Summary of SB 484: Affordable Coastal Housing Categorical Exclusions (Cat Ex) Orders

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Senate Bill 484 Overview

Senate Bill 484 (Chapter 416, Statutes of 2025) amended the California Coastal Act by adding a new provision – Section 30610.05 – to help streamline approval of affordable housing.[1] This provision requires the California Coastal Commission, in consultation with the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), to identify and then designate infill areas in select coastal jurisdictions without certified Local Coastal Programs (LCPs) where 100% affordable housing projects are categorically excluded from the requirement to obtain Coastal Development Permits (CDP). Per the statute, adopted exclusions will remain in effect until June 30, 2037, or the certification of an LCP, whichever comes first.

Background on the Coastal Act

The Coastal Act requires that new development in the coastal zone maximize public coastal access, protect sensitive habitat and other natural resources, and be safe from flooding, erosion, and other coastal hazards. The Act also contains provisions specific to housing, including policies that encourage density within already-developed areas and promote housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income households.

Persons wishing to undertake development in the coastal zone must obtain a CDP or other relevant Coastal Act authorization. In the majority of the coastal zone –

[1] All section references are to the Public Resources Code, unless otherwise specified.

approximately 90% of coastal zone land – development proposals are reviewed and approved by local governments pursuant to their certified LCPs, which regulate development in accordance with the Coastal Act. In the remaining areas, including jurisdictions that have not yet obtained a certified LCP, the Coastal Commission reviews and permits new development directly, ensuring that it is consistent with the resource protection and public access policies of Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act.

Categorical Exclusions Under the Coastal Act

Categorical Exclusion (Cat Ex) Orders are an established mechanism for exempting specific types of development in defined geographic areas from CDP requirements (Section 30610(e)). Generally, Cat Ex Orders are developed and proposed by local coastal cities or counties, then must be certified by a two-thirds vote of the Coastal Commission. After certification, applicants for excluded projects apply to the local government to obtain evidence that their development is covered by the Exclusion Order. But in the case of SB 484 Cat Ex Orders, the Commission itself, in consultation with HCD, will develop the Orders, and then it will certify and implement the Orders.

Cat Ex Orders, including Orders under SB 484, are also subject to several statutory limitations, including that they cannot apply in certain sensitive areas, including tidelands and beaches; that excluded development may not result in significant adverse effects on coastal resources or public coastal access; and that the Orders will automatically terminate in jurisdictions without certified LCPs once an LCP is certified.

Key Provisions of SB 484

This bill contains several additional provisions for the Cat Ex Orders that are specific to SB 484:

Geographic Extent: SB 484 applies specifically to the twelve coastal jurisdictions that do not have a certified LCP, where the Coastal Commission retains direct permitting authority.[2] The Commission, in consultation with HCD, is required to identify coastal infill areas within at least three *(*of the twelve) uncertified jurisdictions where the Cat Ex Orders would apply. Selection criteria include geographic distribution, variation in jurisdictions' population size, and housing needs. The Commission must identify the largest feasible exclusion areas within each selected jurisdiction.

[2] The following twelve coastal cities do not have certified LCPs: Fortuna, City of Monterey, Goleta, Santa Monica, City of Los Angeles, Hermosa Beach, Torrance, Seal Beach, Costa Mesa, Aliso Viejo, San Clemente, and Solana Beach. Note that pursuant to Coastal Act Section 30600(b) and Sections 13300-13325 of Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, the City of Los Angeles elected to issue local CDPs in the coastal zone under a Local Government CDP Program, which the Commission certified in 1978.

The Cat Ex Orders must also avoid sites subject to sea-level rise and related coastal hazards, be based on a consideration of each selected jurisdiction's housing element inventory, and affirmatively further fair housing. The Commission must certify the three Cat Ex Orders by July 1, 2027.

Eligible Development: Within the areas designated in the Cat Ex Orders, qualifying residential housing projects comprised entirely (100%) of units restricted for very low-, low-, or moderate-income households, excluding managers' units, will be categorically excluded from the CDP requirement through June 30, 2037 or until certification of an LCP, whichever occurs first.

Commission Certification and Implementation: The Cat Ex Orders take effect upon certification by a two-thirds vote of the Commission's appointed members, following a public hearing. After certification, proponents of qualifying residential housing development projects will need to obtain notices of exclusion from the Coastal Commission for their individual projects under the applicable certified Cat Ex Orders before they may commence development. Obtaining a notice of exclusion does not exempt a qualifying project from needing to obtain other Planning and Zoning Law entitlement approvals required by the local jurisdiction.

Legislative Reporting: The Commission is required to report to the Legislature by January 1, 2035 on the number of projects constructed or under construction pursuant to the Cat Ex Orders required under this statute.

Key Dates

- **October 6, 2025:** Signed into law
- **July 1, 2027:** Deadline for Commission to certify at least three SB 484 Cat Ex Orders
- **August 1, 2027:** Deadline for Commission to publish SB 484 Cat Ex Order maps
- **January 1, 2035:** Commission's report to Legislature due
- **June 30, 2037:** SB 484 Cat Ex Orders expire

For questions, contact housing@coastal.ca.gov.