

Fishing update discussed at The Grange

December 2, 2023



Earlier this month, Charter vessel owner/captain Steve Huber, representing Del Norte fishermen, addressed the Pacific Fishery Management Council in Garden Grove, seeking a moratorium on the recent quillback ban. The PFMC revealed there is no active data to substantiate any change in the ban. Until verifiable data can be gathered, the PFMC will not change its advice to the Department of Fish and Wildlife to lift the ban.

On another related issue on the PFMC agenda was a discussion about raising the quota for halibut fishing. Currently, the breakdown in Area 2A, which includes Washington, Oregon and California is as follows: Native tribes retain 35 percent of all halibut caught. The remaining 65 percent is divided up accordingly. Washington 32%, Oregon 30% and California 4 percent. The Golden State sought to increase its halibut haul one percent, since it has already exceeded its 40,000-pound quota. Washington was asked to surrender .06 percent and Oregon .04 percent, but the Evergreen State objected and kyboshed the change. Both Washington and Oregon haul of halibut, about 300,000 pounds each did not exceed either state's quota. Bottom line: no change to the current breakdowns.

Here's the chronology of the decision to restrict ocean fishing in Del Norte County and down the Pacific Coast.

- August 7, CDFW sent out a bulletin closing all Quillback retention in the Nearshore Groundfish Fishery from Mendocino to the Oregon border.
- August 21, CDFW determined the quota of approximately 2000 pounds of Quillback had exceeded 130 percent, hence ordered a complete closure directive immediately. The vote was 7-6 with two abstentions. The balance of the ocean fishing season was now declared over.
- Sept 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 about 300 feet. Fish are unattainable below that depth, according to fishermen.

Huber traveled south to the recent local PFMC meeting in Orange county two weeks ago and made his plea to lift the ban plea until verifiable data can be ascertained. His request was denied.

At the Nov. 16 Grange meeting, 25 fishermen learned from Huber concerning the lack of data on quillback. The original group of fisherman contend the last data search in 2021 during the COVID crisis employed faulty methodology and did not use traditional hook and line protocol.

Huber and the fishermen made a successful plea to have scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) board Huber's vessel in February and March of next year to conduct hook and line data recovery on the 76 different species of quillback.

This data will accurately predict the quillback question or whether there is in fact a quillback issue. Failure to conduct this testing protocol may result in a 49 year extension of the ban.

Supervisor Joey Borges attended both Grange meetings and announced the discussion and comment of this issue has been agendized for the Nov. 21 board meeting.

Huber, Harbor Commissioner/vessel owner Harry Adams, commercial vessel owner Andrea Spahn and Englund Marine General Manager Chis Hegness, along with Borges, sat on the panel, last week to answer questions and make comments.

The group is raising awareness of impending economic disaster if ocean fishing continues to be restricted. Huber commented, "Visitors come to Del Norte to enjoy the beaches and Redwoods and of course, to fish. Visitors brings lots of money to support motels, vacation rentals, restaurants, merchants and gaming and just enjoy Crescent City."