

Lack of data driving fish ban

December 8, 2023



Local fisherman presented the ocean fish ban dilemma to the Board of Supervisors last week.

The fishermen reported lack of any quillback data continues to discourage the Pacific Fishery Management Council regulators to lift the ban; however, there is hope on the ocean horizon new data will be learned by late December into January 2024.

Supervisor Chris Howard kicked off the discussion on the ocean fishing ban and shared with his colleagues why the Department of Fish and Wildlife restricted the balance of ocean fishing in the state pending updated data. DWFD issued the ban on quillback in late August. Howard and vessel owner Steve Huber attended the recent Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting in November in a plea for reconsideration. The PFMC advises the DFWD on enforcement and fish ban restrictions. PFMC commissioners were reluctant to lift the ban until new data is gathered. Fishermen claim the data from 2021, at the zenith of the COVID virus was faulty, utilizing inaccurate trawling protocol instead of the more accurate hook and line practice.

Local fisherman and vessel owner Huber will be escorting three National Oceanic and Atmospheric scientists and four fishermen out on Huber's vessel to conduct the more accurate hook and line protocol on the status of the quillback species. Huber strongly contends the data from 2021 by Department of Fish and Wildlife data is inaccurate as older data was gleaned from other fishing grounds. Huber hopes to show the quillback is not in jeopardy and, in process, persuade the PFMC to modify its position on the ban.

Congressman Jared Huffman sent his staff representative John Driscoll via ZOOM to address supervisors about Rep. Huffman's letter to the National Marine Fishery Service requesting a pause to implement the ban, pending results of new data. This request for a federal intervention for the moratorium may be the opportunity for the PFMC to reevaluate its ban on the quillback.

Howard called the ban absurd and a disaster (to Del Norte County) if allowed to continue.

Huber announced at the Grange meeting two weeks ago his intent to bring NOAA scientists aboard his vessel in March of next year but pushed the date up to late December in hopes of allowing NOAA staff enough time to evaluate the recently acquired data.

The ban on the quillback could be amended or modified by June of 2024, the start of the new ocean fishing season.

In other board action, Chairman Darrin Short recognized retiring Planning Commissioner Johnny Jacobs for his 11 years of service on the commission. Jacobs announced he's stepping down and has recently undergone shoulder surgery.

Short also announced the ZOOM public comments feature will be discontinued effective in January 2024. Board meetings will continue to be streamed on YouTube.

The Board meets Tuesday, December 12, at 10 a.m. at the Flynn Center.