

Pacific Seafood Pull-Out Complicates Ice Production in Harbor

December 3, 2024



September 5th, per its lease agreement with the Harbor, Pacific Choice Seafood issued a 30 day notice it would close down its ice plant in the Harbor. The company attributed its exit to declining ice sales, escalating costs and operational expenses. The company is in the process of removing critical equipment from the plant and deploying that equipment to its operations in Oregon and Washington.

The move dismantling the Crescent City facility complicates the transition of shaved ice production to CCHD oversight.

In its Defense, Pacific Seafood has complained verbally about declining ice sales, since May but commissioners did not act on those verbal statements because there was no written acknowledgement. Commissioners' first (and last) written communication was the September 5th letter abrogating the month to month agreement in effect since 2016. During this Holiday season, Harbormaster Mike Rademaker has been seeking both short and long term solutions.

The why's and the wherefor's of declining ice sales can be directly attributed to onerous Government regulations. California's palpable thumb on the fishing industry has driven 75 percent of the commercial fleet out of the Harbor to Oregon whose regulations are far more lenient than the Golden State. Dept of Fish and Wildlife outright banning of many species claiming these species are depleted due to claims of overfishing, a claim vigorously challenged by California anglers. The latest crackdown by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on ammonia-based refrigerant in producing ice has driven the fleet and ice producers to the Beaver State, where regulations are far more relaxed.

Nonetheless, Pacific Seafoods has pulled out and the beleaguered harbor is reeling.

The short-term rabbit out the hat solution is the CCHD will purchase and truck tons of shaved ice from the Brookings harbor in an effort to provide said ice shavings to commercial shrimpers and crabbers for its impending season beginning in January, 2025.

The District has contracted to purchase two freezer units, a 40' unit for \$8,000 and a 20' unit for \$6,000.

Pacific Sea Food's exit has dramatically impacted Del Norte CoCounty. The California EPA has driven (catch) processing to neighboring Oregon. Over a million pounds of shrimp in California waters have been diverted to Brookings. The loss is estimated to be approximately \$500, 000 in handling fees.

Harbor Commissioner Rick Shepherd lamented his disappointment when he shared, " Oregon can mandate sea food caught in its waters be processed locally. Why can't California do the same?" (for sea food caught within its territorial waters) Here's the longterm option. The Crescent City Harbor District (CCHD) issued the following statement:

"The Harbor, City and Del Norte County understand the challenges Pacific Seafood faces and the CCHD is prepared to act decisively. The Harbor has identified readily available grant funds which can be allocated quickly to repair and restore the ice plant ensuring full regulatory compliance ahead of the Crab Season. The effort isn't just about infrastructure- it's about protecting fishing jobs and fortifying a key pillar of our community's economic foundation. The CCHD implores Pacific Seafood to reconsider its position to close down the ice plant."