

Pacific Fishery Management Council **NEWS RELEASE**

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PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL RESPONDS TO U.S. OCEAN COMMISSION REPORT

The Pacific Fishery Management Council commends the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy on the release of its preliminary report. The report brings needed attention to marine issues and highlights the connectedness of humans to our environment. Ocean governance is a multifaceted process that requires a carefully coordinated management system, and the Commission's report emphasizes the complexity of this process and the roles of the many agencies and organizations involved. The Pacific Council hopes the report will result in clear Congressional guidance, dedicated funding, new scientific research, and improved ocean governance. Indeed, when finalized, the Commission's recommendations could direct ocean governance for decades.

Fisheries management is just one facet of ocean governance. However, the value of sound fisheries management is reflected in the public's strong desire to protect the marine environment, and in the importance of commercial and recreational fishing to the many small coastal communities that depend on marine resources for their livelihoods. Self-sufficiency and a sense of stewardship for our nation's bounty remain strong in small West Coast communities like Westport, Astoria, Charleston, Eureka and Fort Bragg.

The regional fishery management council process was created with the passage of the Magnuson Act in 1976. Since then, fishery management councils have represented regional and local interests in management of our nation's fisheries. This system is unique among natural resource agencies in that those who are most affected by policies have a voice in decision making. The Commission's report recognizes the importance of participatory governance, noting that "governance of ocean uses should ensure widespread participation by all citizens on issues that affect them." Further, the report states, "many of the nation's most pressing ocean and coastal issues are regional in nature and require input on planning and management by state and local policy makers and other relevant stakeholders." The fishery management council process provides a foundation for this much needed regional planning and management.

Fisheries management operates on two distinct and sometimes competing levels. In managing fisheries to provide sustainable harvests, the Councils are mandated by

Congress to balance conservation with socioeconomic considerations and to make decisions informed by the best available science. The Council process provides a unique forum for interested parties to help determine management policy that balances these goals while meeting the unique needs of our constituencies.

The Commission's report speaks in detail about the role of science in the regional fishery management process. Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs) are highlighted as an effective way to ensure the quality of science used in fishery management. The Pacific Council agrees that SSCs should have a strong voice in the Council process. Indeed, many Commission recommendations regarding the SSC have already been implemented by the Pacific Council. Our SSC comprises scientists of the highest caliber, including senior level federal, state, and tribal agency scientists and internationally respected academic scientists. The Pacific Council's SSC reviews baseline scientific data, ensures that the best available science is used, and recommends harvest policies from a science perspective.

In the face of a crisis in the West Coast groundfish fishery, the Pacific Council has radically restructured commercial and recreational groundfish fisheries along the West Coast. Vast areas have been closed to protect depleted stocks; stringent gear restrictions are in effect; and harvest levels for many species are well below acceptable biological catch levels. But these restrictions on harvest opportunity have come at a tremendous cost to recreational and commercial fisheries and fishing communities.

In response to and in accord with the Council's Groundfish Strategic Plan, groundfish fishing effort has been substantially reduced. A limited entry trawl permit buyback was implemented and partially funded by trawl fishermen themselves. The Pacific Council means to continue rationalization of the groundfish trawl fishery through development of an individual fishing quota program. Recent management successes—including the removal of Pacific whiting from the "overfished" list, and a recent assessment showing that the overfished lingcod stock is rapidly rebuilding—bolster our confidence in the regional fishery management council process and, specifically, in the Pacific Council family.

We welcome the opportunity to work with the Governors of our four member states (Washington, Oregon, Idaho and California) as they develop their comments to the U.S. Ocean Commission. While the Pacific Council supports many of the findings of the Commission, we would hope that through this review and revision of the preliminary draft the Commission's recommendations to the President and Congress will be not only visionary, but also practical.

The Pacific Council is one of eight regional councils in the United States established by Congress to manage U.S. fisheries and is responsible for fisheries in federal waters off Washington, Oregon, and California. Please visit us on the web — www.pcouncil.org

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