UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
299 Foam Street
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To: Interested Parties

Fisheries in central California are a key component of the historical, cultural, and economic fabric of the region. Catches of many fishery resources, however, have greatly declined in the last decade, due both to real decreases in fish populations and to increased regulations enacted to conserve or rebuild fish stocks. Although the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (Sanctuary) does not regulate fisheries, it does play a role in protecting fishery habitat and conducting research on fisheries.

In 1998, the Packard Foundation sponsored the California Sea Grant publication "Fishery Resources of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary" by Starr, Johnson, Laman, and Cailliet. That original publication provided a summary of existing commercial and recreational fisheries, management strategies, management issues, and status of selected fisheries according to landings at the five major ports within the Sanctuary from 1980-1995. In June 2001, the Sanctuary commissioned an update of the 1998 report by Starr, Cope, and Kerr. During the past year, brief presentations on the progress of the report were made at various meetings, including those of the Sanctuary Advisory Council, Research Activities Panel, and marine reserves working group of the Alliance of Communities for Sustainable Fisheries.

The new enclosed report is entitled, "Trends in Fisheries and Fishery Resources Associated with the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary from 1981-2000." This new report goes beyond just providing an update of landings data through the year 2000. The different fisheries are presented using a habitat approach rather than on a species-by-species basis. Technical concepts and information that fishery scientists use to estimate the population sizes of harvested species are summarized for a general audience. A brief description of the types of fisheries operating in the region encompassed by the Sanctuary, and a summary of fishery management operations from 1981-2000 are provided. The report also provides suggestions as to why fishery landings changed over time, including changes in regulations (including gear restrictions and quotas), declines in populations, and El Niño events.

The fishery trends summarized in this report and the overall status of fish populations are more complex than anticipated, and cannot be succinctly represented in this memo. A few broad points, however, are included here. Since 1981, the number of vessels and people fishing in Sanctuary waters has decreased, although most local ports saw an increase in vessels in 1999 and 2000. Catches of pelagic species has increased while landings of other species combined has decreased. More regulations designed to protect decreasing fish populations have meant shorter seasons and lower quotas for many species. And, the population status of many species remains

unknown. Several trends within the five habitats described in the report are summarized here, although do not fully represent all fisheries within a particular habitat.

- Nearshore Rocky Reef and Kelp Habitats
  - High catches in the 1990s were probably not sustainable, and appeared to have reduced the abundance of nearshore fish species

- Nearshore Soft Bottom Habitats
  - Market squid, the main component of catches in this habitat, fluctuated probably due to market conditions and oceanographic changes
  - While landings of fishes from this habitat group have been decreasing, the population sizes of most of the fish species in this habitat are unknown

- Rocky Deep Shelf And Slope Habitats
  - Fish populations in this habitat (mainly rockfish) were the most heavily impacted by the high rates of fishing that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s
  - Low stock sizes attributed to poor recruitment and excessively high rates of fishing (see report for probable causes)
  - Several rockfish species (bocaccio, canary, cowcod, widow rockfish) and lingcod have been declared overfished; most other rockfishes show decreasing trends
  - Stock assessments of several rockfishes (chilipepper and shortbelly) indicate stable or increasing trends

- Soft Bottom Deep Shelf And Slope Habitats
  - Commercial catches remained high between 1985 and 1996, but landings for most species have declined since the last edition of this report was published.

- Open Water Habitats
  - Landings of small coastal pelagics (e.g. Pacific sardine) have increased since the 1980s, yet landings are still much smaller than annual landings from 1930-1950.

Information contained in this publication will be used to advise the National Marine Sanctuary Program during the central California Joint Management Plan Review, and possibly by other agencies and groups. We hope you will take time to read the enclosed complimentary copy to learn of the status of our natural resources. Additional copies are available through California Sea Grant College Program (www-csgc.ucsd.edu) and, to a limited extent, at the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary offices.

Regards,

William J. Douros
Superintendent