



G10

SPORT FISHING & SCUBA DIVING

Tuesday, September 10, 2000

Pacific Fishery Management Council

2130 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 224
Portland, Oregon 97201

Mr. Jim Lone and council members,

I have been active in the recreational fishing industry for over thirty years. I presently operate a sportfishing landing out of Morro Bay, Ca. This is one of just two sportfishing landings for over 100 miles in either direction on this isolated part of the California coast.

Last year you moved the closure line so that we would be included with southern California because closing in March and April would have left us completely unemployed with nothing else to do. We do not have a reliable salmon season in March and April like the landings to the north, or other surface fisheries like the landings to the South. However in January and February we can run enough whale watching tours to stay off unemployment.

The first option on the list of the summary or recreational fishery options proposed by the California Department of Fish and Game is to include us with the northern California zone. This would change our seasons and have severe impact on our businesses with no benefit to the fishery. We have planned a huge whale watching advertising campaign for whale watching tours instead of fishing during January and February to keep our boats busy enough to keep our doors open. Changing our closure dates now would be a devastating blow.

The hardest part of the changes that were made last year was that we did not have time to adapt our businesses. Changing our season again now that we have had time to adapt to the changes made last year would have a severe and unfair financial impact to our businesses and these small fishing and tourist based communities. We will be out of work again, completely unemployed and have wasted our efforts and money to adapt ourselves to the changing regulations.

For these reasons I implore that you would not move us into the Northern closure zone. Also that the transportation issue would be resolved by allowing the transport of rockfish through restricted areas without any special permits just as salmon and all other species are presently.

I would like to also comment on some of the other proposals. Because of our relatively remote location on a long stretch of coastline, our fishery on the central coast is very healthy. We have as many lingcod as I have ever seen but on average they are smaller than they were 20 years ago. Presently we release about 25 lingcod for every one that is over 26 inches. And 20 of those released are over 20 inches. So I think the size restrictions for lingcod are working well and sufficient as they are.

I would like to see the size limit on cabazon raised to 16 inches. Years ago I used to see cabazon up to 18 pounds regularly. I have not seen one that big for three years now.

We have been cooperating with fishery observers for many years but I would support a requirement for CPFV's to do so provided space is available. The same requirements need to be applied to all user groups.

I don't think a one or two hook restriction will accomplish the goals intended. The chances of catching three bocaccio at the same time are the same as one hook set three times. Probably less because typically one hook is set with less weight and will sink slower allowing midwater fish (bocaccio, widows, etc.) more opportunity to bite. Our passengers tend to use larger baits or jigs with single hook set-ups as well. Larger baits tend to catch fish with larger mouths like bocaccio and lingcod.

The closure of area 1 as defined by the summary of recreational fishery options does not effect our area so it is easy for me to say it is a good idea.

However, that proposal closes an area that has been fished hard for many years. The closure designed to protect cow cod will protect all species, reduce the overall take and provide a breeding ground for all species. This is such a huge area that this proposal alone should be enough to allow rebuilding of the fishery without further restrictions. The benefits of year round, closed areas for ground fish need to be explored.

All prawn trawling should be converted to traps. I know several prawn boat captains that tell me "off the record" what their bycatch really is. I have seen many pictures as well. The trawl waste of rockfish species and particularly bocaccio is far greater than most people suspect. It is wrong to put such harsh restrictions on the public because they might impact bocaccio when the prawn fishery has such a huge, undocumented bycatch.

In summary, I ask you will not change our seasons in central California by moving the zone boundary. I cannot stress this enough. This would be financially disastrous for the central coast landings and have no real benefit to the fishery. The coastal zone we fish in is huge and our impact is very small comparatively. Providing for rebuilding by closing specific zones that have been over fished is perhaps the best solution. But we will need to provide for transportation of fish through these closed areas.

I am sure there are other solutions to the problems we are facing. I hope you will let us work with you to find a solution that will rebuild and conserve our fisheries for future generations.

Very sincerely yours,

Darby Neil
Vice President