

County stands against fishing closure

November 3, 2023



The Del Norte County Board of Supervisors authorized sending a representative to the November Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting to present the county's position on the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's nearshore groundfish fishery closure in the northern management area.

In addition, the Board of Supervisors authorized chairman Darrin Short to sign a letter to Gov. Gavin Newsom and another letter of objection to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

"We came in late to the game. The board and the entire state of California was caught off guard with this decision," Supervisor Chris Howard said in reference to the Aug. 21 directive banning Quillback retention from Mendocino to the Oregon border. The order was later updated to full closure for the remainder of the year.

"(California Department of Fish and Wildlife) has bad models and bad data. The full closure not only affected recreational fishing, but commercial fisheries. In doing so, it shut down the entire state. We thought

the salmon closure was bad, but the groundfish industry in the state of California in particular is quite a bit larger.”

Howard said he does not believe the task at hand is an uphill battle, because there are a number of supporters in both the government and the private sector in agreement with the county’s opinion.

“I’ve never seen 100 percent closure to restrict fishing in the 28 years I’ve been here,” he said. “There is a willingness to amend the change.

“It’s too late to impact our season. The decision has been made and there are no signs of reopening. So, we’ve lost the remainder of this year.”

The chronology of what happened:

- August 7 - CDFW sent out a bulletin closing all Quillback Rockfish retention in the Nearshore Groundfish Fishery from Mendocino to the Oregon border.
- August 21 - CDFW determined the quota of approximately 2,000 pounds of Quillback had exceeded 130 percent, hence ordered a complete closure directive immediately. The vote to shut down ocean fishing was 7-6, with two abstentions. The balance of the fishing season is now declared over.
- September 1 - CDFW extends the closure to the Central Management Area south of Mendocino.

The ban extends from the shoreline to a depth of 50 fathoms or 300 feet.

The closure of ocean fishing will be an economic disaster for Crescent City and up and down the California coast, starting in May, 2024, according to a local fishing group consisting of Harry Adams, Steve Huber, Andrea Spahn and Chris Hegness.

The group called for letters of support to persuade Pacific Fisheries to amend its recommendations to CDFW.

The council meets again in Garden Grove, November 1-8. The fishermen group plans to pool its personal funds to send a representative to that meeting.

It has yet to be decided which supervisor will represent the county at the meeting to persuade Pacific Fisheries, Short said. But plans are to send either Howard or Supervisor Joey Borges to represent Del Norte County.

In its letter to Gov. Newsom, the Board of Supervisors highlighted, “... As a rural coastal community, many residents of Del Norte County are reliant on the local marine fishery for their livelihood such as charter boat owners, fishing supply stores, and seafood restaurants,” according to the draft.

“Sport ocean fishing is a major attractant for visitors to our community and many sectors of our economy rely on this tourism such as grocery stores, gas stations, motels, RV parks, restaurants, etc. The effect on the individual fisher people and small business owners has been and will continue to be devastating, particularly

when coupled with the concomitant 2023 commercial and sport salmon season closure, as well as our community's recovery from this summer's 94,693-acre Smith River Complex Fires."

The letter to the governor outlined an estimated \$450 million loss to the California salmon fishery is a drop in the bucket compared to the state's commercial and recreational groundfish fishery, with a nearly \$200 million in ex-vessel value in 2018 and overall commercial and recreational fishing activity which is responsible for \$25 billion in economic activity and the creation of 142,000 jobs in California.

In its letter to California Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Charlton Bonham, Del Norte County expressed dismay with recent decisions by CDFW to close the 2023 nearshore rockfish season in marine waters off the Del Norte County coast.

"... It is our basic position that CDFW's decision to close the nearshore groundfish fishery points to a failed system of modeling and data collection, which will not be able to accurately determine the status of many nearshore species in State waters without significant investment by the Department," as stated in the letter.

"... In our view, it would have been more prudent for CDFW to isolate the nearshore closure strictly to the quillback rockfish if that was the intended focus of the measures taken. We wish to propose that CDFW, at a minimum, institute a zero-retention policy for the 2024 season for quillback but allow other non-threatened rockfish to be pursued."

The Pacific Fishery Management Council manages fisheries for approximately 119 species of salmon, groundfish, coastal pelagic species (sardines, anchovies, and mackerel), and highly migratory species (tunas, sharks, and swordfish) on the West Coast.

It is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by Congress in 1976.

The city council in Crescent City also voted to send a letter opposing the fishery closure.