

Harbor sends emergency letter to Fish and Wildlife

August 21, 2023



In two emergency meetings Thursday and Friday, August 17-18, Harbor Commissioners voted 3-0 to send a letter to Assemblymember Jim Wood, Senator Mike McGuire and Representative Jared Huffman, asking for a 60 day moratorium on banning all ocean fishing along the North Coast.

August 7, the California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) issued a directive regarding the retention of the quillback rockfish as prohibited state-wide. DFW sent out a second bulletin effectuating the ban mid-night, August 21, during the height of the ocean fishing season. DFW cites the 2021 stock for quillback and other related groundfish have suffered a severe population decline. DFW urges anglers to use best fishing practices to reduce the impact on quillback rockfish and other related species.

The ban on ocean fishing runs from Mendocino to the Oregon border and extends to areas seaward of a 50 fathom boundary (one fathom equals 300 feet) line from the northern groundfish area.

The announcement and ban has sent shockwaves across the fishing community which predicts severe negative economic impact.

The Crescent City Harbor District (CCHD) met in special session, last week and passed a draft letter to the California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, with copies sent to state Senator Mike McGuire, Assemblymember Jim Wood, Congressman Jared Huffman objecting to the recently enacted regulatory changes within the Northern Management Area. Here are the bulletpoints of the letter:

- The conservation boundary should be modified. CCHD proposes a modification to start the Rockfish Conservation Area offshore at a 10 fathoms depth, citing data the species of primary concern are rarely found in waters shallower than 10 fathoms. Forcing fishermen to venture beyond the 50 fathom boundary places them in precarious and dangerous waters.
- Economic Domino Effect. The sport fishing industry is not simply a recreational pastime but an essential part of the (Del Norte) local economy, generating revenue, creating jobs, and supporting countless ancillary business such as hotels and vacation rentals. Sadly, fishing enthusiasts have canceled reservations, after the ban was announced. Many of these same recreational fishermen have moved to Oregon where these restrictions are non-existent.
- CDFW's abrupt in-season regulatory action was reckless. Charter boat businesses operate on careful planning, taking bookings and scheduling trips months in advance. Clientele travel considerable distances, plan their vacations and allocate significant resources based on assurance of these bookings.
- Request for intervention. Commissioners asked for a 60 day moratorium on these implemented restrictions to consider reviewing its decision. The restrictions threaten to dismantle an intricate and long- established economic structure that has been a source of livelihood for generations.

Local fishermen also expressed their displeasure and concern with the ban during the heart of the ocean fishing season.

Bo Harkins who moderates a Facebook page, Crescent City/Del Norte Fishing states, "I can't understand why the season was closed after DFW said no retention of quillback after August 7. Then, a week later, sent (DFW) out a bulletin stating no inshore fishing after August 21. It doesn't make sense. Our community will be deeply affected by the closure." Harkins continued, "we get people who come here to vacation and fish because we have a great fishing area. The motels, restaurants, vacation rentals will be deeply affected." Harkins asked folks to voice their concern to the Board of Supervisors who were recently advised of the dilemma. Harkins and his fishing colleagues urge the public to contact CDF Marine specialist Carolyn McKnight (831) 227-8683 to express your opinion. Harkins respectfully asks those who call to show courtesy and respect to game wardens who he said are our greatest allies in helping return ocean fishing to its appropriate role in Del Norte County.