October 13, 2009

Mr. Dave Ortmann, Chair &
Dr. Don McIsaac, Executive Director
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place #200
Portland OR 97220-1384

RE: Agenda Item I.1.d: Sardine Assessment and Management Measures &
Experimental Fishing Permit (EFP) for Pacific coast Sardine Research including CA

Dear Chairman Ortmann, Dr. McIsaac and Council members,

The California Wetfish Producers Association (CWPA) represents the majority of active wetfish fishermen and processors from both Monterey and southern California. We very much appreciate this opportunity to address the Council on the subject of Pacific sardine management measures and research.

As we have testified in the past, we believe developing a second index of sardine abundance is essential to expand understanding of the sardine resource and improve sardine resource management. We appreciate the Council’s interest in and support of the industry-sponsored aerial/acoustic research program, in which California collaborated with the Northwest Sardine Survey this past summer. A STAR panel review of survey results found:

- “The 2009 aerial survey is a key source of information about the stock status of Pacific sardine.”
- “The 2009 aerial survey can be used to calculate a fishery-independent estimate of biomass that provides critical information on stock size and distribution.”
- “The Panel endorsed the use of the 2009 aerial survey estimate for use in the Pacific sardine stock assessment. The aerial survey provides a basis for scaling the abundance of Pacific sardine, something which was not available in the past.”

We strongly support the STAR panel recommendations and encourage the Council to adopt the panel’s advice.

We very much appreciate the acceptance of survey methodology by the stock assessment team and STAR panel, and their encouragement to refine and continue the survey in the future. Repeating the aerial survey in 2010 and beyond will reduce the coefficient of variation applied this year to address uncertainty.

We encourage the Council to approve another collaborative EFP application and related research set-aside, as focusing attention on this research in its critical early years outside the pressures of the directed derby fishery will improve precision of this minimum biomass estimate, ultimately leading to an improved index of abundance, and providing essential information on the sardine resource.

California’s wetfish industry and CWPA support further development of this survey and have committed our energies and funding to continue our collaboration with the Northwest Sardine Survey in 2010.
We continue to work closely with the principals involved in this survey to improve the outcome in 2010. Although the California portion encountered difficulties in 2009, in major part caused by El Niño conditions, including a persistent marine layer, as outlined in the Final EFP Report, such conditions are predicted to abate by the time of the survey next year.

We hope to repeat and improve on the core survey protocol approved in 2009. In addition, we are investigating the use of hydroacoustics to estimate density and biomass of sardine schools too large to quantify with ‘point sets’. As summarized in the final report, we experimentally deployed a Biosonics DT-X scientific echosounder outfitted with a side-looking transducer to measure sardine schools, and successfully completed an acoustic survey of a series of sardine schools while the acoustic tow vessel identified the sardines with onboard acoustics, and the aerial crew took photographs of the vessel and the sardine schools. CWPA transmitted the acoustic data file and pertinent photographs to Biosonics Inc. for analysis with Echoview software. The report is in preparation and will be submitted as soon as it is available.

We are fully committed to ensure the success of the second year of this EFP research and hope the Council will support its continuation also. In CA the use of the research set aside will be taken under the guidance of CA Northwest scientists, with the goal to achieve representative samples of school size, as outlined in the EFP final report. In addition, we will also use our Biosonics DT-X, again deployed with both down-sound and side-looking capabilities to better quantify school height and density.

Again, we appreciate the Council’s interest in this research and urge you to approve a collaborative Pacific coast sardine EFP application for the 2010 season, allowing this synoptic research program to be conducted after the summer directed fishing period has closed.

Thank you for your consideration.
Best regards,

Diane Pleschner-Steele
Executive Director