



## FORAGE FISH: KRILL

### BACKGROUND

Krill (primarily *Euphausia pacifica* and *Thysanoessa spinifera*) are a prime food source for many fish and seabirds, as well as baleen whales and pinnipeds such as the Antarctic fur seal. Due to their ecological importance and nearly global distribution in the world's oceans, krill are a critical link in marine food webs and ecosystems. Many species that prey on krill are depleted, including fish like Pacific salmon and the endangered right whales, blue whales, and humpback whales. Protecting krill will help ensure adequate food resources to rebuild the populations of these rare fish and marine mammals, and also protect the productivity and ecological functions of the west coast ecosystem. The Pacific and North Pacific Fishery Management Councils recognized the potentially disastrous impacts that krill fisheries could have by driving down krill populations and they have taken preemptive action to ban krill fisheries, but other fishery management councils have not taken action to protect this critical link at the base of the food web. Climate change may also pose a serious risk to krill, as they thrive on phytoplankton blooms in colder, nutrient-rich waters. Warming waters with lower krill numbers could trigger impacts that cascade through the entire marine food web.

### KRILL FISHERY

No krill fishery has ever operated off the west coast. In 2006, the Pacific Fishery Management Council adopted a complete ban on commercial fishing for krill in federal waters in recognition of its vital importance to the food web and to the productivity of commercially targeted species of fish and other species higher up the food chain.

In 1998, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council also banned directed fishing for krill in federal waters off Alaska through amendments 36 and 39 to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish FMP and Gulf of Alaska Groundfish fishery management plan (FMP), respectively. The amendments defined a forage fish category which included krill and specified that fishery regulations should prevent the development of a commercial fishery for krill.

### KRILL POLICY ISSUES

Pacific Region: On October 30, 2007, the Bush administration's Office of Management and Budget rejected the Pacific Fishery Management Council's amendment banning commercial fishing for krill in federal waters. The administration claimed the amendment was unnecessary, as there is no fishery for krill on the west coast. The National Marine Fisheries Service and the Pacific Fishery Management Council can work to address the administration's issues with the rule and reconsider it next year. The states of Washington, Oregon, and California have all banned krill fishing in their state waters, and prohibit landings of krill at their ports.

North Pacific Region: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is drafting a new FMP for the Arctic Ocean. Their preferred alternative would ban fishing for krill and other forage species in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters of the Arctic. Initial drafts of the plan will be available at the December 2007 council meeting.

Councils: Pacific Fishery Management Council and North Pacific Management Council

Links to Resources: <http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/divisions/fed/climatechange.cfm>  
<http://www-csgc.ucsd.edu/STORIES/SeabirdDeaths.html>; <http://www.foragefish.org/krill/html>  
for fishery area management map.

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*The Marine Fish Conservation Network is the largest national coalition solely dedicated to promoting sustainable management of marine fish and wildlife, and our oceans. The Network, made up of almost 200 environmental groups, commercial and recreational fishing associations, aquariums, and marine science organizations, uses its distinct voice and the best available science to educate policymakers, the fishing industry, and the public about the need for sound marine conservation and best marine management practices.*