



**GAVIN NEWSOM**  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

The Honorable Wilbur Ross  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave NW  
Washington, D. C. 20230

September 5, 2017

Dear Secretary Ross,

California is experiencing an economic disaster to our red sea urchin fishing industry and communities due to oceanic conditions that have affected the kelp forest ecosystems.

Persistent warm ocean conditions that began in 2014 in northern California and 2015 in southern California, has affected the fishery in these two regions. In northern California, the warm water event devastated kelp production (93% loss of surface kelp canopies compared to 2008 levels), a primary food source for urchins that created persistent starvation conditions. Starvation has led to reductions in the food value of the urchins targeted by the fishery in northern California. In addition, a population explosion of the less marketable purple sea urchin continues to overgraze the recovering kelp beds, adding further stress to the fishery. In southern California, urchin mortality increased in response to warm El Nino conditions and disease in 2015. This has reduced the numbers of healthy red sea urchins in southern California available to the fishery.

The impacts to the regions are evident in the fishery landings data. In 2016, the northern California fishery ex-vessel revenue fell by 77% compared to the 5-year average from \$2,587,419 to \$604,440, Orange County ports fell by 93% from \$85,382 to \$6,045, and San Diego County ports fell by 48% from \$574,526 to \$297,594. These initial estimated impacts are based on ex-vessel value of commercial landings and do not account for additional impacts to fish processors or to other businesses that rely on the fishery.

Given the significant impacts to date, I request you declare a fishery resource disaster for the fishery in northern California, Orange County, and San Diego County under section 308(d) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act of 1986 (16 U.S.C. § 4107(d)), and a commercial fishery failure under section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (16 U.S.C. § 1861a(a)).

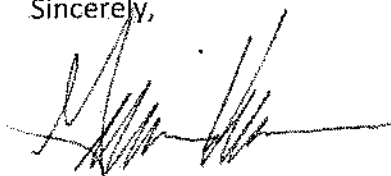


As you know, declaring a commercial failure will enable the affected fishing communities to receive essential economic assistance, which will be critical for the well-being of our fishing industry and our state. Red sea urchin is a vital component of California's natural resources and provides significant commercial, cultural, and economic benefits to our state. I also ask National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries to work directly with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to expeditiously complete the required review process.

The CDFW contact is Dr. Craig Shuman ([Craig.Shuman@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Craig.Shuman@wildlife.ca.gov)), and the designated alternate is Sonke Mastrup ([Sonke.Mastrup@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Sonke.Mastrup@wildlife.ca.gov)).

Thank you for your consideration of this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Newsom', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

GAVIN NEWSOM  
Acting Governor of California

CC:

The Honorable Diane Feinstein

The Honorable Kamala Harris

The Honorable Jared Huffman

The Honorable Jackie Speier

The Honorable Jimmy Panetta

The Honorable Salud Carbajal

The Honorable Anna G. Eshoo

The Honorable Mike Thompson

Senator Mike McGuire, Chair Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture

Assemblymember Jim Wood, Vice Chair, Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture

Valerie Termini, California Fish and Game Commission

Chuck Bonham, California Department of Fish and Wildlife