



February 29, 2024

Agenda Item F.8 - Final Inseason Adjustments Groundfish

Dear Chair Pettinger,

The Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust (MBFT) is a nonprofit working to ensure that our coastal communities benefit from active, working waterfronts and local, sustainable seafood for years to come. We are also an IFQ shareholder in the Pacific Groundfish fishery since 2014.

At the request of fishermen in our region, I am writing to impress upon you the current economic challenges and future additional negative impacts of the quillback situation now unfolding north of 36 degrees latitude (from southern Monterey County north). The 'small boat' commercial fishermen in our region primarily depend on three fisheries for their income: salmon, Dungeness crab, and nearshore groundfish. I'll use a common analogy: the 3-legged stool, to make my point.

### **Leg 1: Salmon**

The 2023 closure of the California salmon season was a big hit. By comparison, in 2022 fishermen here landed just over 500k lbs worth \$4.2 million<sup>1</sup>. They made \$0 in 2023 and likely will again in 2024. Fishermen are still waiting on federal disaster relief, which was 30% less than requested, and not expected to come through until at least the end of this year or possibly 2024.

### **Leg 2: Dungeness crab**

For the sixth year in a row, the Dungeness crab season was opened late - after the holiday market, and only 50% of gear was allowed. In 2022, the fleet in our area landed less than 130,000 lbs, worth about \$825,000. This is compared to their best year, 2014, when they landed over \$4 million worth of crab to Monterey area ports. In effect, just over ¼ of crab revenue in primary and secondary economic benefits to this area is gone.

### **Leg 3: Nearshore groundfish**

Last fall, the nearshore fishery was hit with a series of state and federal closures to prevent overharvest of quillback rockfish. Just recently (2/12/24), the CDFW emergency rule gave access back to those with shallow and deeper nearshore permits inside of 20 fathoms. **However, anyone else who derives income from groundfish is no longer allowed to fish in state waters.** This last closure, while it may be a smaller proportion of annual revenue (\$1.6 million estimated in 2022), is actually the most significant, as this is

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<sup>1</sup> All landings & value data were sourced from CDFW Marine [Data Explorer Portal](#), accessed Feb. 2024

the most common starting point for new entrants. The door is now closed on them, unless they can manage to steam out to federal waters safely and comply with VMS and other requirements therein.

As of now, all three legs of the stool are wobbly at best (crab) or completely gone (salmon). Also hit are the recreational, charter, and fish receiving/processing industries, the cumulative effect of these circumstances all landing in the same time period exacts a heavy toll on the overall coastal economy. Diminished landings means less wharfage for ports, fewer opportunities for fishing-related tourism, and less money spent on local services. The remaining infrastructure to service the industry is at risk of failing.

Given the challenges, constraints, and closures, it should be obvious to everyone how dire the threat is to the economic viability of our small fishing communities in California. This crisis is not just about a failing coastal economy, but the potential to lose a major cornerstone of our region's food security and heritage. We need to protect our ocean ecosystem and resources, however we must also consider and account for the impacts to the communities, or we will lose seafood producers as a result.

On behalf of the Monterey Bay region and its fishery dependent businesses and families, I ask you to please address the following:

- 1) Move the line for federal in season groundfish commercial from 36 degrees to 37.11 degrees latitude (Pigeon Point, or the northern line of the CDFW GMA)
  - a) this ask assumes the GMT analysis at this meeting shows relatively low risk of quillback encounters south of 37.11
- 2) Request that NMFS document the economic impacts of the nearshore fishery closure in 2023-24 on each coastal community from 36 north (per Standard 8 MSA Guidelines)
- 3) Support CDFW's recommendation from November 2023 (E2a Supplemental CDFW Report 2) to conduct a full assessment of the quillback resource in CA before moving forward with a rebuilding plan (prioritize quillback per Agenda Item F.3 at this meeting)
- 4) Support the creation of a fisherman cooperative survey to gather data on quillback in CA (per Dan Platt and other's suggestions via public comment in November 2023)

I lastly want to express sincere appreciation for this Council, all members and staff, associated agency personnel at NMFS and CDFW, scientists, and the fishermen who engage tirelessly here in service of a constructive outcome that benefits our ecosystems and our communities.

Please reach out to me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Executive Director  
Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust  
[mmahoney@mbfishtrust.org](mailto:mmahoney@mbfishtrust.org)

