



Pacific Fishery Management Council

NEWS RELEASE

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PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL VOTES TO CLOSE PACIFIC SARDINE FISHERY FOR THE THIRD YEAR IN A ROW

Sacramento, California – The Pacific Fishery Management Council today announced the continued closure of the Pacific sardine directed fishery through June 30, 2018. This is the third annual closure in a row for this fishery.

Council members heard from scientists that the abundance forecast for the 2017- 2018 season, scheduled to start July 1, was significantly below the 150,000 metric ton threshold for a directed fishery. They also considered 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 small harvest amount was allocated to the Quinault Indian Nation along the mid-Washington coast.

“This represents a real hardship for coastal communities that depend on sardines and other coastal pelagic species. However, there are signs that the sardine population is increasing, so we’re hopeful there will be some fishing opportunity for next year,” said Council Chair Herb Pollard.

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 86,586 metric tons in 2017.

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 8,000 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.

Background

The sardine biomass is assessed annually, and the fishing year runs July 1 through June 30. Although sardine fishing hasn't generated the money that some other fisheries have in recent years, it is an important source of income for communities up and down the west coast.

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, and in 2014 it was 23,293 mt. Since July 2015, the harvest guideline has been zero.

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

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>