

Fed rules urged to protect black abalone

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A U.S. federal agency has proposed listing black abalone -- a marine mollusk sought by fishermen -- as an endangered species.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service issued the proposal after a scientific review team concluded the species is at risk of extinction.

Black abalone were once plentiful in the intertidal waters from Northern Baja California, Mexico, to Monterey, Calif., although there is some scientific debate about how far north the population once extended, NOAA said. The species was utilized by early California natives and peaked as a commercial fishery in the state in 1973 with nearly 2 million pounds harvested.

Since the 1980s, black abalone abundance has plummeted primarily from a bacterial disease known as withering syndrome, NOAA officials said, with other causes of the rapid population decline likely due to overfishing, poaching and natural predation.

Researchers said the likelihood that black abalone populations will continue to decline towards extinction within 30 years is very high.

The proposal is available at
swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/petition.htm

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