

## Ocean Advocates Urge Fishery Managers to Account for Ecosystem Needs In West Coast Forage Fish Plan

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#### Contact:

Pam Lyons Gromen, National Coalition for Marine Conservation: 703-777-1961

Ben Enticknap, Oceana: 503-329-4465

Ken Stump, Marine Fish Conservation Network: 202-543-5509 x203

**Leesburg, VA** – Conservationists are meeting with the Pacific Fishery Management Council this week to discuss ways to protect the coastal food web. Following on a recent report highlighting the importance of west coast forage fish like sardine and anchovy, and citing new national guidelines for fishery managers to consider the needs of predators when setting catch limits for prey fish, an alliance of environmentalists, fishermen and scientists is urging the federal council to incorporate ecosystem concerns into its fishery management plans.

Their recommendations build on a report issued earlier this year by PRBO Conservation Science, *Ecosystem-Based Management of West Coast Forage Species* (<http://www.prbo.org/forage>), which highlights the importance of conserving West Coast forage fish such as sardine and anchovy. The report's recommendations are the outcome of a year-long collaborative effort involving scientists, fishing interests, and environmental groups, reflecting a broad base of support among stakeholders of all backgrounds to conserve forage fish stocks.

"It was a tremendous effort involving multiple partners with diverse interests working together to forge a blueprint for conserving the middle of the food chain," says Jennifer Roth of the PRBO Conservation Science's Marine Ecology division.

"Threatened species from whales and seabirds to tuna and salmon rely on healthy populations of forage fish for their survival."

At its week-long public meeting at the Hilton Orange County in Costa Mesa beginning October 31<sup>st</sup>, the Pacific Council will consider ways to improve conservation of managed forage stocks - sardine, anchovy, squid, mackerel and krill - to comply with the new catch limit requirements of the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 2006 and revised guidelines from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on overfishing. The NMFS guidance sanctions the use

of more conservative catch limits on forage fish to maintain adequate forage “to enhance and protect the marine ecosystem.”

“The Pacific Council has a golden opportunity now to make the necessary changes that will ensure a healthy food base throughout the California Current ecosystem,” says Pam Lyons Gromen, executive director of the National Coalition for Marine Conservation (NCMC).

“We urge the Council to follow the guidance given by NMFS and develop mechanisms to incorporate food web interactions explicitly into the catch-setting process,” adds Ben Enticknap, Pacific Project Manager for Oceana.

In July, a Pacific Fishery Management Council rule prohibiting harvest of krill became final. Conservation advocates praised the decision as a proactive measure to prevent a fishery from developing, and they are now calling on managers to provide similar precautionary measures for other key forage species like smelts and sand lance that are not currently targeted by commercial fisheries and not managed under a federal plan. For existing fisheries such as the sardine fishery, they seek ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management that account for the needs of other fish, seabirds, and marine mammals when determining catch levels.

“A healthy forage base is essential to the recovery of depleted predators including rockfish and salmon which are vital to the coastal fishing communities,” says Ken Stump, policy director for the Washington, D.C.-based Marine Fish Conservation Network. “Protection of forage fish is one of the pillars of an ecosystem-based management strategy.”

In addition to the new national guidelines that direct fishery managers to consider the needs of ecosystems and predators when setting catch limits for prey fish, the groups point to last year’s West Coast Governors’ Agreement on Ocean Health in support of their position. The Governor’s Agreement calls for the development of a fishery ecosystem plan to enhance the conservation of forage fish in the California Current ecosystem.

**The National Coalition for Marine Conservation**, [www.savethefish.org](http://www.savethefish.org), is a non-profit national environmental organization devoted exclusively to conserving ocean fish and their environment. The organization was founded in 1973 by conservation-minded anglers and today is supported by fishermen, scientists, divers, boaters and wildlife enthusiasts.

**The Marine Fish Conservation Network**, [www.conservefish.org](http://www.conservefish.org), is a coalition of over 200 national and regional environmental organizations, commercial and recreational fishing groups, aquariums, and marine science groups dedicated to achieving healthy oceans and productive fisheries.

**Oceana** campaigns to protect and restore the world's oceans and has more than 300,000 members and e-activists in over 150 countries. For more information, please visit [www.Oceana.org](http://www.Oceana.org).

**PRBO Conservation Science**, founded as Point Reyes Bird Observatory in 1965, is dedicated to conserving birds, other wildlife and ecosystems through award-winning innovative scientific research and outreach that advances conservation on land and at sea. *For questions on the PRBO Conservation Science report, contact Jennifer Roth: 707-781-2555.*