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October 19, 2012

Mr. Dan Wolford, Chair  
Pacific Fishery Management Council  
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101  
Portland, OR 97220-1384

Dear Chairman Wolford and Council Members,

For more than two decades, San Francisco Baykeeper has worked to reverse the environmental degradation of the past and promote new strategies and policies to protect the San Francisco Bay. Much of our work is focused on protecting San Francisco Bay waters, and we believe a healthy oceanic ecosystem is vital to the waters' vitality. Our ultimate mission is to protect and enhance the water quality of the San Francisco Bay for the benefit of its ecosystems and human communities.

The San Francisco Bay is home to a remarkable array of species, including salmon, harbor seals, sea lions, and brown pelicans. Many of the species in our bay, including those named above, rely heavily on forage fish as their main source of food. We see forage fish are the cornerstone of the ecosystem along the Pacific coast, and believe their protection is of utmost importance. We thank the Council for their decision to recognize the importance of forage fish to a productive ecosystem, and ask the Council to fulfill its commitment to adopt strong protection for these currently unmanaged forage fish.

Our coastal ecosystem is under increasing pressure. The Pacific marine environment is affected by large-scale changes in climate, coastal habitat degradation, invasive species, and rising demand to feed a growing world. A resilient ecosystem depends first and foremost on a balanced food web, which is why conservation of prey fish is widely recognized as a pillar of ecosystem-based fishery management. For these reasons, we urge the Council to adopt a strong Fishery Ecosystem Plan in a timely fashion. A strong Fishery Ecosystem Plan will maximize the benefit we derive from the ocean by weighing the tradeoffs between large-scale fisheries targeting prey fish versus leaving them in the water to feed ocean wildlife, including highly sought after fish like halibut, salmon, and tuna.

It's important that the Council adopt a plan that's actually useful in improving fishery management, rather than a weighty document that sits on a shelf. The Council's top priority should be to ensure the stability of the marine ecosystem and existing fisheries here on the Pacific coast. Adequate conservation of forage fish may be the single most important action the council can take to protect the Pacific marine ecosystem – and the fishermen and coastal communities that depend on it. Thank you for showing leadership on this critical policy issue.

Sincerely,

Deb Self  
Executive Director