



Pacific Fishery Management Council *NEWS RELEASE*

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Contact: Ms. Jennifer Gilden, Communications Officer, jennifer.gilden@noaa.gov
Dr. Donald McIsaac, Executive Director, 503-820-2280
Mr. Jim Milbury, National Marine Fisheries Service, 310-245-7114

PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL VOTES TO CLOSE 2015-16 PACIFIC SARDINE FISHERY

Rohnert Park, California – The Pacific Fishery Management Council today announced the closure of the 2015-16 Pacific sardine directed fishery, beginning July 1.

Pacific Council members heard from scientists that the abundance forecast for the 2015-2016 season, scheduled to start July 1, was significantly below the 150,000 metric ton threshold for a directed fishery. They also heard testimony from fishery participants and environmental groups before reaching a decision to close the directed fishery. Small amounts of sardines may be taken incidental to target fishing on other stocks, and a much reduced harvest amount was allocated to the Quinault Indian Nation along the mid-Washington coast.

“While this is a sad day for all those dependent on a healthy sardine fishery, it is actually a good thing that this Council is addressing the problem directly, something you don't always see across the nation or certainly, internationally,” said Council member Frank Lockhart of National Marine Fisheries Service. “This Council cutback on salmon with extensive closures a decade or so ago, and the Klamath and Sacramento stocks rebuilt fairly quickly. This Council also cut back on lingcod and other groundfish catches in the recent past, and those stocks are also rebuilt. This action today paves the way for the sardine population to rebuild as soon as the ocean cycles permit.”

Sardines are subject to large natural population swings associated with ocean conditions. In general, sardines thrive in warm water regimes, such as those of the 1930s, and decline in cool water years, like the 1970s. After reaching a recent year peak

of about one million metric tons in 2006, the sardine biomass¹ has dropped to an estimated 97,000 metric tons this year.

Council Vice Chair Herb Pollard said, “The Council’s Fishery Management Plan has done its job. When the sardine stock declines to this point, the directed commercial fishery stops. This is a testimony to the precautionary provisions the Pacific Council has locked into our management regime.”

“We know boats will be tied up, but the goal here is to return this to a productive fishery,” said Council member David Crabbe.

The Council takes a precautionary approach to managing Pacific sardines. When the fish are abundant, more fishing is allowed; but as the stock size declines, the amount of allocated to harvest decreases. When the biomass is estimated at or below 150,000 metric tons, directed commercial fishing is shut down.

Although directed commercial fishing will close, the Council will allow up to 7,000 tons of sardines to account for small amounts taken as incidental catch in other fisheries (such as mackerel), live bait harvest, Tribal harvest, and research. However, if the allocated amount of incidental harvest is reached, those other fisheries will also be shut down.

On Wednesday, April 15, the Council will consider whether to take the additional step of making changes to the remaining months of the current season, which ends June 30.

Background

The sardine biomass is assessed annually, and the fishing year runs July 1 through June 30. Although sardine fishing doesn’t generate the money that some other fisheries do, it is an important source of income for communities up and down the west coast.

Sardine productivity is generally linked to ocean temperatures, but it’s not a perfect relationship. For example, temperatures in the Southern California Bight have risen in the past two years, but we haven’t seen an increase in young sardines as expected.

The allowable harvest in recent years has been as high as 109,000 metric tons (2012), but has dropped as the biomass has dropped. In 2013 the harvest guideline was 66,495 mt,

¹ Biomass is the (estimated) weight of a stock of fish.

in 2014 it was 23,293 mt. Exvessel revenues were \$21.5 million in 2012. Sardine exports were valued at \$44 million in 2010 and \$34.8 million in 2011.

Council Role

The Pacific Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 for the purpose of managing fisheries 3-200 miles offshore of the United States of America coastline. The Pacific Council recommends management measures for fisheries off the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington.

All Council meetings are open to the public.

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On the Web

- Pacific Fishery Management Council: <http://www.pcouncil.org>
- Coastal Pelagic Species Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation document (historical information): <http://tinyurl.com/lzs3f2n>