

Coastal Zone Management Act Federal Review Fact Sheet

Understanding the recently announced federal review of California's coastal management program

On May 20, 2026, the U.S. Department of Commerce [directed](#) the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to conduct a formal review of the California Coastal Management Program (CCMP) under the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA). In its announcement, the Department of Commerce stated NOAA would examine California's review of activities related to offshore oil production, pipeline maintenance, spaceport infrastructure, desalination projects, undersea cables, and other federal priorities. The CCMP is carried out by the California Coastal Commission, the State Coastal Conservancy, and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission.

This type of review typically happens every five to 10 years. The state has undergone many successful reviews since the CCMP was approved by NOAA in 1978. The state's program has routinely received high praise for its innovative and rigorous approach to coastal protection.

NOAA most recently evaluated California's management program in 2024. Although the CZMA notes that NOAA may conduct ongoing reviews, this recent direction from the Department of Commerce is unusual given how recently the previous review was undertaken.

The NOAA evaluation process in 2024 included extensive meetings with state coastal zone management staff, public officials, other government staff members, and other interested parties. The federal government also held a virtual meeting open to the general public to solicit input on the coastal program.

Although NOAA completed a draft report in June 2025 on its review of the CCMP — finding the successful implementation and enforcement of the federally approved program, a final report was never released.

715 P Street, 20th Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814 Ph. 916.653.5656 <http://resources.ca.gov>

Frequently Asked Questions

Can the federal government suspend its grant payments under the California Coastal Management Program?

The CZMA authorizes the U.S. Secretary of Commerce to suspend financial assistance to a state coastal program if the state fails to adhere to any portion of its approved program or the terms of its grant or cooperative agreement funded under the law.

California currently receives millions of dollars a year from the federal government to help operate its coastal management program. That funding is divided among the California Coastal Commission, the State Coastal Conservancy, and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission.

If financial assistance is suspended, the commerce secretary must provide the governor with specific actions that can be taken by the state in order to resume payments. The suspension of financial assistance may not last for less than six months or more than 36 months after the date of suspension.

What is the timeline and opportunity for public participation under this newly announced review of the California Coastal Management Program?

This review process will begin with the federal government issuing a Notice of Intent to Evaluate in the Federal Register, which triggers a minimum 45-day public comment period. The federal government must hold at least one public meeting in the coastal zone of the affected state to solicit comments a minimum of 45-days after the Federal Register notice is issued.

The federal government will then issue its findings. The state has up to 30 days, plus a potential 15-day extension, to respond. The federal government can then issue its final review, potentially including a determination of non-adherence. If there is a determination of non-adherence, interim sanctions may be invoked immediately, including the amount of financial assistance to be suspended and redirected.

California Coastal Management Program track record on key industries

Undersea cables

California has reviewed 18 undersea fiber optic cable projects under the CCMP over the past 30 years. The state has concurred with each project. California's reviews have helped ensure that projects included provisions to protect coastal resources, such as:

- Protection of commercial and recreational fishing grounds and gear
- Siting that avoids and offsets damage to sensitive marine habitats
- Accurate maps to improve navigational safety
- Safeguards against accidental entanglement of endangered marine life, such as whales and sea turtles

Offshore oil and gas

California has conducted reviews of proposed offshore oil and gas development consistently for the past 49 years, including under its CZMA authority. When appropriately sited and designed to include adequate measures to protect the coast, including oil spill prevention and response, such projects have been authorized.

California reviews of oil and gas projects under the CZMA have resulted in significant project modifications, such as:

- Revised proposals to incorporate alternative drilling designs
- Modified drilling projects to address significant spill risks and other potential impacts to marine habitats
- Revised proposals for exploratory drilling to incorporate timing restrictions to minimize fishery impacts

Concerns that can lead California to object to a federal or federally regulated project include:

- Unmitigated oil spill risks
- Significant damage to marine ecosystems
- Water quality degradation
- Navigational hazards, including to commercial shipping lanes

Space launches and related development

Since 1980, at least 135 aerospace and space launch-related projects have been reviewed under the CCMP. Only two of these projects received objections.

These objections were based on unresolved procedural issues regarding rocket launches at Vandenberg Space Force Base in Santa Barbara County. The state also raised several concerns, including that sonic booms generated by rocket launches would harm endangered and protected wildlife. Despite California's objections, the federal government decided to proceed with these projects without any delay.

Desalination

Over the past fifty years, the Commission has approved several dozen desalination facilities statewide. Only one desalination project has ever gone through the CZMA review process. It was a pilot-scale project in federal waters and was found to have no effects on coastal resources.

In the past five years, the Coastal Commission has approved two municipal scale desalination projects, one in Orange County and one in Monterey County, as well as one pilot scale project, in Mendocino County.

In the last 20 years, the commission has only denied one private desalination facility. It would have had unavoidable significant impacts on the ocean food chain and was proposed for a site under imminent threat from sea level rise.

Pipeline Maintenance

Pipeline repair and maintenance projects are routinely reviewed and permitted under state law rather than the CZMA. Review of such projects typically focuses on the manner in which the work is conducted rather than whether or not it should be completed.