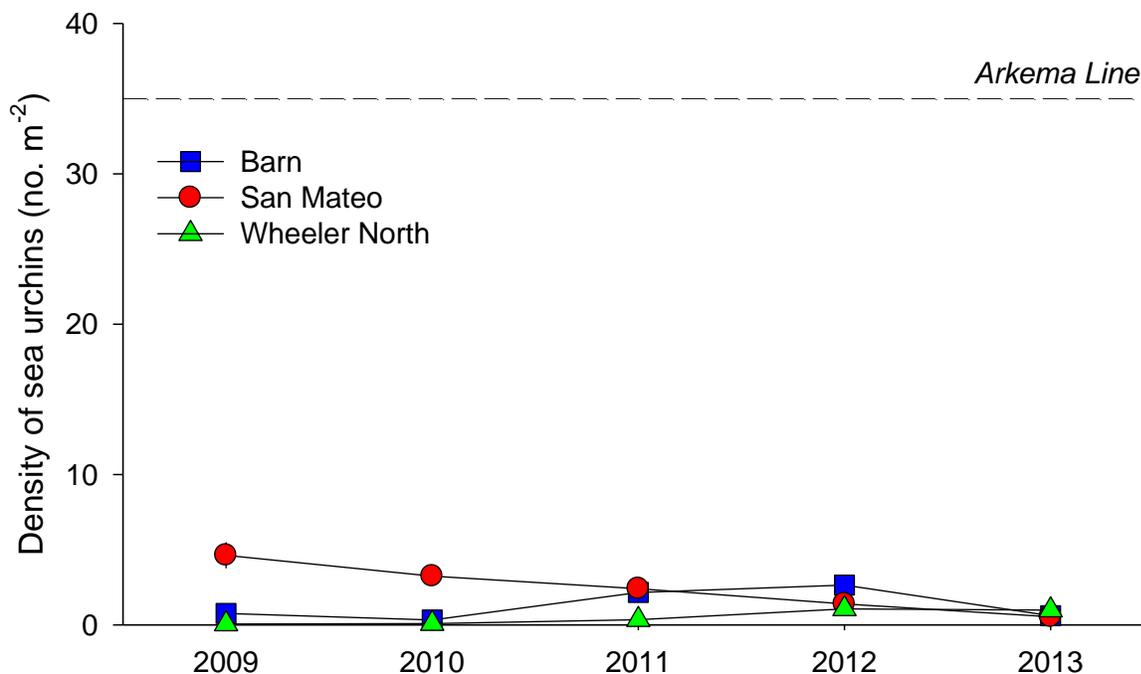


Figure 6.5. Mean density (± 1 standard error) of sea urchins, *Strongylocentrotus* spp. at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn for 2009 - 2013.

No invasive non-native species of invasive algae have been observed during any of the monitoring surveys done to date. Based on the above results we find no evidence that invasive or undesirable species reached abundances that were high enough to impair important ecological functions of Wheeler North Reef. Thus the Wheeler North Reef met the performance standard for invasive species in 2013.

6.2 Relative Performance Standards

1. *THE BENTHIC COMMUNITY OF MACROALGAE SHALL HAVE A COVERAGE SIMILAR TO NATURAL REEFS WITHIN THE REGION.*

Approach: The coverages of reef associated algae and sessile invertebrates provide a measure of the biomass associated with the benthic community attached to the hard substrate of a reef. Because many species of algae are difficult to count as individuals their abundance is estimated as percent cover. The percent cover of benthic macroalgae at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo, and Barn is measured annually in the summer in five replicate 1m² quadrats located at 10m intervals along each of the eighty-two 50m transects. At the Wheeler North Reef, these transects are located in the Phase 1 modules and the Phase 2 primary polygons (Figure 4.4.2). Percent cover is estimated using a uniform point contact method that consists of noting the identity and relative vertical position of all organisms under 20 uniformly placed points within each of five quadrats located along each transect. Using this method the total percent cover of all species combined can exceed 100%, however, the maximum percent cover possible for any single species cannot exceed 100%. Because the abundance of macroalgae is expressed as percent cover of the bottom

(rather than percent cover of the rock on the bottom) the ability of the Wheeler North Reef to meet this standard is not only influenced by biological processes that regulate species abundance (i.e., recruitment, growth, mortality), but also by the percent of the bottom covered by rock. For Wheeler North Reef to meet this performance standard the four-year running average of the percent cover of macroalgae calculated from the current year and the three preceding years must not be significantly less than that of the reference reef with the lower four-year running average of macroalgal cover (i.e. the p-value for the t-test must be less than the proportional difference between the two reefs).

Results: The percent cover of macroalgae at Wheeler North Reef was about 27% in 2009; decreased to about 10% in 2010 when the surface canopy of giant kelp became fully established, and has remained near this low level through 2013 (Figure 6.6a). In contrast, the percent cover of macroalgae at the two reference sites increased during the five years of monitoring, most notably in 2012, before declining in 2013 following an increase in giant kelp at these sites (Figure 6.6a). The different trajectories of algal percent cover at the Wheeler North Reef and the reference reefs resulted in a four-year running average of algal percent cover at the Wheeler North Reef that was substantially lower than that at the two reference reefs (Figure 6.6b). Consequently, the Wheeler North Reef did not meet this performance standard in 2012 or 2013.

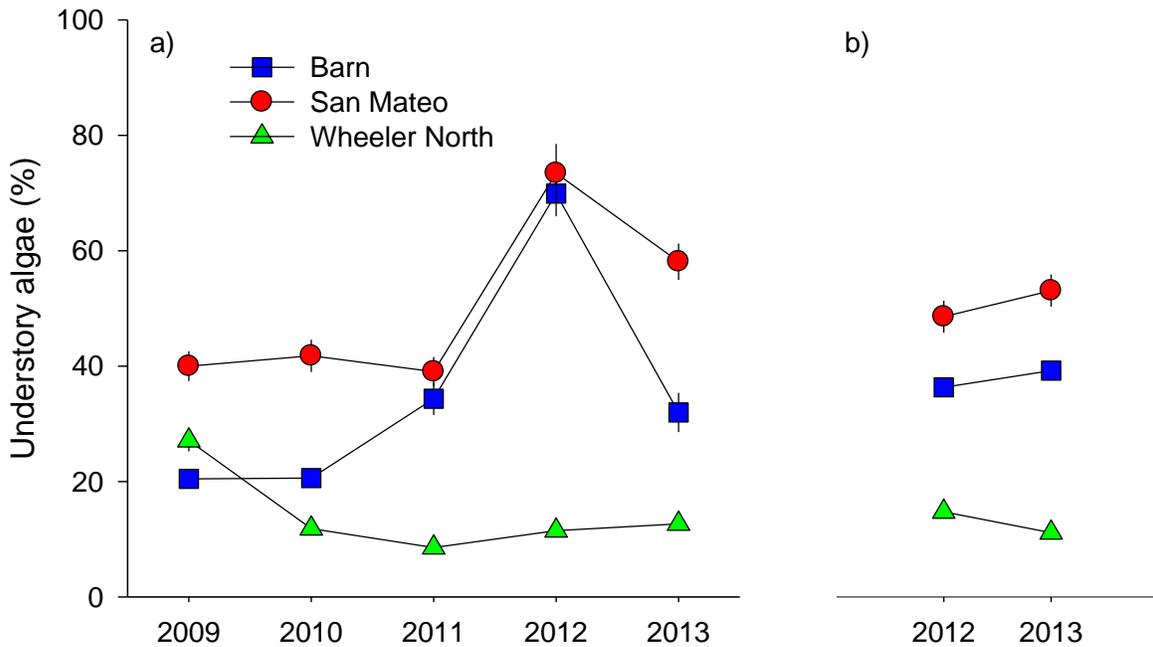


Figure 6.6. Mean percent cover (± 1 standard error) of understory algae at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

2. THE NUMBER OF SPECIES OF BENTHIC MACROALGAE SHALL BE SIMILAR TO NATURAL REEFS WITHIN THE REGION.

Approach: The percent cover data of macroalgae are used to determine the total number of species per transect on the Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo, and Barn. These values are averaged over the 82 transects on each reef to provide an estimate of average species density per reef. For Wheeler North Reef to meet this performance standard its four-year running average of number of species of macroalgae per transect must not be significantly less than that of the reference reef with the lower four-year running average of number of species of macroalgae per transect.

Results: The average number of macroalgal species per transect declined over time at the Wheeler North Reef, while it increased at the two reference reefs (Figure 6.7a). As a result, the four-year running average of algal species density at the Wheeler North Reef has been lower than that at Barn and San Mateo (Figure 6.7b). Consequently, the Wheeler North Reef did not meet the performance standard for algal diversity in 2012 or 2013.

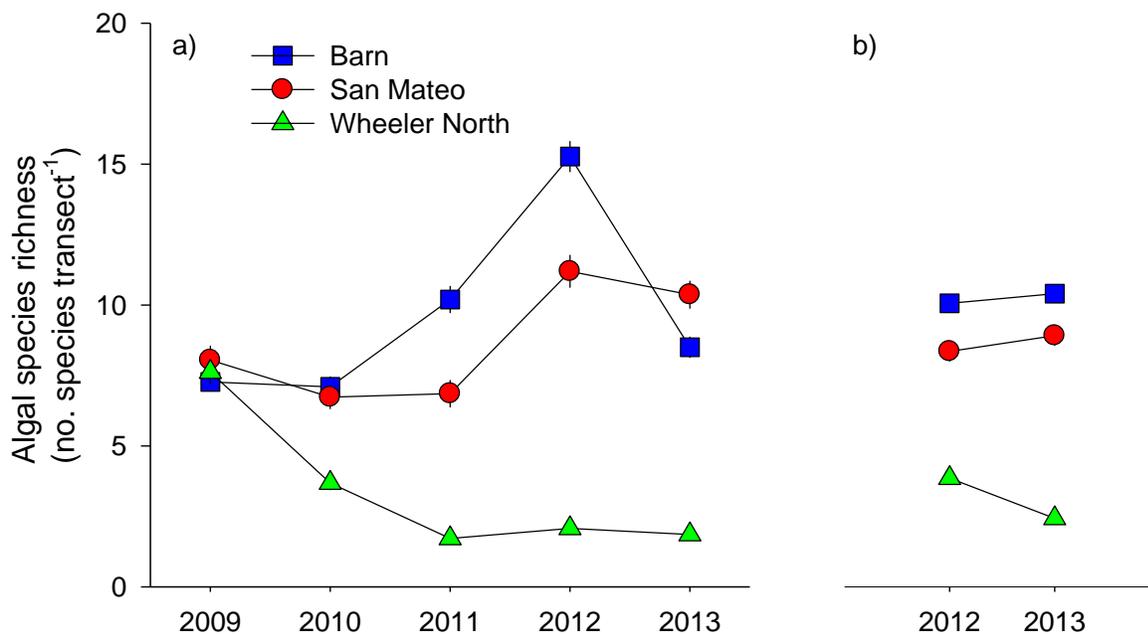


Figure 6.7. Mean species density (± 1 standard error) of understory algae at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

3. THE BENTHIC COMMUNITY OF SESSILE INVERTEBRATES SHALL HAVE A COVERAGE SIMILAR TO NATURAL REEFS WITHIN THE REGION.

Approach: The percent cover of sessile invertebrates is measured at the same time and in the same way as the percent cover of benthic macroalgae. For Wheeler North Reef to meet this performance standard the four-year running average of the percent cover of sessile invertebrates calculated from the current year and the three preceding years must not be significantly less than that of the reference reef with the lower four-year running average of sessile invertebrate cover.

Results: As described in section 5.0, sessile invertebrates and algae compete for space and as a result, increases in the percent cover of one group are typically accompanied by decreases in the percent cover of the other. This is exactly the pattern that we have seen at the Wheeler North Reef, Barn and San Mateo. The percent cover of sessile invertebrates at the Wheeler North Reef in 2009 was about half of that at the reference reefs, but increased nearly three-fold over time as the cover of algae decreased (Figure 6.8a vs. Figure 6.6a). By contrast the percent cover of sessile invertebrates remained relatively constant at Barn and San Mateo from 2009 to 2011 before decreasing sharply in 2012 (Figure 6.8a); the exact opposite pattern that was observed for the percent cover of macroalgae at these sites (Figure 6.6a). The percent cover of sessile invertebrates increased slightly in 2013 at Barn following an increase in the density of giant kelp at this site (Figure 5.2.7) . Because the recent four-year running average of percent cover of sessile invertebrates at the Wheeler North Reef was slightly higher than at San Mateo and Barn in 2012 and substantially higher than at both reefs in 2013, the Wheeler North Reef met this performance standard in 2012 and 2013 (Figure 6.8b).

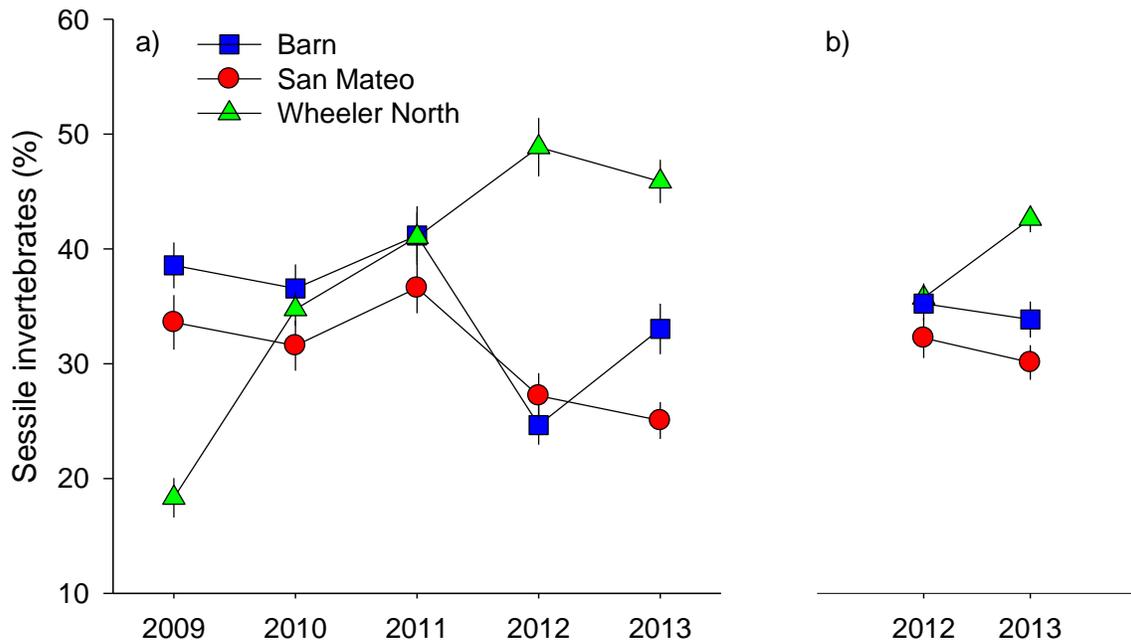


Figure 6.8. Mean percent cover (± 1 standard error) of sessile invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

4. THE BENTHIC COMMUNITY OF MOBILE MACROINVERTEBRATES SHALL HAVE A DENSITY SIMILAR TO NATURAL REEFS WITHIN THE REGION.

Approach: The number of large solitary mobile invertebrates (e.g. sea stars, sea urchins, and lobsters) are counted in the five 10m x 2m plots centered along each 50m transect. Depending on their size and abundance, smaller solitary mobile invertebrates (e.g., brittle stars, nudibranchs, sea cucumbers) are counted in either a 1m² or a 0.5m² area created by dividing the 1m² quadrats in half using an elastic cord stretched across the frame of the quadrat. Densities are expressed as number

per m² of bottom. For Wheeler North Reef to meet this performance standard the four-year running average of the density of benthic mobile invertebrates calculated from the current year and the three preceding years must not be significantly less than that of the reference reef with the lower four-year running average of mobile invertebrate density.

Results: Much like the percent cover of sessile invertebrates, the density of mobile invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef was initially low (< 10 m⁻²) in 2009 and has increased over time to densities > 100 individuals 10 m⁻² (Figure 6.9a). In contrast the densities of mobile invertebrates at San Mateo and Barn have fluctuated much less over the four-year sampling period with densities ranging between 25 to 70 individuals per m⁻² (Figure 6.9a). The four-year running average of mobile invertebrate density at Wheeler North Reef was between values at the reference reefs in 2012 and was greater than that at the two reference reefs in 2013 (Figure 6.9b) the Wheeler North Reef met this performance standard in both 2012 and 2013.

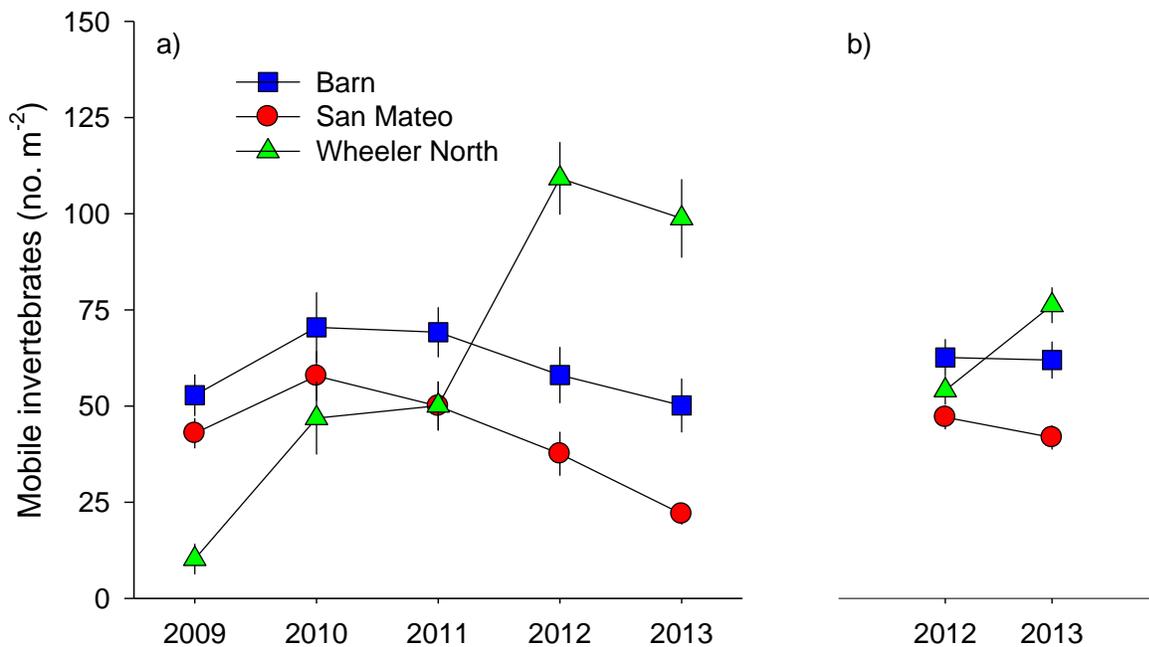


Figure 6.9. Mean density (± 1 standard error) of mobile invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

5. THE COMBINED NUMBER OF SPECIES OF BENTHIC SESSILE AND MOBILE INVERTEBRATES SHALL BE SIMILAR TO NATURAL REEFS WITHIN THE REGION.

Approach: Data on the percent cover of sessile invertebrates are combined with data on the density of mobile invertebrates to determine the total number of species of benthic invertebrates on each transect at the Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo, and Barn. These values are averaged over the 82 transects on each reef to provide an estimate of average species density per transect of benthic invertebrates per reef. For Wheeler North Reef to meet this performance standard its four-year running average of number of species of benthic invertebrates per transect must not be

significantly less than that of the reference reef with the lower four-year running average of number of species of benthic invertebrates per transect.

Results: The average number of species of benthic invertebrate per transect at the two reference reefs has declined slightly over the five-year sampling period, whereas it has increased dramatically at Wheeler North Reef from a low value of 12 species per transect in 2009 to about 33 species per transect in 2013; which was within the range of that observed at San Mateo and Barn in 2013 (Figure 6.10a). While the number of species of invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef is on an increasing trajectory, its four-year running average is below that of the two reference reefs in both 2012 and 2013 due to the low numbers of species observed during the first couple years following its construction (Figure 6.10b). As a result, the Wheeler North Reef did not meet the performance standard for the number of species of benthic invertebrate in 2012 and 2013.

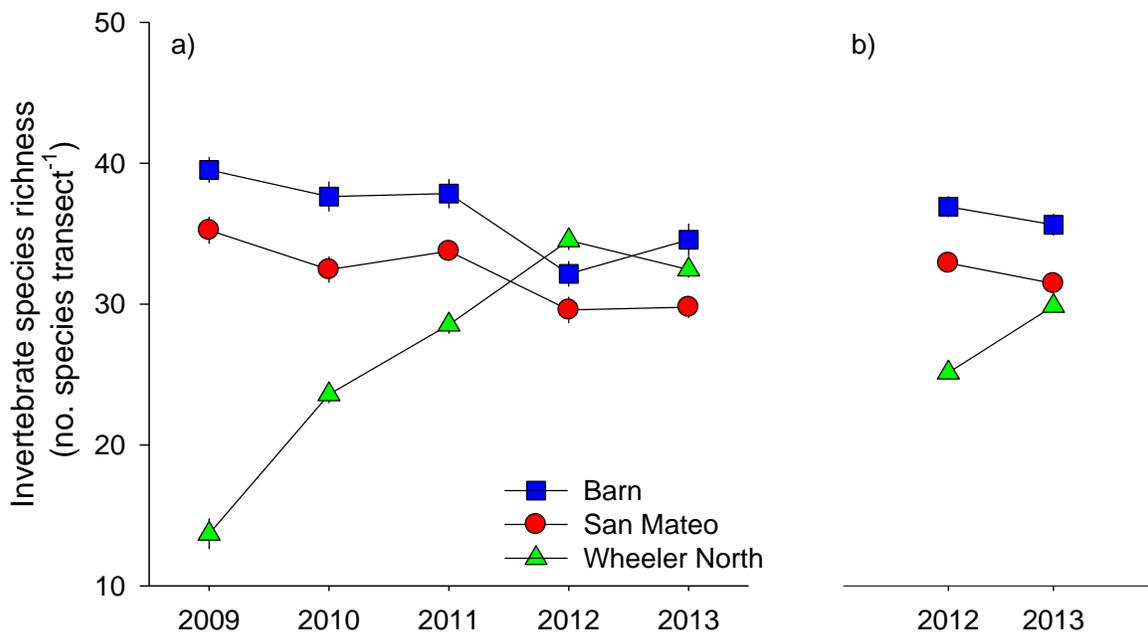


Figure 6.10. Mean species density (± 1 standard error) of invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

6. THE RESIDENT FISH ASSEMBLAGE SHALL HAVE A TOTAL DENSITY SIMILAR TO NATURAL REEFS WITHIN THE REGION.

Approach: Data on the density and lengths of resident fishes at San Mateo and Barn are collected using the same methods described above for estimating the standing stock of fish at Wheeler North Reef. Resident fish are defined as reef associated species > 1 year old (young-of-year fish are defined as reef associated species ≤ 1 year old). Data on fish lengths are used to classify each individual fish counted as a resident or young-of-year based on published size classes and/or expert knowledge. The total density of resident fishes on a reef (Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo, and Barn) are calculated as the mean density of resident fishes on the bottom averaged

over the 82 replicate 50m x 3m x 1.5m transects. For Wheeler North Reef to meet this performance standard the four-year running average of the density of resident fish calculated from the current year and the three preceding years must not be significantly less than that of the reference reef with the lower four-year running average of resident fish density.

Results: In 2009, 1 year after its construction, the density of resident fish at the Wheeler North Reef was 2 to 3 times greater than that at the reference reefs (Figure 6.11a). Since then fish densities have been relatively similar among the three reefs and years. The lone exception to this was a spike in resident fish density at Barn in 2011. The four-year running average of resident fish at the Wheeler North Reef was between values at San Mateo and Barn, both in 2012 and in 2013 was slightly above that at San Mateo hovering around 10 fish 100 m⁻² (Figure 6.1b). Thus, Wheeler North Reef met the performance standard for resident fish density in both in 2012 and 2013.

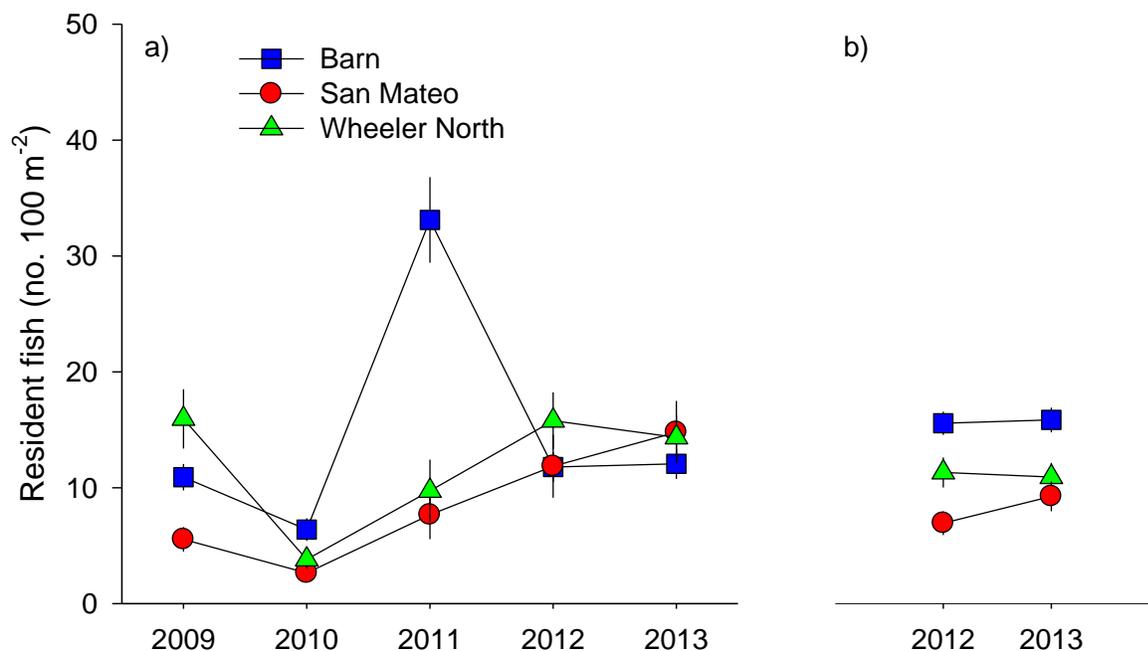


Figure 6.11. Mean density (± 1 standard error) of resident fish at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

7. THE DENSITY OF YOUNG-OF-YEAR FISHES (INDIVIDUALS LESS THAN 1 YEAR OLD) SHALL BE SIMILAR TO NATURAL REEFS WITHIN THE REGION.

Approach: Giant kelp forests serve as nursery habitat for a variety of nearshore fishes, and full compensation for the loss of kelp forest habitat caused by the operation of SONGS requires the Wheeler North Reef to provide this important ecological function at a level that is similar to that of natural reefs in the region. Data on the density of young-of-year (YOY) fishes (defined as reef associated fish < 1 year old) at the Wheeler North Reef and reference reefs are collected using the same

methods and at the same time as are data for resident fishes. The approach used for determining whether the density of YOY fishes at Wheeler North Reef is similar to that on the reference reefs is the same as that used for resident fishes.

Results: Densities of YOY fish in 2009 were 2-5 times high at Wheeler North compared to San Mateo and Barn (Figure 6.12a) due to a large recruitment of the black eye goby, *Rhinogobius nicholsii*. Since then mean densities of YOY fish at Wheeler North Reef have fluctuated within that range set by San Mateo and Barn. The temporal pattern observed at Barn has been similar to that at San Mateo, but at substantially lower densities. The four-year average for YOY density at Wheeler North Reef was above values at San Mateo and Barn in 2012 and intermediate between San Mateo and Barn in 2013 (Figure 6.12b). Thus, the Wheeler North Reef met the performance standard for YOY density in 2012 and 2013.

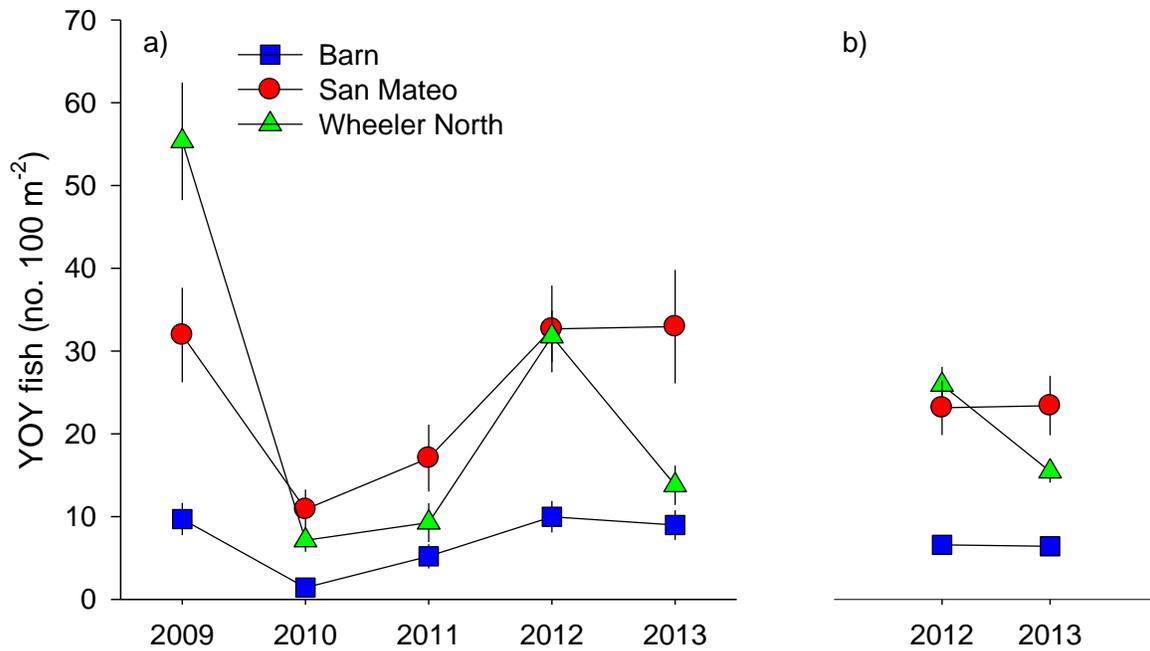


Figure 6.12. Mean density (± 1 standard error) of young-of-year fish at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

8. THE COMBINED NUMBER OF SPECIES OF RESIDENT AND YOUNG-OF-YEAR FISH SHALL BE SIMILAR TO NATURAL REEFS WITHIN THE REGION.

Approach: All fish counted to assess the abundance of resident and young-of-year fish are identified to species. These data are used to calculate the number of species of resident and young-of-year fish combined per transect on each reef. These values are then averaged over the 82 transects on the Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo, and Barn to provide an estimate of average species density of kelp bed fishes per reef. For Wheeler North Reef to meet this performance standard its four-year running average of number of species of kelp bed fish per transect must not be

significantly less than that of the reference reef with the lower four-year running average of the number of species of kelp bed fish per transect.

Results: Fish diversity has generally increased at the three reefs since 2009, with Barn typically displaying the highest diversity and San Mateo the lowest (Figure 6.13a). The 4-year average of the mean number of fish species per transect for Wheeler North Reef in 2012 and 2013 was intermediate between Barn and San Mateo (Figure 6.13b). Thus the Wheeler North Reef met the performance standard for fish diversity in 2012 and 2013.

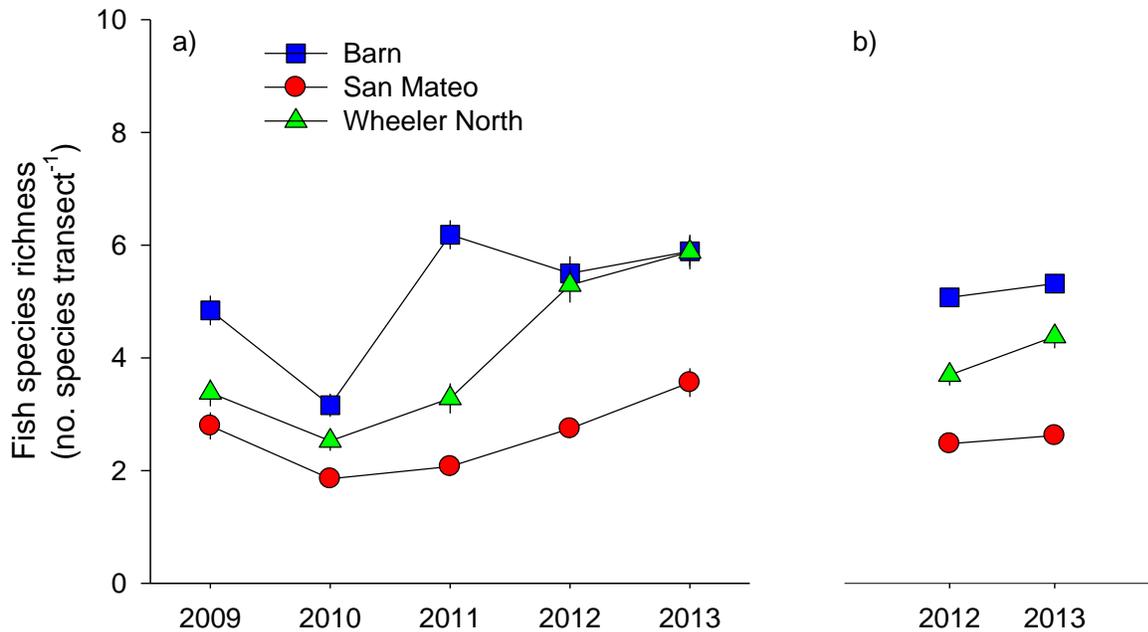


Figure 6.13. Mean species density (± 1 standard error) of fish at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

9. FISH PRODUCTION SHALL BE SIMILAR TO NATURAL REEFS WITHIN THE REGION

Approach: Estimating fish production on a reef is a difficult and potentially expensive task because it requires knowledge (or scientifically defensible assumptions) of the abundance and size structure of the fish standing stock, coupled with size-specific rates of growth, mortality, reproduction, emigration and immigration. For this reason a great deal of thought has gone into developing a precise and cost-effective way to evaluate this performance standard. The method selected for estimating fish production to assess this performance standard involves the use of data on biomass and gonadal growth collected for the purpose of the performance standards pertaining to fish density, fish standing stock, and fish reproductive rates, in combination with data of somatic growth rates obtained from otolith studies. Importantly, this method of estimating fish production assumes no net migration (i.e., the immigration of fish to a reef is assumed to be equal to the emigration of fish from a reef). Details of the method used to estimate fish production are provided in the monitoring plan for the SONGS' reef mitigation project (Reed et al. 2014).

Fish production is estimated for five target species: blacksmith, black surfperch, señorita, sheephead and kelp bass. These species represent the major feeding guilds of fishes in southern California kelp forests and are common to the study region. Blacksmith eat plankton during the day and seek shelter on the reef at night, black surfperch and señorita feed on small invertebrates that live on or near the bottom, sheephead feed on larger benthic invertebrates, and kelp bass feed on other species of fish. The annual production for each of these species is averaged to obtain an overall mean and standard error of fish production for each of the three reefs. For Wheeler North Reef to meet this performance standard the four-year running average of fish production calculated from the current year and the three preceding years must not be significantly less than that of the reference reef with the lower four-year running average of fish production.

Results: Temporal patterns of reef fish production at the Wheeler North Reef mirrored those at San Mateo, but with slightly higher values. At both sites production was highest in 2009 (about $3 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ y}^{-1}$) before declining to $< 2 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ y}^{-1}$ in 2010. Fish production has remained near this low value for the past four years at both sites (Figure 6.14a). Fish production at Barn has been higher than at the other two sites with very large peak in 2011, reflecting a spike in the biomass density of all five target species that year. Because fish production at the Wheeler North Reef has been intermediate between Barn and San Mateo in all five years the value of its four-year running average also has been intermediate between that of the two reference reefs (Figure 6.14b).

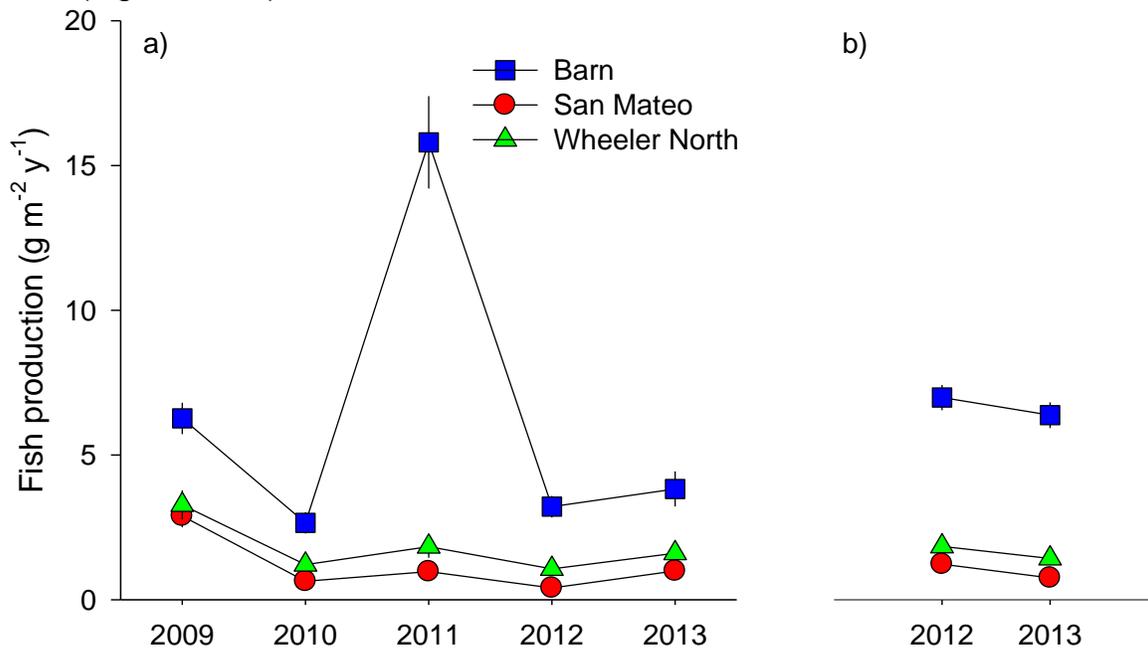


Figure 6.14. Mean fish production (± 1 standard error) at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

Thus, the Wheeler North Reef met the performance standard for fish production in both 2012 and 2013.

10. FISH REPRODUCTIVE RATES SHALL BE SIMILAR TO NATURAL REEFS WITHIN THE REGION.

Approach: The rationale for the performance standard pertaining to fish reproductive rates is that for artificial reefs to be considered successful, fish must be able to effectively reproduce. Data on per capita egg production of a select group of targeted reef fish species collected throughout the spawning season (summer through autumn) are used to determine whether fish reproductive rates at Wheeler North Reef are similar to those at San Mateo and Barn for similar sized individuals. The targeted species used to evaluate this performance standard are the California sheephead, señorita, and kelp bass. These species represent different feeding guilds of reef fishes in southern California and are sufficiently abundant to facilitate their collection with minimal impact to their local populations.

A resampling approach is used to statistically determine whether the Wheeler North Reef met this performance standard for a given year. This provides a method to estimate the variance and provides a basis for the calculation of a p-value. Because larger individuals tend to produce more eggs, the production of eggs is scaled to the body length and used to obtain a standardized measure of fecundity for each species at each reef. For each reef, a species-specific estimate of standardized fecundity is combined with a species-specific estimate of the proportion of individuals spawning to obtain a Fecundity Index that is averaged across all target species.

In order for fish reproductive rates at Wheeler North Reef to be considered similar to that at natural reference reefs the median value obtained from the resampled distribution of the Fecundity Index at Wheeler North Reef using data from the current year and the previous three years must not be significantly lower than that of the reference reef with the lowest Median Fecundity Index (i.e., the p-value for the t-test must be less than the proportional difference between the two reefs). In practice this is accomplished by comparing the median value at Wheeler North Reef to the distribution of 1000 (resampled) values at the lowest performing reference reef. This yields a probability value comparable to that obtained using a t-test. For example, assume the median value of the Fecundity Index at Wheeler North Reef is 100 and that value is the 40th lowest value in the distribution of Fecundity Index values from the lowest performing reference reef. This means that a value as low as 100 could only occur at a rate of $40/1000 = 4\%$ if the two reefs were performing equivalently. Note that 4% is the same as a p-value = 0.04. If the four-year running average of the proportional difference in median values of the Fecundity Index for Wheeler North and the lowest performing reference reef ≥ 0.04 then we would conclude that fish reproductive rates at Wheeler North Reef were significantly lower than those at the reference reefs for that year.

Results: The value of the Median Fecundity Index varied inconsistently among the three reefs during the five-year monitoring period (Figure 6.15a). Despite the erratic and asynchronous fluctuations in fish reproductive rates at the three sites their 4-

year running averages of the Median Fecundity Index have been very similar the past two years (Figure 6.15b). Therefore the Wheeler North Reef met the performance standard for fish reproductive rates in both 2012 and 2013.

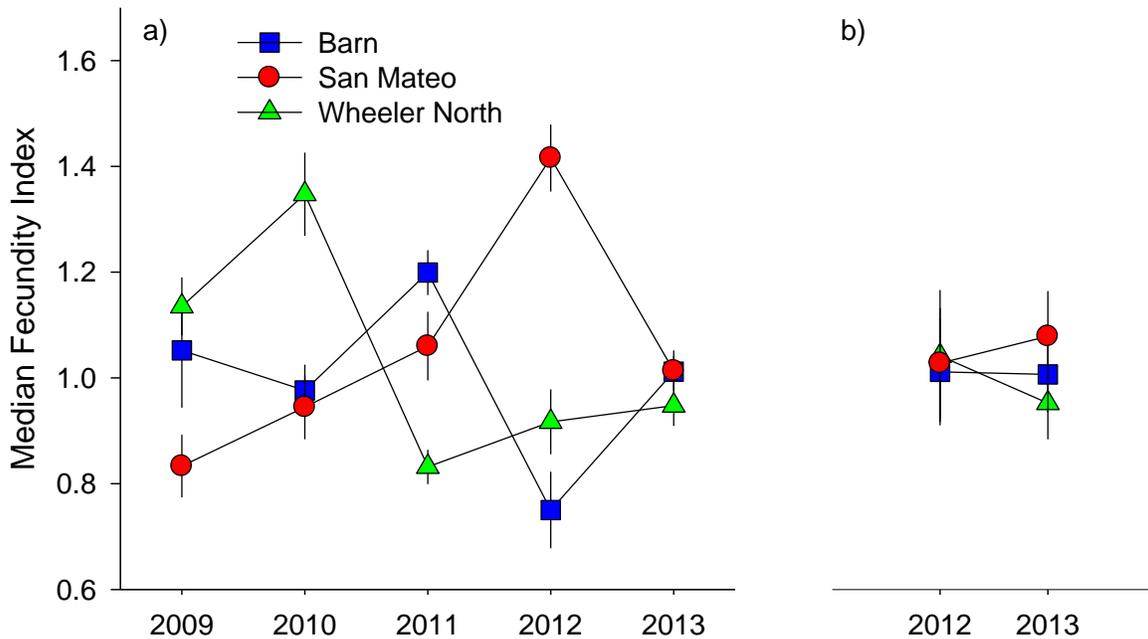


Figure 6.15. Median fecundity index (± 1 standard deviation) at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

11. THE BENTHIC COMMUNITY SHALL PROVIDE FOOD-CHAIN SUPPORT FOR FISH SIMILAR TO NATURAL REEFS WITHIN THE REGION.

Approach: Several different approaches could be taken to evaluate the contribution of the benthic community to food-chain support of reef fishes, but the most direct and cost efficient of these approaches involves sampling gut contents in reef fishes that feed on the bottom and are collected for other purposes. Such is the case for the black surfperch and the California sheephead. Both species feed almost exclusively on benthic prey and individuals of these species are collected for purposes of evaluating the performance standards pertaining to fish reproductive rates and fish production. Once collected, black surfperch and sheephead specimens are placed on ice and transported to the laboratory where they are either immediately dissected and processed or frozen for processing at a later date. Sample processing for both species involves removing the entire tubular digestive tracts and weighing the contents, either before or after preservation by fixation in 10% formaldehyde and storage in 70% ethanol. These measurements are used to calculate an index of food chain support (FCS) that is based on the mass of the gut contents relative to the body mass of the fish

$$FCS = g / (b - (r + g))$$

Where g = gut content mass, b = body mass, and r = gonad mass.

The values of the FCS index for each of the two species are transformed into a standardized FCS index using a Z transformation to control for species-specific differences in average feeding success. This standardization procedure allows the performance standard to be evaluated using a single metric that incorporates data from both species. For Wheeler North Reef to meet this performance standard its four-year running average of the FCS index must not be significantly less than that of the reference reef with the lower four-year running average of the FCS index.

Results: The three reefs have shown very different temporal patterns in the values of their standardized food chain support index. The standardized FCS index at the Wheeler North Reef steadily declined from 2009 to 2012 before showing a sharp increase in 2013 (Figure 6.16a). In contrast the FCS index at San Mateo increased from 2009–2011 and has remained high since then, while the FCS index at Barn remained relatively high from 2009-2012 before declining sharply in 2013. The four-year running average of the FCS at Wheeler North Reef was lower than at both reference reefs in 2012, but not statistically lower than that at San Mateo (Figure 6.16b). The difference in the standardized FCS between Wheeler North Reef and San Mateo widened in 2013 and became statistically significant. Consequently, the Wheeler North Reef did not meet the performance standard for food chain support in 2013.

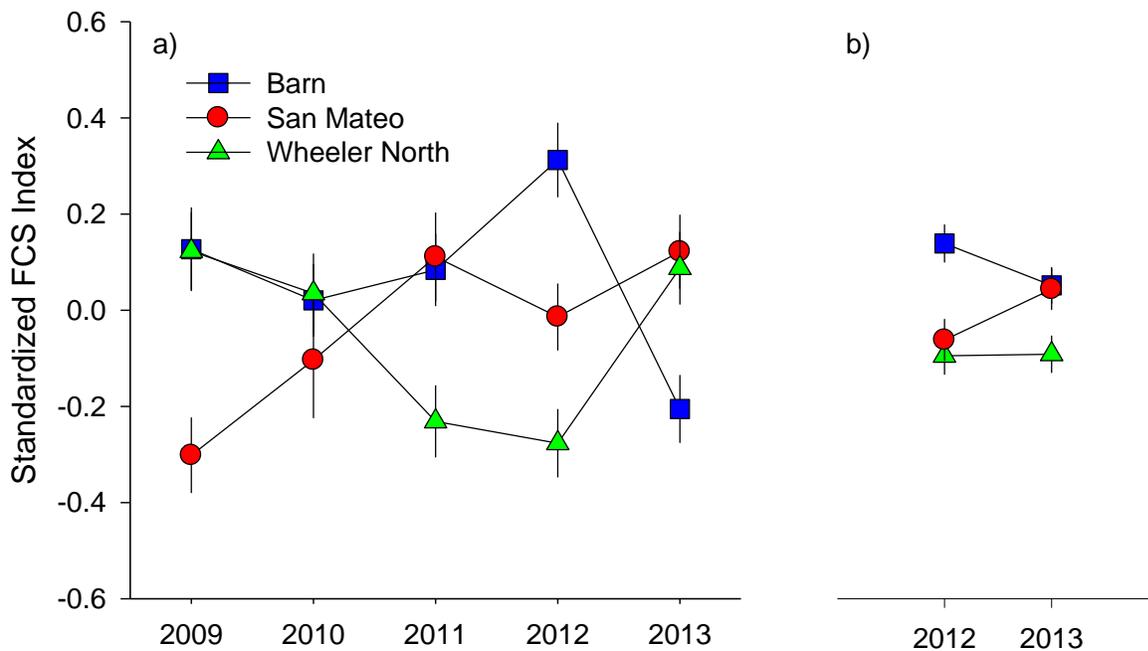


Figure 6.16. Food chain support (FCS) index (± 1 standard error) at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

7.0 Permit Compliance

7.1 Summary of SONGS Permit compliance

To receive mitigation credit for a given year the Wheeler North Reef must meet: (1) all four absolute performance standards, and (2) at least as many relative standards as the reference reefs. The absolute performance standards are only measured at the Wheeler North Reef and they are assessed using values from either the current year (i.e., 2013) or the four-year running average (2010-2013), whichever is higher. The relative performance standards are measured at Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn using only the most recent four-year running average (see Section 4.1).

A summary of the performance of the Wheeler North Reef as measured by the four absolute performance standards and the 11 relative performance standards is shown in Table 7.1. In 2013 the Wheeler North Reef met three of the four absolute standards; it failed to meet the standard for fish standing stock. Wheeler North Reef met 7 of the 11 relative performance standards, which was one less than it met in 2012 but the same number that San Mateo met in 2013. Barn met 10 of the 11 relative standards in 2013. Thus in 2013 Wheeler North Reef met as many relative standards as San Mateo, the lowest performing reference reef. However, because Wheeler North Reef did not meet the absolute standard for fish standing stock it received no mitigation credit for 2013.

Table 7.1. Summary of the performance of Wheeler North Reef in 2013 with respect to the absolute and relative performance standards that are used to judge whether it is meeting its intended goal of compensating for the kelp bed resources lost due to the operation of SONGS Units 2 and 3. YES means that the standard was met for that year, NO means the standard was not met.

	WNR		San Mateo	Barn
	2013	4-yr avg	4-yr avg	4-yr avg
ABSOLUTE STANDARDS				
1. Substrate	YES	YES		
2. Giant kelp	YES	YES		
3. Fish biomass	NO	NO		
4. Invasive species	YES	YES		
<i>Number of Absolute Standards met</i>	3	3		
RELATIVE STANDARDS				
1. Algal cover		NO	YES	YES
2. Algal species richness		NO	YES	YES
3. Sessile invertebrate cover		YES	NO	YES
4. Mobile invertebrate density		YES	NO	YES
5. Invertebrate species richness		NO	YES	YES
6. Resident fish density		YES	YES	YES
7. YOY fish density		YES	YES	NO
8. Fish species richness (all ages)		YES	NO	YES
9. Fish production		YES	NO	YES
10. Fish reproductive rates		YES	YES	YES
11. Food chain support		NO	YES	YES
<i>Number of Relative Standards met</i>		7	7	10

Fulfillment of the SONGS reef mitigation requirement occurs when the number of years of mitigation credit accrued by the Wheeler North Reef equals the total years of operation of SONGS Units 2 & 3, including the decommissioning period to the extent that there is continuing discharge of cooling water. SONGS Unit 2 operated for approximately 29 years and Unit 3 for about 28 years. Thus the minimum number of years of mitigation credit that the Wheeler North Reef must obtain to fulfill the requirements of Condition C of the SONGS coastal development permit is 29 years. As of 2013 the Wheeler North Reef has not earned any years of mitigation credit (Table 7.2). The reason for this has been its failure to meet the absolute performance standards for giant kelp in the first year (2009) and for fish standing stock in all five years.

Table 7.2. Summary of the mitigation credit earned by the Wheeler North Reef

Year	Mitigation credit	Reason for no mitigation credit
2009	No	Kelp & fish standing stock too low
2010	No	Fish standing stock too low
2011	No	Fish standing stock too low
2012	No	Fish standing stock too low
2013	No	Fish standing stock too low
TOTAL	0 years	
Mitigation Target	29 years (minimum)	

Despite the above noted deficiency in the performance with respect to fish standing stock the Wheeler North Reef has shown promise in meeting many of its objectives. For example, it has consistently met the absolute performance standards pertaining to hard substrate and lack of invasive species in all five years of monitoring and the absolute standard for giant kelp in each of the last four years. Moreover, the overall performance of Wheeler North Reef with respect to the relative performance standards has been within the range of that set by the two natural reference reefs. The Wheeler North Reef continues to under-perform with respect to understory algae, which is to be expected given the intense shading by the dense canopy of giant kelp that has been present since 2010. The failure of the Wheeler North Reef to meet the performance standard for invertebrate species richness in 2013 stems from low diversity during the first few years following its construction which lower the four-year average for this performance standard (Figure 6. 10). This is because colonization by many species of invertebrates does not occur every year and it may take several years for many species of invertebrates to accumulate on a newly constructed artificial reef. The steady increase in the species richness of invertebrates at Wheeler North Reef since it was constructed supports this notion.

That the mean value for invertebrate species richness at Wheeler North Reef in 2012 and 2013 was within or above the range set by Barn and San Mateo is quite promising. If this trend in invertebrate species richness continues, then the four-year running average for this performance standard at the Wheeler North Reef should be similar to that of the reference reefs by 2014. By contrast, the Wheeler North Reef met the standard for fish reproductive rates in 2013 even though it has underperformed both reference reefs with respect to this standard in two of the last 3 years (Figure 6.15). If the trend for lower fish reproductive rates at Wheeler North Reef continues, then its four-year running average for this standard will likely drop below that of both reference reefs in 2014. In the case of food chain support, the four year running average for this standard at Wheeler North Reef was significantly less than that at both reference reefs even though its 1-year average increased dramatically in 2013 (Figure 6.16). Consequently, the Wheeler North Reef failed to meet this standard in 2013 due to its poor performance in 2011 and 2012.

7.2 Reasons for failing to meet the performance standard for fish standing stock

The standing stock of fish on a reef is influenced by a wide variety of factors including ocean climate, fishing and physical attributes of the reef such as its size, rock coverage and topography. The present configuration of the Wheeler North Reef is 176 acres of low relief rock that covers an average of 42% of the bottom. Low relief was chosen to mimic natural reefs in the region including the reef at San Onofre that was damaged by SONGS operations. Low relief reefs are also more likely to support giant kelp, which was a major objective of the mitigation project. A critical question in assessing the long-term performance of the Wheeler North Reef is whether its present configuration is sufficient to sustain 28 tons of fish over the long term. The time series monitoring initiated in Phase 1 of the reef mitigation project provides a longer term perspective for evaluating this question.

Time series data from the Phase 1 rock modules collected from 2000 to 2013 are useful for evaluating the effects of rock coverage on the standing stock of reef fish. We used these data to calculate the annual mean biomass density of reef fish for modules with low, medium and high rock coverage. Mean biomass densities for each of the three rock coverages were scaled up to 176 acres to obtain a time series of the estimated fish standing stock for 176 acre reef with low, medium or high rock coverage. Results from this analysis show that the ability of a 176 acre reef to meet the 28 ton standard increased with increasing rock coverage (Figure 7.2.1). The fish standing stock of a 176 acre reef estimated from the low cover rock time series (which is the most similar in rock cover to the larger Phase 2 reef) would only have met the 28 ton standard in 1 of 11 years using the 1-year average criterion and 0 of 5 years using the 4-year average criterion. In contrast, a 176 acre reef with high rock coverage would have met the 28 ton standard in 8 of 11 years using the 1-year average and 4 of 5 years using the 4-year average. A 176 acre reef with medium rock coverage supported at least 28 tons in 3 of 11 years using the 1-year average and 1 of 5 years using the 4-year average.

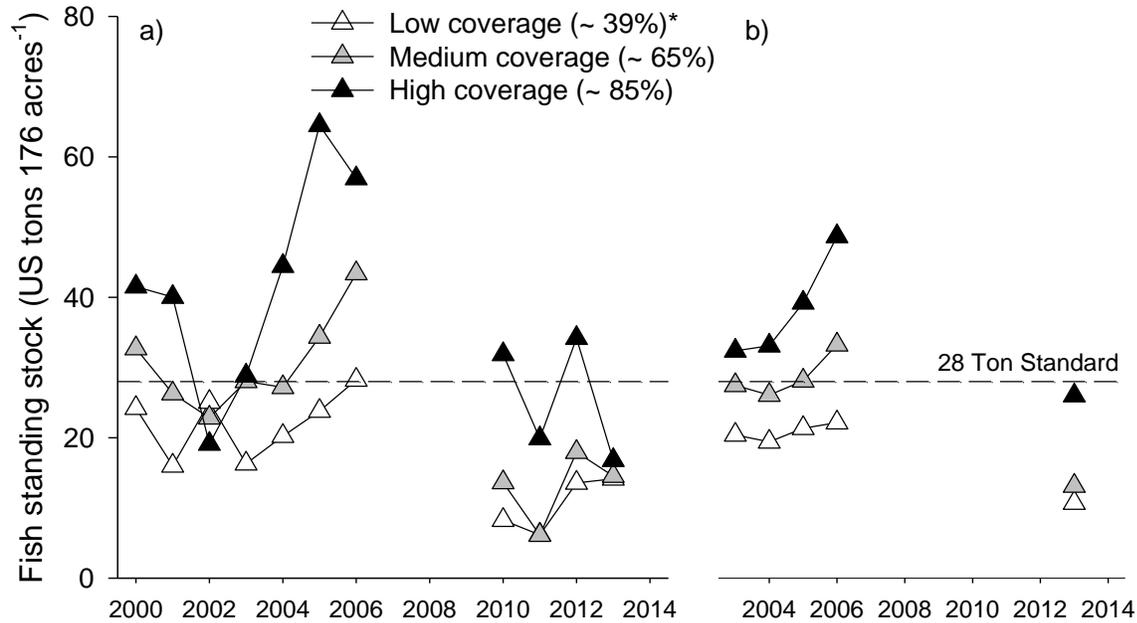


Figure 7.2.1. Estimated standing stock for a 176 acre reef with low, medium and high rock coverage. Values are derived from data on fish biomass density from the Phase 1 rock modules that were scaled to 176 acres. (a) annual values for 2000 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

The standing stock of reef fish at the Wheeler North Reef also was compared to that of a comparable area at San Mateo and Barn to determine whether the physical characteristics or location of Wheeler North Reef were responsible for its failure to support 28 tons of fish biomass. This was done by scaling the mean biomass density of reef fish at San Mateo and Barn up to 176 acres for the five-year mitigation period (2009-2013) as well as for the seven-year period in which data were collected during Phase 1 (2000-2006). Results of this analysis show that when scaled to 176 acres neither of these two natural reefs have consistently supported 28 tons of reef fish biomass in recent years (Figure 7.2.2). Barn met the 28 ton standard 1 out of 12 years using the 1-year average and 2 out of 6 years using the 4-year average. While San Mateo met the 28 ton standard 3 out of 12 years using the 1-year average and 2 out of 6 years using the 4-year average.

Collectively, the results of analyses using longer-term data from the reference sites and the Phase 1 modules strongly suggest that the present size and configuration of the Wheeler North Reef is not sufficient to consistently support 28 tons of kelp bed fish. This is a notable finding because the performance standard for fish standing stock, like all absolute performance standards, must be met in a given year by the Wheeler North Reef for that year to count towards mitigation credit.

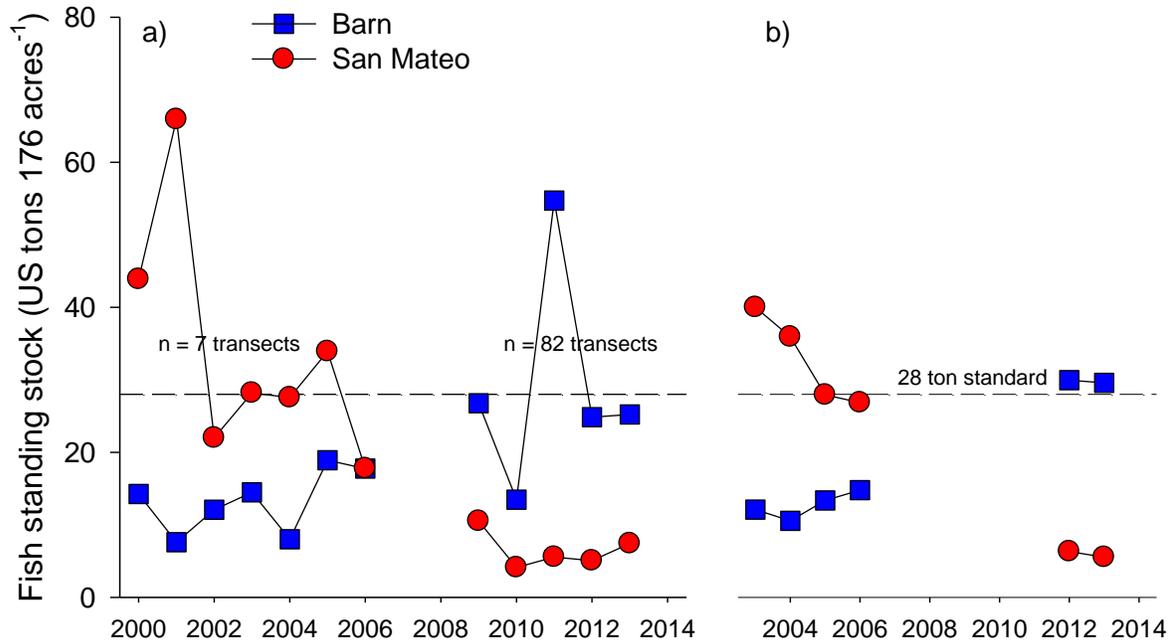


Figure 7.2.2. Estimated standing stock of kelp bed fish per 176 acres at San Mateo and Barn. (a) annual values for 2000 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

Much like fish standing stock the ability of a reef to sustain 150 acres of medium to high density giant kelp is dependent on the area of suitable rocky habitat. Thus it is reasonable to ask “Is the current 176 acre 42% rock coverage configuration of Wheeler North reef sufficient to sustain 150 acres of medium to high density giant kelp over the long term?” Time series monitoring of the natural reference reefs initiated in Phase 1 of the reef mitigation project provide a longer term perspective for evaluating this question. For this analysis we multiplied the proportion of transects with medium to high density kelp (defined as > 4 adult plants 100 m^{-2}) at San Mateo and Barn by 176 acres to determine whether 176 acres of these reefs was sufficient to support 150 acres of medium to high density giant kelp. Results from this analysis show that neither reef consistently supported 150 acres of kelp when scaled to 176 acres (Figure 7.2.3). Barn would have met the 150 acre standard 4 out of 12 years using the 1-year average and 1 out of 6 years using the 4-year average. San Mateo would never have met the 150 acre standard during the 12 years of sampling. These data indicate that 176 acres is not large enough to sustain 150 acres of giant kelp over the long term.

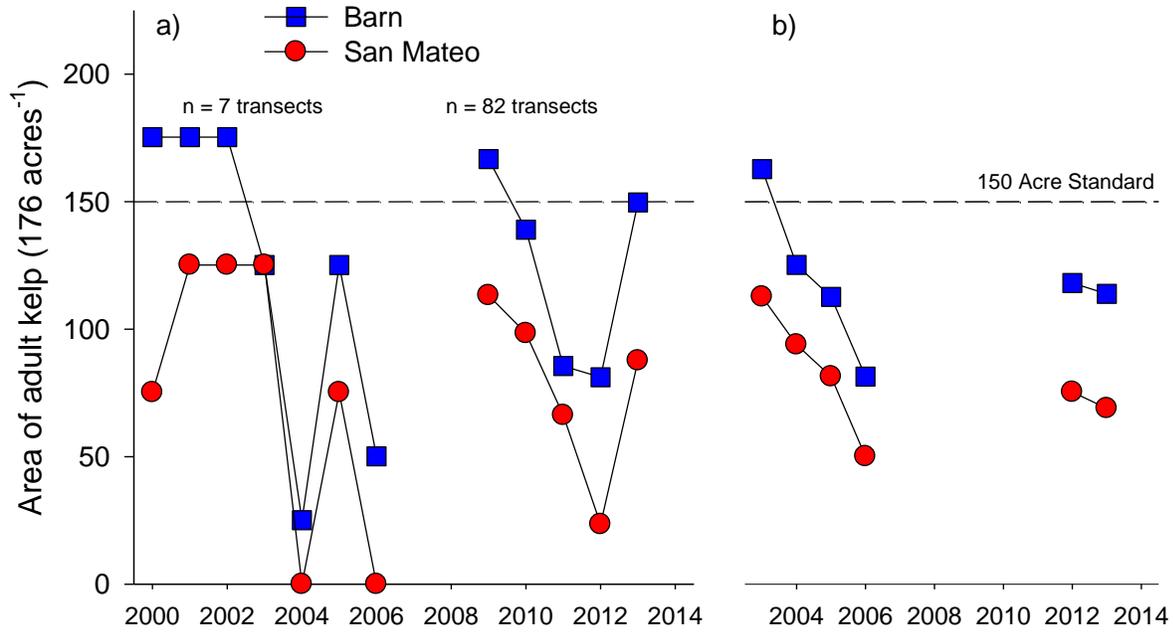


Figure 7.2.3. Estimated number of acres of medium to high density adult kelp at San Mateo and Barn. (a) annual values for 2009 - 2013 and (b) 4-year running average.

When considered collectively, the results from analyses of existing data suggest that the present size (176 acres) and configuration (42% rock coverage) of Wheeler North Reef is not sufficient to consistently meet the absolute performance standards for fish standing stock and giant kelp area. The conclusions drawn from these analyses are that some form of remediation will be needed for the Wheeler North Reef to consistently meet its current mitigation requirements over the long term. The staff of the California Coastal Commission will be working with SCE in the coming year to identify opportunities for remediation.

8.0 Future Monitoring Plans

Monitoring of the Wheeler North Reef, San Mateo and Barn will continue in 2014 using the same level of effort and methods employed in 2013. In addition to monitoring, additional analyses will be done with existing data to aid the CCC staff in their discussions with SCE to identify opportunities for remediation that enable the Wheeler North Reef to consistently meet its current mitigation requirements over the long term

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