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## DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES

### IMPROVED REGULATIONS FOR THE CA. SEA URCHIN FISHERY A Framework for Sustainability and Enhanced Socio-economic Viability

Submitted by the California Sea Urchin Commission  
To the California Fish & Game Commission  
Marine Resource Committee  
August 5, 2014,  
San Diego, CA

Sound fisheries management planning involves input from both managers and stakeholders including the California Fish and Game Commission (CF&GC). Good management must have the flexibility to react in a timely manner to changes in the resource, the effects of regulations, improved science, and evolving markets.

Understanding that good fisheries policy involves a sustainable resource, the business of fishing, and the essential fisheries information (multidisciplinary science) to help create and maintain a fishery that is sustainable in biomass, as well as social and economic integrity.

Working with The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (the Department), the California Sea Urchin Commission (CSUC) is proposing to the California Fish and Game Commission (the Commission), a number of changes to the current Sea Urchin regulations. The CSUC believes these changes will help secure the long term viability of California's valuable Sea Urchin Fishery, in meeting the goal of The Marine Life Management Act.

#### 1) **Reduce the current capacity from 300 to 150 Divers.**

Reducing capacity assures a sustainable fishery from over harvesting. This can be accomplished through natural attrition over many years, but it could also include a "permit buyback program" developed at a later date if attrition is not adequately achieving desired capacity reduction.

Traditionally sea urchin harvest has been controlled by limiting effort through minimum size, the number of open harvest days, and restricting the number of divers.

#### **Reasoning:**

- Compaction of fishing pressure. The implementation of the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) has resulted in an estimated loss of 40+% of the dive fishing grounds to Marine Protected Areas (MPA's), which results in the loss of some of the most productive locations in terms of poundage and/or quality. This is a particular concern if latent permits started fishing again.
- Reduces latent capacity. Department data shows for the past several years 150 divers have harvested approximately 97% of the poundage landed. If all 300 divers were

active it's possible the fishery might not remain economically sustainable due to the added harvest pressure.

## 2) **Improve the new entrant diver lottery.**

Change the current system to a **strictly priority based** system, with the diver who has been in the lottery the longest given the first opportunity to receive a permit based on a 10:1 ratio....for every 10 divers who leave the fishery 1 new entrant is provided a permit. This will allow limited access to the fishery, while still moving towards the new capacity goal.

The first lottery after the new regulations are approved (**2015?**) would be to settle any ties between entrants by prioritizing those who have applied unsuccessfully in the past. Prioritize the applicants by the number of years attempted on a first come first served basis. After that any new applications would be given a place based on when (day and time) their application is received by the Department's License and Revenue Branch.

In order to close the so called **Lottery Loop Hole**, an additional change to the lottery is required. Under current regulations the number of permits available in the lottery are based on the number that has been renewed by July 31 of each year. However, divers have until March 31 of the following year (the license year) to renew, resulting in a situation where by, **capacity is added** to the fishery.

It is therefore recommended that the available permits be based on a 16 month cycle (April 1 of the current calendar year to July 31st of the following year to renew a license, as well as purchase the license for the current year). Under this system no new permits would be given out the first year the new regulations are in effect, (e.g.. if the new regulations are approved for 2015, it would be 2016 before any new permits would be issued).

### **Reasoning:**

- Guarantees those waiting for diver permits the longest will be given the first opportunity to have one.
- 10:1 keeps open limited access to the fishery, until such time as capacity reduction goals are met.
- Closes the lottery loop hole, while allowing divers extra time to renew a license.

## 3) **The “Dead Man’s” Permit:**

Currently the family of a deceased diver who dies while engaged in fishing, can lease out the permit for up to 2 years.

Change the regulation to read “**death for any reason**”.

### **Reasoning:**

- This is a humanitarian regulation that will help the deceased's family make the adjustment for the loss of fishing income.

4) **Other Possible Regulatory Actions (to be considered in the future):**

- a) Make the Sea Urchin diving permit **fully transferable** when the capacity goal is reached, including the ability for the family of a deceased diver to transfer a diving permit. The capacity goal can be periodically validated to be sure it meets the stated objectives with a sustainable harvest.
- b) Explore raising the **Sea Urchin Size Limit** in Southern California (reflecting the current Northern California size limit), to increase the bio-mass, spawning potential ratio, and improved uni recovery at harvest.
- c) Explore a diving permit **buyback program** that would be primarily funded by sources outside of the industry.

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**\*\*\*Sea Urchin Buyer/Processor Recommendation\*\*\***

5) **Sea Urchin Buyer/ Processor Recommendation: Add One Day to the Open Days of the Week, June through October.**

The current harvest schedule of Monday through Thursday, June through October results in delayed market replenishment at the start of each week. Urchins “held over” for shipments from the previous **Thursday** lose some of their freshness, and related quality issues, resulting in a marketing problem that is opening the door to competition from foreign suppliers. A reliable supply of a quality product, at a fair price is essential to maintaining and expanding California’s domestic and international market share.

**Reasoning:**

- The domestic (U.S.) market for California Red Sea Urchins has **grown dramatically** during the last decade and is **continuing to expand**, helping to offset the **economic damage** the California Sea Urchin industry suffered with the loss of a substantial portion of its sales to the Japanese market.
- The U.S. market has its **highest product demand** during the **summer months into early fall**. By adding one day a week to the current harvesting schedule (June through October), the California Sea Urchin Industry will be better positioned to **maintain its historic advantage** over competition from foreign and other domestic suppliers by increased reliability of supply, and a fresher, higher quality product.
- Sea urchin harvesters will have **greater flexibility** in working with **dangerous** ocean conditions, and **military** training activities if they have greater flexibility in setting their diving schedule.

As stated, item number “5” (**days back**) is a **Sea Urchin Buyer/Processor Recommendation**. The actual day or days back has not been fully vetted by the CSUC, and the Buyer/Processors. A definitive request for days back will be forth coming at the next Marine Resources Committee (MRC) meeting, reflecting the sea urchin industry’s position for the best policy guidance for management of the sea urchin fishery as a whole, as opposed to one segment of the fishery.

**Days Back are an Agenda item at the next CSUC meeting July 25<sup>th</sup>. Board members, (including the DFW member) and other individuals from industry will finalize this request, with possible viable alternatives for MRC consideration.**

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