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Pacific Whiting-National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Under Secretary for
Oceans and Atmosphere
Washington, D.C. 20230

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APR 28 1993

Mr. Philip Cogswell, Jr.
Deputy Editorial Page Editor
The Oregonian
1320 S.W. Broadway
Portland, Oregon 97201-3499

Dear Mr. Cogswell:

I would like to respond to the recent criticism claiming that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) decision on the 1993 Pacific whiting allocation favors the at-sea processors.

The new one-season rule recognizes the reality of a declining whiting population and allocates the conservation burden equitably between onshore processors based in Oregon and offshore processors based in Washington in proportion to their actual take of whiting in 1992. Section 301 (a)(4) of the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act states that "conservation and management measures shall not discriminate between residents of different states" and specifically requires allocations that are "fair and equitable to all such fishermen."

As background, it should be noted that the Pacific whiting fishery presents management challenges due to the cyclical nature of this fishery. Between 1991 and 1993, the harvest quota declined by 86,000 metric tons. The 1994 quota is expected to drop another 42,000 metric tons, with a reversal of this trend anticipated in the next several years.

In 1992, vessels delivering to shore-based processors in Oregon used 27 percent of the available quota, or 56,000 metric tons. In 1993, the Pacific Fishery Management Council proposed a permanent rule that would have allocated 74 percent of the available quota to vessels delivering to shore-based processors, or 105,000 metric tons, nearly twice the amount of whiting that they actually harvested in 1992. Conversely, while the offshore processors actually took 153,000 metric tons in 1992, their share in 1993 would have dropped from 73 percent to 26 percent of the quota, i.e., to 37,000 metric tons.



THE ADMINISTRATOR

In other words, the original Council proposal would have increased the portion available to onshore processors by 49,000 metric tons and decreased the amount available to offshore processors by 115,000 metric tons. In NOAA's view this was not an equitable allocation of the conservation burden in the declining whiting fishery, and did not comply with one of the Magnuson Act's national standards for fishery conservation and management set forth in Section 301 (a) (4).

In contrast, the 1-year rule adopted by NOAA is designed, in its final result, to allocate to vessels delivering to each group of processors approximately the same percentage of whiting as occurred in 1992, i.e., approximately 29 percent to the onshore processors and 71 percent to the offshore processors.

It does this in two steps. First, it allows all boats to fish freely for the first 112,000 metric tons of the 1993 quota. Historical data show that vessels delivering to onshore processors will obtain approximately one-ninth of the harvest under these circumstances, or roughly 12,000 metric tons. This take could, of course, be larger if the currently depressed markets for whiting diminish the offshore fleet. When 112,000 metric tons of whiting have been caught, the remaining 30,000 metric tons of the quota will be released to vessels delivering whiting to the onshore processors, making their total take approximately 42,000 metric tons or 29 percent of the harvest, 2 percent more than they actually took last year. While the amount of whiting utilized by both types of processors will be smaller in 1993 due to the smaller resource available, the economic burden of the reduced fishery will be shared equitably between them in proportion to the amounts of whiting that they actually processed in 1992.

In this context, it is difficult to understand the argument that reducing the offshore share by 53,000 metric tons while reducing the onshore share by only 14,000 metric tons is unfair to the onshore processors.

I hope that the above information will clarify NOAA's final rule on Pacific whiting for your readers.

Sincerely,

Diana H. Josephson

Diana H. Josephson
Acting Under Secretary
for Oceans and Atmosphere