

PRESS RELEASE

From the
CALIFORNIA SALMON COUNCIL
INSTITUTE FOR FISHERIES RESOURCES
PACIFIC COAST FEDERATION OF FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS

For Immediate Release:
May 16, 2003

Contact: David Goldenberg (916) 933-7050
Larry Collins (415) 585-5711
Natasha Benjamin (415) 561-3474
Zeke Grader (415) 561-5080

GLOBAL FISHERIES MAY BE IN CRISIS BUT MOST LOCAL FISHERIES REMAIN ROBUST, SUSTAINABLE

Fishermen Say Consumers Can Help Preserve Fish Stocks and the Oceans By Selecting Locally and Sustainably Harvested Seafood

SAN FRANCISCO, May 16 – “What’s happening globally is not happening locally,” was the message today from California fishing industry leaders describing generally healthy fish stocks and the efforts that have gone in to making a number of west coast fisheries sustainable. During a briefing this morning at San Francisco’s historic Fisherman’s Wharf, fishing leaders responded to two reports that came out this week painting a generally bleak picture of the status of fish populations across the globe and in many parts of the U.S.

“California’s fishing industry got its wake-up call with the collapse of the sardine fishery 50 years ago and a few years later when we nearly lost our salmon,” said Zeke Grader, Executive Director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations. “Although recent data indicates the sardine decline was not directly due to fishing pressure and the salmon losses, as everyone knows, came about due to in-river habitat destruction and massive water diversions, these events made activists out of many fishermen knowing they had to control their catches and fight to protect our rivers and oceans.”

No one at the morning briefing refuted the study done by Drs. Ransom Meyers and Boris Worm of Dalhousie University in Canada that appeared in Thursday’s edition of the scientific journal *Nature* finding that as many as 90 percent of the world’s largest fish are gone. A National Marine Fisheries Service report released this week on the status of U.S. fish populations for the year 2002 found 86 overfished stocks and 66 stocks subject to overfishing. What local leaders said, however, is that most fish stocks along the California coast, with the exception of groundfish, are in good shape because fishermen have been proactive, working to put in place regulations to prevent overfishing and protect habitats.

"I can't comment about fisheries in other parts of the world, but I think governments, conservationists and even other nation's fishermen could learn a lot from what we've done here in California to sustain our fisheries," said Larry Collins, a San Francisco fisherman and Chairman of the California Salmon Council. "Our fishing men and women have taken the lead in restoring fish habitat and making sure our fishing is well-managed. And, if this past crab season and this salmon season are any indication, we're succeeding."

MORE.....

David Goldenberg, the Executive Director of the California Salmon Council described the process California is now going through to get certification for its troll-caught king (chinook) salmon as a sustainable fishery by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). To date, only a handful of fisheries in the world have applied for and gotten certification; the only U.S. fishery to date with MSC certification is Alaska salmon, although California hopes to be next with its salmon. Other west coast fisheries that are in the process of applying or considering applying for certification are Pacific halibut and blackcod, Dungeness crab, albacore tuna, and California lobster (probably jointly with Baja California). The MSC is London-based and the only credible international certifier of sustainable fishing practices at this time.

Joining the fishing leaders was Dr. John McCosker of the California Academy of Science's Steinhart Aquarium. McCosker, an expert on global fisheries, backed up statements by the fishing leaders that many California and west coast fishing stocks are well-managed and healthy. Steinhart Aquarium has developed a seafood guide for consumers to help them select seafood by informing them on which fisheries are sustainable, which ones people should ask questions about and which ones to avoid. The Monterey Bay Aquarium and San Francisco's Aquarium of the Bay also have developed guides, and the three are in near total agreement with their recommendations.

While the news from many west coast fisheries is good, the fishing leaders also warned that conservation of fish stocks is a work in progress. Continued health of many salmon stocks and the restoration of others will depend on continued availability of adequate fresh water flows in streams and to estuaries, said Grader. Collins also said crab fishermen need help to get trap limit measures put in place in the Dungeness crab fishery to maintain it as a sustainable fishery. They also warned against new efforts to allow offshore oil drilling and proposals to permit genetically modified fish in aquaculture operations where these "frankenfish" could get loose into the wild and devastate native fish populations.

The leaders went on to say the public could greatly help the cause of fish and ocean conservation, assuring there will be fisheries in the future and healthy fish populations for future generations of Americans, by:

- 1) Supporting efforts to get State Legislatures and the Congress to do a better job of protecting fish habitats and ensuring fisheries are conducted responsibly; and
- 2) Taking care in their purchase of seafood, by asking questions about what the fish is, where it's from and how it was caught and using the seafood guides to help direct purchases. "Think local and sustainable."

Just last week the City of San Francisco passed two resolutions by Supervisor Gerardo Sandoval encouraging the consumption of locally-caught and sustainably harvested seafood, along with better seafood information so consumers can make better choices as to sustainability and health.

"People who are concerned about our fish and oceans don't have to give up eating seafood, but they need to ask more questions and be more discerning - buying only sustainably harvested and, whenever possible, locally-caught fish," said Natasha Benjamin, Southwest Regional Director for the Institute for Fisheries Resources. Benjamin continued saying, "fish are one of the very best sources of protein. Consumers can reward themselves and reward those fishing men and women who fish responsibly by becoming informed seafood buyers." --30--