Mr. Don Hansen, Chair  
Dr. Donald McIsaac, Executive Director  
Members of the Pacific Fishery Management Council  
7700 NE Ambassador Place #101  
Portland, OR 97220  

My name is Ciro Ferrigno, and I’m a second-generation purse seine fisherman who grew up in the wetfish industry in San Pedro, California. I began fishing full-time in 1981 on the F/V Ferrigno Boy, taking over for my father. I have fished for sardines, anchovy, mackerels, market squid, bonito and tunas in southern California for the past 27+ years, and seven families rely on my fishing income for their well-being. I also represent the San Pedro wetfish fleet on the Board of Directors of the California Wetfish Producers Association.

Sardines are critically important to California’s wetfish fleet and markets. Sardines help pay the bills and keep our markets going throughout the year. I was among those fishermen who qualified for a federal limited entry permit when the federal government took over sardine management in 1999. Many wetfish fishermen in San Pedro and other ports in California lost out, but we were told limited entry was necessary to prevent overcapitalization and protect historic participation in the fishery. The fishery management plan also set trip limits for our limited entry fleet to prevent rapid expansion, and a capacity goal to keep fishing capacity in line with the resource.

California fishermen who missed qualifying were told they could fish in the “open access” region north of Point Arena, but Oregon and Washington wound up closing those areas to federal permitted fishermen unless they also bought a state permit. Those state authorized limited-entry fisheries expanded and added more boats, but they didn’t have the same trip limits and capacity limits as we do in California.

Now the models used to develop stock assessments are predicting a resource decline, and California’s historic limited-entry fishery is at risk because it seems there may now be more fishing capacity than the resource can support, at least according to recent stock assessments. California’s federally permitted limited entry fishery was closed a total of 184 days in 2008, as a result of the seasonal coast-wide derby fishery that occurred, when the 2008 quota dropped from 152,000 tons to 89,000. California’s sardine fishery is now shut down until January 2009, and San Pedro has lost 50 percent of its peak season, which begins around October and continues until around March of the following year. Many of the small seiners who fish exclusively for sardines here may be forced out of business, and we could be in the same boat if squid don’t show up soon.

The stock assessment proposed for 2009 is even lower than it was in 2008. We need the Council to understand the year-round importance of sardines to California’s wetfish industry, and to protect the federal limited entry fishermen when the sardine quota declines. We urge the Council to review the current allocation framework at the earliest opportunity.
Sardine comments

We also ask the Council to support the Pacific Northwest industry’s efforts to develop an aerial survey, which we hope will improve sardine resource assessments by documenting the huge sardine schools that fishermen see in the ocean, stretching from California into the Pacific Northwest and Canada. California’s wetfish industry spent millions of dollars to recover the sardine resource, and we definitely do not want to risk overfishing. But right now we believe the stock assessment does not reflect the reality on the grounds, and we need better science to avoid being shut down unnecessarily.

In that regard, it is critically important for the Council to approve an adequate set aside to allow incidental catch of sardine in other fisheries when the sardine fishery is closed. We support at a minimum the framework recommended by the Advisory Subpanel, which provides 1,000 metric tons for the January 1-June 30 fishing season; 1,000 metric tons for the July 1-September 14 season; and 4,500 metric tons for the September 15-December 31 season, including protection for the squid fishery and a buffer to ensure the total harvest guideline is not exceeded. We need that 6,500 metric ton set aside to be approved regardless of the quota set for the directed sardine fishery.

In closing, we again ask the Council to recognize the historic and year-long importance of sardines to California’s wetfish industry. The federal fishery management plan allowed open-access fishing in the north to provide fishing opportunity when sardine abundance was high, but it did not address what to do when it wasn’t, simply noting that sardines would likely disappear from the Pacific Northwest when the biomass declined below 750,000 tons. According to the 2008 stock assessment, the biomass has fallen below that level. It is critically important to verify that assumption, and if true, to find management solutions that protect both the resource and California’s federal limited entry fishery.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ciro Ferrigno