



## FORAGE FISH: PACIFIC SARDINE

### BACKGROUND

Pacific sardines (*Sardinops sagax*) are well-known from the “Cannery Row” days in Monterey, California, and serve as important forage for tunas, salmon, marlin, mackerel, sharks and some groundfish species, as well as many seabirds, seals, sea lions, dolphins and whales. Although some sardines have been canned for human consumption, the major human use today is reduction (ground sardines) for fish meal and oil to supply the growing aquaculture industry’s demand for feed and canned pet foods. Small quantities of sardines and other species are also used as bait in sport fisheries.

### CALIFORNIA SARDINE FISHERY

The Pacific sardine fishery was the largest in North America during the “Cannery Row” heydays of the 1930s and 1940s. After several decades of intensive fishing, the sardine population collapsed in the 1950s. Despite a 20-year fishing moratorium, the sardine population has been slow to recover. A 2007 assessment of Pacific sardines shows populations have declined again since 2000.

The contemporary Pacific sardine fishery extends from Baja California, Mexico, to British Columbia, Canada, but the bulk of the fishery occurs in federal waters off southern California and Ensenada, Mexico. Until recently, two-thirds of the U.S. portion of the annual quota was allocated to the southern area of the Pacific coast. As the sardine stock has expanded across its historical range, however, a greater portion of the catch has occurred to the north, especially off the Oregon coast.

### PACIFIC SARDINE MANAGEMENT

The Pacific Fishery Management Council’s west coast Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) fishery management plan (FMP) includes sardine, anchovy, mackerel, and squid. The CPS fishery has expanded significantly in recent years. Many of these species are prone to extreme population fluctuations and large-scale fishing will amplify these swings between high and low abundance. Consequently, cycles of boom and bust have characterized many of these fisheries over time.

### CURRENT PACIFIC SARDINE POLICY ISSUES

Recent developments in the scientific assessment of sardine populations off the California coast show that numbers are much lower than previously thought, and have been in decline since 2000. As a result, the Pacific Fishery Management Council followed scientific recommendations to protect the stock by lowering 2008 harvest levels. Harvest limits for 2008 are 42 percent lower than the 2007 limits and the total 2007 catch.

Council: Pacific Fishery Management Council

Links to Resources: [http://www.savethefish.org/conservation\\_news\\_Taking\\_Bait.html](http://www.savethefish.org/conservation_news_Taking_Bait.html);  
<http://foragefishery.org/sardine.html> for fishery area map and historical catch data.

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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.*