

NOAA bans commercial harvesting of krill

July 13 2009

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) today published a final rule in the Federal Register prohibiting the harvesting of krill in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington. The rule goes into effect on August 12, 2009. Krill are a small shrimp-like crustacean and a key source of nutrition in the marine food web.

"Krill are the foundation for a healthy marine ecosystem," said Mark Helvey, NOAA's Fisheries Service Southwest Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries. "Protecting this vital food resource will help protect and maintain marine resources and put federal regulations in line with West-Coast states."

While the States of California, Oregon and Washington currently have regulations prohibiting the harvesting of krill within three miles of their coastlines, there was no similar federal restriction within the three to 200-mile confines of the EEZ.

The krill prohibition was adopted as Amendment 12 to the Coastal Pelagic Species Fishery Management Plan (FMP), which was developed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The krill harvest prohibition was originally proposed to the PFMC and NOAA Fisheries Service by NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. Today's rule implements Amendment 12 to the FMP and is intended to preserve key nutritional relationships in the California Current ecosystem, which includes five National Marine Sanctuaries.

"This is a great success for protecting the entire California Current ecosystem", said William Douros, West Coast Regional Director for NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. "This decision reflects strong teamwork within NOAA and a commitment to addressing the issues raised by the Pacific Fishery Management Council and Sanctuary Advisory Councils."

Amendment 12 adds all species of krill under a new category, "prohibited harvest species." This new group may not be caught or taken by any fishery or gear type within the EEZ.

Krill are important because they convert microscopic phytoplankton into a food source for numerous other species and are a principal food source for many species of fish, seabirds and marine mammals. Some of the species that depend on krill as prey are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, and many others are important as target species for commercial and recreational fisheries on the west coast.

Source: NOAA

Citation: NOAA bans commercial harvesting of krill (2009, July 13) retrieved 3 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-07-noaa-commercial-harvesting-krill.html>

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