



May 17, 2017

Charlton H. Bonham
Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
1416 9th Street, 12th floor
Sacramento CA 95814

Dear Director Bonham,

The California Red Sea Urchin fishery continues to suffer sustained harvest declines statewide, with Northern California and San Diego regions experiencing declines in excess of 80% over the last five-year landing average. The California Sea Urchin Commission believes these two areas are truly eligible to be classified as a fishery failure.

The decline in urchin abundance can be traced to several environmental anomalies including the 2015 warm water event, the 2016 El Nino, and chronic ocean acidification due to continually increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The cumulative effect has decimated California's kelp canopy up and down the state. Kelp is what feeds the urchins and the loss of kelp has contributed to the overall decline in urchin abundance. Urchins are sold for their internal gonads, or roe, and the lack of a sufficient kelp canopy is contributing to poor quality urchins lacking internal gonads. Urchins with nonexistent or of such poor quality roe have little to no market value. In 2015, when the ocean temperature rose, Department of Fish & Wildlife (DFW) biologists and divers noted that urchins were dying in huge numbers. The die off was observed coast wide, but was most prevalent in the Northern and Southern parts of the state. The die off has since subsided, but kelp canopy remains well below historic levels, particularly in the extreme ends of the state. In summary, the Red Sea Urchin fishery has experienced similar cyclical periods. In the last few years, this cycle has been worse than others and has been longer lasting. The industry has reached a new low in 2016.

Attached is a spreadsheet with statistics provided by the DFW's California Fisheries Information System (CFIS). We have singled out San Diego data in a second spreadsheet because the DFW data combines all Southern California ports. These two documents indicate the North Coast region has experienced an 82% drop in production, with a 77% drop in value over the last five-year average (2016 vs 2011-2015). In the San Diego region, the entire fishing area experienced a 79% drop in production, with the greatest drop experienced in Dana Point with a 97% loss over the same period.

The California Sea Urchin Commission represents over 300 commercially licensed divers and processors who market over 8 million pounds of urchins domestically and internationally. We are requesting your assistance to seek a gubernatorial proclamation of a fishery failure so the industry can pursue federal disaster assistance. The proclamation should be sent to Wilbur L. Ross, Jr., U.S. Secretary of Commerce to petition his concurrence. Please let us know how we can assist you in this request.

Sincerely,



David Goldenberg
Executive Director
California Sea Urchin Commission

CC:

Senate President pro Tempore Kevin de León	Senator Toni Atkins
Senator Tom Berryhill	Senator Robert Hertzberg
Senator Jerry Hill	Senator Hananh-Beth Jackson
Senator Mike McGuire	Senator Holly Mitchell
Senator William Monning	Senator Jim Nielsen
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