

“GREEN SHEET”

Meeting/workshop: June 6-7, 2008, Commission Meeting
Agenda Item: Coastal Sardine Fishery – Briefing
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Background:

Since 2000, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has had an emerging commercial purse seine fishery for Pacific sardines. Following an extensive public process which included establishing and meeting with a formal Sardine Advisory Board, the Director decided to advance the sardine fishery from a trial fishery to an experimental fishery in 2003, under the Emerging Commercial Fisheries legislation, in which permits would be limited.

Pacific sardines are managed under the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) fishery management plan. The Council develops and adopts a coastwide annual harvest guideline, which takes into account the biological and ecological impacts of harvesting forage fish, and the amount of fish available to U.S. waters. In 2005, the Council replaced the geographical allocation with a strategy to provide for the seasonal release of the harvest guideline as the stock is fished along the West Coast during different times of the year.

The Northwest (Washington and Oregon) sardine fishery has fluctuated over the past few years. In 2002, Washington landings increased to a high of 15,212 mt, and Oregon fishery landings dramatically increased from its inception in 1999 (771 mt) to a high of 36,111 mt in 2004. However, in 2006 and 2007, the Northwest fishery experienced a decline—more so in Washington than in Oregon—as a result of lack of market availability, and landings into Washington dropped to about 4,300-4,600 mt each year. This had made it difficult for permit holders in both states to meet their respective minimum landing requirements to qualify their permits for the next season.

The topic of the amount of sardines that could be used for purposes other than human consumption and fishing bait has also been raised in both states. Since 2006, Washington has implemented a limit of 15% restriction across the season, which applies to all permit holders and processors individually, and Oregon adopted consistent regulations. There have been requests to relax this restriction, particularly from one of the processing facilities in Washington. We have met with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife staff to discuss these issues, and both states have continued to keep this restriction in place.

Additionally, under the Emerging Commercial Fisheries legislation, the Department is required to submit a report to the Legislature after five years of designating an emerging fishery. The five-year report includes a description of the fishery and a recommendation as to whether to continue the fishery as an emerging fishery (for up to another five years) or to establish a commercial fishery in legislation. Based on the Commission’s previous action, the Department submitted a report to the Legislature in December 2004 recommending that the sardine fishery remain an emerging fishery for another five years (2005-09), with the intent of proposing legislation in 2009 to create an established fishery.

Beginning in 2006, Department staff has worked with the Sardine Advisory Group to develop the draft legislation language and the fishing regulations for the established fishery. At the June Commission meeting, Department staff will brief the Commission on the federal management strategy, the current state and federal sardine fishery regulations, review the results of the Washington sardine fishery for the 2000-07 period, and review the draft legislative proposal.

Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

None at this time.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Department staff held a series of Sardine Advisory Group meetings to discuss these topics on December 21, 2006, December 18, 2007, and March 27, 2008. The meetings were open to the public and all current permit holders and processors were invited to participate. Department staff will brief the Commission on the results of these meetings at the Commission meeting.

Actions requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

None at this time; Department staff will consider folding this item into the larger agency request legislation package for 2009, which is scheduled for Commission consideration at the August 8-9 meeting in Bellingham.

Draft motion language:

N/A

Justification for Commission adoption:

N/A