

DON H. SMITH  
OREGON**United States Senate**

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3704

April 9, 2003

The Honorable Conrad Lautenbacher, Jr.  
Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator  
14<sup>th</sup> Street and Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Urgent: Sent via facsimile

Dear Admiral Lautenbacher:

I am writing to request your assistance to ensure the management of the Pacific sardine fishery reflects changing ocean conditions and related sardine population movements and expansion. I believe the Pacific Fishery Management Council (the Council) should take urgent action to ensure that a premature closure of the northern management area of the Pacific sardine fishery does not occur in the future while fish is still available for harvest on the coastwide harvest guideline.

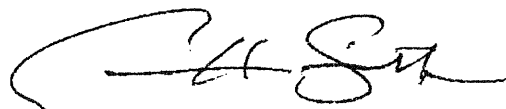
As you know, many coastal communities in Oregon and Washington have been negatively impacted by the successive collapses of the coastal salmon and Pacific groundfish fisheries over the last ten years. Many fishers have left the industry altogether or moved to alternate fisheries to support their families. However, recent changes in ocean conditions have brought an unexpected surge in the population of sardines off of the Pacific Northwest coast. This fishery has helped many Oregon fishing families weather the current groundfish crisis.

The Pacific sardine fishery quota is divided into a northern and southern zone. However, as mentioned above, the sardines have been appearing in much greater numbers in the northern zone off of Oregon and Washington over the last three years. Unfortunately obsolete regulations continue to allocate sardine harvest to the southern zone even though much of the sardine biomass is now appearing in the northern area. I believe the Council should adopt regulations that reflect these changes and allow the reallocation of the sardine quota from the southern zone to northern zone as circumstances warrant.

The Council is currently considering several alternatives to address this issue. I urge your support of either "Alternative 3" or "Alternative 5." Both of these options would allow for the management of this fishery to more accurately reflect sardine population trends and the needs of coastal communities in the Pacific Northwest.

I appreciate your consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to contact me for more information on this matter.

Sincerely,

Gordon H. Smith  
United States Senator

Cc: Bob Lohn, NMFS Regional Director  
Bill McDonald  
Hans Radtke, Pacific Fishery Management Council Chairman

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 8, 2003

Dr. Hans Radtke, Chair  
Pacific Fishery Management Council  
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 200  
Portland, OR 97220

Mr. Rod McInnis, Regional Administrator  
NOAA Fisheries - Southwest Region  
501 W. Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200  
Long Beach, CA 90802

Dear Dr. Radtke, Mr. McInnis, and Council Members:

We are writing to you regarding the upcoming Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) meeting. As we understand it, one of the matters to be discussed and decided at this meeting is the proposed regulatory amendment for changes to the sardine fishery allocation. The PFMC will be considering five alternatives for management and interim revisions to the Pacific sardine allocation framework within the Coastal Pelagic Species Fishery Management Plan.

As you know, Washington and Oregon have struggled greatly with the downturn of the economy and currently suffer some of the highest unemployment rates in the country. The sardines harvested in the north are approximately three times larger than the sardines caught in the south. The larger sardines are sold per ton at markets for 50% to 100% times the price per ton of the smaller sardines caught in the south. At the mouth of the Columbia River, this translates into approximately 1,000 jobs in Ilwaco and Astoria and a very large economic benefit to the rural coastal communities of Washington and Oregon.

As we understand it, the north has not been able to maximize the harvest of sardines because the harvest guidelines are apparently not fully utilized. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, one of the national standards for fishery management plans is the efficient utilization of available harvest. This standard allows for maximum harvest while preserving the fishery. However, in the sardine fishery, the larger fish found in the north are higher in oil and fat content, resulting in fewer fish being caught before the harvest guideline tonnage limit is reached. This suggests the fishery is not being managed as efficiently as it could be.

In 2002, the northern fishing season was prematurely closed on September 14<sup>th</sup> when the harvest guideline limit was caught. Reallocation of the remaining harvest would not have occurred until October 1<sup>st</sup>. Both the PFMC and our offices contacted NOAA Fisheries in order to support reallocating the fishery prior to October 1<sup>st</sup>. While our joint efforts were successful in quickly reopening the fishery, it is estimated that 28,000 metric tons of the remaining harvest guideline for sardines were not caught, which was still a strong blow to an already economically depressed area.

April 8, 2003

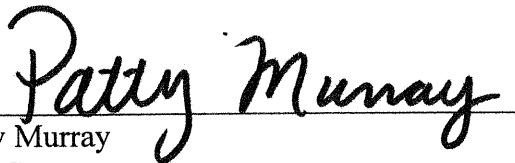
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The northern sardines are returning at greater rates each year. As a result of the potential increase in harvest in the north, several processors and secondary businesses would like to expand existing operations or locate new facilities at or near the mouth of the Columbia River. However, without an increase in the northern harvest guideline, they lack the certainty of increased harvest capacity and cannot move forward with their economic development and business plans. Further business investment in the northern region's economy and communities is dependent upon the increased harvest guideline for the northern sardine fishery.

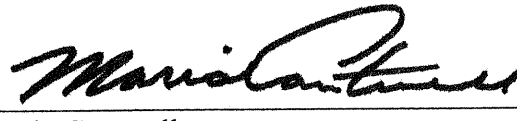
We have consulted with representatives of the ports, sardine processors, commercial fishermen, and seasonal employees affected by the proposed changes to the northern region fishery allocation. We are supportive of increasing the harvest guideline for Washington and Oregon. In addition, we support any opportunity to allow for maximum harvest, while still ensuring sustainability of the fishery. This will generate the certainty local businesses need to expand or locate operations in Washington and Oregon and generate new jobs and revenue for the struggling local economies. We strongly encourage the PFMC to take these factors into consideration when reviewing the alternatives outlined in Exhibit G.2.b in the Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team Report for April 2003.

We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray  
U.S. Senator



Maria Cantwell  
U.S. Senator



Brian Baird  
US Representative, 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District, Washington