

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

POLICY DECISION

POLICY TITLE: Marine Fish Culture

POLICY NUMBER: C-3611

Cancels: Policy C-3611,
Adopted Aug. 11, 2000

Effective Date: March 10, 2007

See Also: Policy C-3003

Approved by: 
Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission

PURPOSE

This policy applies to the use and application pertaining to the culture and release of marine fish species. It is intended to preserve and protect the integrity of natural occurring populations of marine fish in Puget Sound and coastal waters adjacent to the state of Washington.

General Policy Statement:

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) will rely on natural production to meet its marine fish conservation objectives unless a stock is designated as depleted and meets the conditions and constraints outlined under the terms of this policy. Management of natural production will proceed under the precautionary principle previously adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) (Policy C-3003, November 1996) and implemented in the Puget Sound Groundfish Management Plan (Palsson, et. al., 1998).

The Commission acknowledges that the authorities and jurisdictions of the state and the treaty tribes regarding marine fish potentially pertain to some of the activities associated with this policy. It is the responsibility of the Department to coordinate activities associated with this policy with the affected treaty tribes on a government-to-government basis.

1. Definitions

- a. The term "stock" means an interbreeding group of fishes and may refer to one or more distinct population segments.
- b. The term "depleted" means a species whose estimated spawning biomass is 25% or less of the estimated unfished spawning biomass.
- c. The term "marine fish" means all saltwater fish, excluding classified salmon (RCW 77.08.024), game fish (RCW 77.08.020), and sturgeon.
- d. The term "production scale" refers to the release of large numbers (releases that are numerically greater than 5% of the target stock's population level) of juvenile marine fishes for the purpose of rebuilding populations.

2. Release of Cultured Marine Fish

Cultured marine fish may be released to marine habitats for two purposes:

- a. For scientific research, including development of hatchery and release methods in preparation for production scale releases or for other scientific needs.
- b. To rebuild native marine fish stocks designated as depleted.

3. Scientific Research

Scientific research is intended to focus on development of marine fish culture methods that will result in the use of stocking juveniles as a means to protect and recover the state's valuable marine fish stocks. Scientific research may be conducted for the following purposes including, but not limited, to:

- a. Evaluating the practicality of a species for cultivation.
- b. Developing methods for collection, spawning, and maintenance of broodstock.
- c. Evaluating the cost effectiveness of mass culture.
- d. Diagnosing and treating disease.
- e. Developing quantitative measures to monitor and evaluate success.
- f. Optimizing release strategies.
- g. Minimizing genetic and ecological impacts to natural populations.
- h. Conducting ecological or behavioral studies.

4. Production Scale Releases

Insofar as is possible, production scale releases shall be carried out in a manner that ensures the following:

- a. Maintaining genetic diversity displayed in the native stock,
- b. Protecting the spawning biomass of the native stock,
- c. Preserving ecological balance in the enhanced marine community, and
- d. Avoiding negative impacts on the recovery of any state or federal species listed as threatened or endangered.

5. Collection of Native Marine Fish

Collection of native marine fish for scientific purposes or production scale purposes will be considered on a species-specific basis. Factors for consideration will include the timing of the request, the population status of the species being requested, and the number of fishery related mortalities of that species that is allowed under a state or federal rebuilding plan.

6. Release of Cultured Native Marine Fish

The release of cultured marine fish will be governed by the following criteria:

- a. The release of fish for scientific research purposes is limited to no more than 1,000 fish in any one catch record card area, unless it is determined that the objectives of the research project cannot be met, in which case release levels will be determined on a case-by-case basis while ensuring that natural occurring populations are protected.
- b. Production scale releases may only be directed at native marine fish species that are

designated as depleted.

- c. Project Operational Plans are required for production scale releases and must undergo Departmental peer review prior to the release of cultured fish.
- d. A Scientific Research Plan is required for research projects that include the release of cultured fish and are subject to review and approval by the Fish Program Assistant Director.

7. Term of Production Scale Releases

- a. Production scale releases of cultured fish used to augment a native marine fish stock will cease when the stock has recovered to the target population size.

8. Compliance

- a. The Department will ensure that all SEPA guidelines are complied.
- b. All permits issued by the Department involving release of cultured marine fish are subject to compliance with the terms and conditions of this policy.