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UPDATE ON CALIFORNIA'S PACIFIC SARDINE FISHERY IN 2002

California's purse seine fishery landed a total 35,589 metric tons of sardine as of the 6th of September. The fishery south of Pt. Piedras Blancas has landed 30,476 mt, with 48,485 mt remaining on the initial southern allocation. The northern California fishery based in Monterey Bay has landed 5,113 mt to date, only 13% of the initial northern allocation. Northern California's fishery will close this weekend, along with Oregon and Washington, when the northern harvest guideline is attained. Lower Monterey landings can be attributed to sporadic sardine availability in combination with an active squid fishery between March and August.

Two exogenous factors have affected California's sardine fishery this season. Early in the year, the California Department of Health Services issued health warnings due to high domoic acid levels in sardine and anchovy. Domoic acid closures affected the Monterey fishery in March and the southern California fishery from April through June. Concurrent to this, problems arose with a major export market in Australia. In April 2002, the Australian government implemented a moratorium on importation of California sardine and mackerel for use in tuna rearing pens. The moratorium was due to the confirmed presence of the viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHSV) in Pacific sardine and mackerel from southern California and a concern that VHSV could infect Australia's endemic sardine population via the pen feeding practice. Interim measures allowing some importation are now in place, and exports are expected to resume at a steady pace as the California's fall-winter fishery commences.

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