

California commission approves sweeping restrictions on coastal fishing

August 7 2009, By Mike Taugher

California regulators sharply restricted fishing off more than 20 percent of the state's coastline from the San Francisco peninsula to Mendocino County, turning back pleas to allow more abalone diving and delay the new measures due to budgetary concerns.

In a 3-2 vote, the state Fish and Game Commission on Wednesday moved forward with a historic ocean protection plan by putting into place the second of five planned complexes of reserves and [conservation](#) areas.

The protected areas are intended to form a network along the state's 1,100-mile coast to allow dwindling stocks -- including rockfish, abalone and Dungeness crab -- to rebound.

"I am committed to returning California to the sustainable abundance it once enjoyed," commissioner Richard Rogers said in announcing his intention to vote for the plan.

With that vote, which followed nearly six hours of occasionally heated testimony, the commission rejected pleas from fishermen to adopt a slightly less restrictive alternative, saying the final design already was the result of extensive negotiations and accommodations.

The alternative favored by fishermen still would have affected 18 percent of the water from the San Francisco Bay Area to Mendocino, but it would have left more access for abalone divers.

"All of the proposals are going to hurt and all of them achieve all of the conservation goals," said Dan Wolford of Los Gatos, Calif., the science director for the Coastside Fishing Club and vice-chairman of the federal panel that regulates fishing off the West Coast.

But environmentalists supported the plan, saying it was essential to maintaining and restoring marine life off the coast.

"We created national parks decades ago. It is certainly time to protect the Yosemite of the sea," said Karen Garrison, an oceans policy advocate for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The new rules ban fishing in newly created marine reserves, including state water around the Farallon Islands, and areas near Point Reyes National Seashore, portions of Sonoma County, and parts of Bodega Head.

Marine conservation areas, which make up about half of the water in the plan, were created with exceptions to allow for limited recreational fishing.

Like underwater parks, the idea is to put certain underwater rock formations, kelp beds and other areas off limits to fishing to allow those ecosystems to rebound and thrive.

A representative of the state's game wardens urged the board to delay action on the plan because California already has fewer game wardens per capita than any other state, and because state employee furloughs are making the situation worse.

"The current (marine life protected areas) are not afforded adequate protection. How can we possibly consider more?" asked Todd Tognazzini, president of the California Fish and Game Wardens

Association.

"The game wardens are the ones trying to keep people out of those areas. We're pretty upset by what's going on," Tognazzini said.

Lawmakers directed the commission in 1999 to organize marine protection zones into a network that stretches throughout state waters, which extend three miles off the entire 1,100-mile coast.

The Central coast plan, which was adopted in 2007, covers waters from Point Conception in Santa Barbara County to Pigeon Point in San Mateo County. The regulations adopted Wednesday extend that network north to Mendocino County.

The commission is still expected to pass new rules for the South Coast, from Point Conception to the Mexico border, and the North Coast, from Point Arena in Mendocino County to the Oregon border. The final zone to be considered is expected to be San Francisco Bay, which is expected to be completed in 2011.

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Citation: California commission approves sweeping restrictions on coastal fishing (2009, August 7) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2009-08-california-commission-restrictions-coastal-fishing.html>

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