



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

May 2, 2025

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, District of Columbia 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick:

In accordance with section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), I am requesting that you expedite a fishery resource disaster for the California northern red sea urchin fishery for the 2023 and 2024 fishing seasons.

The California red sea urchin fishery is managed by the State of California under two distinct management zones. Fishing in the northern zone (north of the Monterey/San Luis Obispo County line) largely occurs north of San Francisco Bay. Fishing in the southern zone (south of Monterey/San Luis Obispo County line) largely occurs at offshore islands and along the mainland coast south of Point Conception. Commercial take is allowed under a statewide permit and harvest in the two zones is differentiated by a distinct size limit and season structure.

California is continuing to experience an economic disaster in our northern red sea urchin fishing industry and communities due to oceanic conditions that have affected the kelp forest ecosystems. Over the last decade, this fishery has been severely impacted by environmental conditions. The North Pacific Heat Wave and El Niño events generated persistent warm water conditions that created a trophic cascade of ecological impacts which have affected the fishery and devastated kelp production. Surveys from remote sensing data, from 2014 to 2022, found a 95% and 90% loss of surface kelp canopy in Sonoma and Mendocino counties, respectively. Recent data (2023 through present) indicates a lack of kelp recovery in these counties.

Kelp is the primary food source for sea urchins. Its loss has created persistent starvation conditions leading to reductions in the food value of the red sea urchins targeted by the fishery. In addition, a population explosion of the less marketable purple sea urchin continues to overgraze recovering kelp beds, adding further stress to the fishery. Due to these environmental changes, a fishery resource disaster was declared for the northern management zone for the 2016 and 2017 seasons and again for the 2018 and 2019 seasons.

Since then, the value of the fishery has continued to decline and has shown minimal improvement (Figure 1). In determining ex-vessel revenue losses, the years 2014, 2015 and 2020 through 2022 were used as the basis for the most recent 5-year average. These years correspond to two years immediately preceding the first fishery disaster in 2016 and three years after the last disaster year in 2019. Ex-vessel value declined by 39% in 2023 and 84% in 2024 (Table 1). These initial estimated impacts are based only on ex-vessel value of commercial landings and do not account for additional impacts on fish processors or other businesses that rely on this fishery.

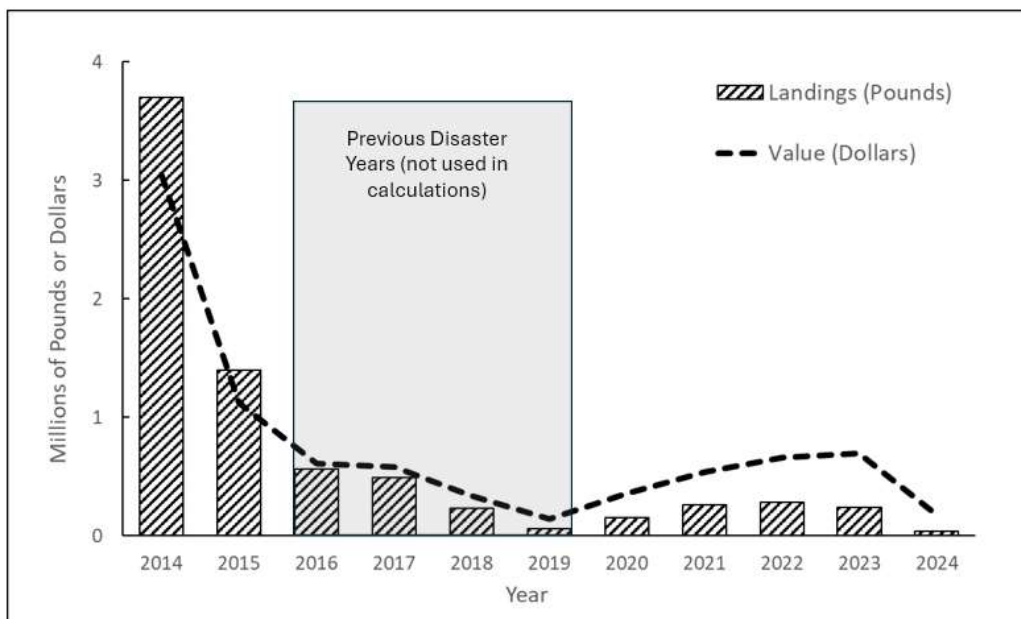


Figure 1. Landings and ex-vessel value in the northern management zone from 2014 through 2024; and highlighting the previous disaster years not used in calculations.

Table 1. Red sea urchin ex-vessel value in the northern management zone from 2014 and 2015 (pre-disaster years); and 2020 through 2024 (post-disaster years); and the percent decline from

five year average value of \$1,144,530 (2023 and 2024). Prior disaster years are not included in this analysis.

Year	Ex-Vessel Value	Percent Decline of Ex-Vessel Value from Average (2014 through 2022*)
2014	\$3,046,083	-
2015	\$1,122,711	-
2016-2019	Prior Disaster Years	-
2020	\$360,421	-
2021	\$535,836	-
2022	\$657,598	-
2023	\$696,122	39%
2024	\$177,460	84%

*Excludes prior disaster years.

Given the significant impact, I request you declare a fishery resource disaster for the fishery under section 312(a) of the MSA.

A fishery resource disaster determination will begin the process for the affected fishing communities to receive essential economic assistance, which will be critical for the well-being of our fishing industry. Red sea urchins are a vital component of California's natural resources and provide significant economic and cultural benefits to our state. I also ask National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries to work directly with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to expeditiously complete the review process.

Please direct questions or requests for more information to Dr. Craig Shuman, CDFW Marine Region Manager at r7RegionalMgr@wildlife.ca.gov or 805-568-1246.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and your ongoing support for California's fishing communities.

Sincerely,



Gavin Newsom
Governor

CC: The Honorable Alex Padilla
United States Senate

The Honorable Adam Schiff
United States Senate

The Honorable Jared Huffman
The Honorable Sam Liccardo
The Honorable Kevin Mullin
The Honorable Jimmy Panetta
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Mike Thompson

The Honorable Mike McGuire
Senate President pro Tempore
California State Senate

The Honorable Robert Rivas
Assembly Speaker
California State Assembly,
Chair Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture

The Honorable Henry Stern, Chair
Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee
California State Senate

The Honorable Diane Papan, Chair
Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee
California State Assembly

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary
California Natural Resources Agency

Charlton H. Bonham, Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director
California Fish and Game Commission