

# THE TRIDENT

VOLUME 73 - ISSUE 4



## UPDATES ON CALIFORNIA ABALONE AND MPAs

Terry Maas, conservation liaison

### ABALONE:

Several years ago, I interviewed Josh Russo of the Watermans Alliance (WA), which was formed to defend against the MLPA debacle. The WA has remained active, ready to assist in battling new threats to our sport. Josh updated me on his efforts on behalf of the WA.

An article from 2018 California Senate office of research communication in kelp stated, "Over the last five years, the coast of Northern California has experienced a 'perfect storm' of negative impacts, resulting in the loss of more than 93 percent of the bull kelp forests." The article states that bull kelp, which is the predominant species is in a delicate balance with urchins—not the large black (Uni) variety, but the same pesky purple urchins that devastated our kelps earlier this decade. In 2011, sun starfish began to die off, possible due to a virus which increased in virulence due to warming waters. With these predators suddenly missing in action, the purples began to take over.

Compounding the problem was the significant El Nino event of 2015-2016 when in 2014 a large "blob" of warm water appeared off the Mendocino coast causing a die off of the bull kelp

First in 2013 off Sonoma, and then next year 2014 off Mendocino a large offshore purple urchin spawning event inundated inshore waters with these kelp killers. With the kelp receding, abalone were forced to forage on algae, but soon the urchins beat them to that too. The result was an abalone die off and the eventual closure of the abalone fishery in 2018.



Image courtesy John Ugoretz, biologist Calif Dept of Fish and Wildlife.

This is where Josh came in. He and others, including the WA members, theorized if they could strip the urchins from an area and keep it clear, the kelp would flourish in these areas that could act as a reserve allowing the kelp to return when nature brings the overall urchin issue back into balance. Many, including me, were skeptical. Undaunted Josh organized a campaign to eliminate the urchins from several test areas. After they raised 130k, and after State blessings, they hired 9 urchin-diver boats to clean several "index" coves known well to the department of Fish and Wildlife. Josh reports that Kelp is doing well in these areas. As an example, at the start of the 2020 season, Noyo Harbor entrance was a complete urchin barren. Commercial divers cleared and marked a 10 acre area and in 2021 there was exactly 10 acres of kelp in the spot cleared the year before.

This week the department unveiled a new abalone fisheries management plan that has been in the works since 2014. Josh and others have fought hard for the inclusion of a "de minimus" fishery where just a few abalone—not enough to matter either way—will be allowed for take before the complete recovery of the fishery. The department has included this in their proposal. The first take would be for scientific purposes called a "biological de minimis fishery". When the biologists need samples, recreational divers would be allowed to harvest the animals. Fish and Game biologists will take the gonads and innards then return the meat and shell to the diver. When the abalone populations recover, a modest lottery system or other highly regulated take may be authorized by the new FMP through experimental regulations.

While the bull kelp was decimated, Josh sees it returning. He says there is still an abalone population off the coast—some areas more than others. The abalone have also migrated into shallow water where the smaller kelps and algae sustain them.

#### MLPA:

One of the most difficult challenges for me was being a member of the MLPA representing spearfishermen. I had high hopes that we could work together with folks representing the environmental faction—half of the delegates. I was shocked when during the first meeting, these guys put circles on the map representing every location coveted by spearos. It soon became clear that this process was window dressing for a preordained plan. The head of the program was clearly biased as were all of the facilitators.

The enviros wanted just 10%, however, all of their wants were rocky headlands for rocky reefs—basically all of our best hunting grounds. They made up criteria for selection, which they broke if it suited them. A glaring example is an MPA should have "persistent" kelp. When we found alternative locations that met these new criteria, they simply changed it.

We had multiple lectures from leaders in the field of marine ecology who detailed the many challenges to the marine environment—pollution, acidification, power plants, sewage plants, warming of the waters, and yes overfishing. It soon became clear that the only tool that the MLPA could/would use was restrictions on fishing. While fishing can be effectively managed, and the State does a decent job now, the only solution was NO fishing areas.

Eric Kett and I were able to have the committee and the Department of Fish and Wildlife make a distinction between anglers who fished blind and spearos who can visually choose their prey. Also having the Department make the distinction between resident benthic fish and seasonal pelagic fish resulted in us being able to fish some areas others cannot—Farnsworth Bank and Naples reef.

I would like to share the following article from National Fisherman a industry magazine I monitor for information and possible impacts on our community. Ray Hillborn, one of the few who I feel gets it and is not afraid to voice his opinion.

# Fishing Then & Now

## A look at marine protected areas

By Jessica Hathaway



Nance Trueworthy

Lumping groundfish at the Portland (Maine) Fish Exchange (Cover, NF March 1992)

**T**hirty years ago, *NF's* then-editor Jim Fullilove made a prophetic statement on no-take marine reserves.

"The perceived simplicity of the no-harvest zone idea makes it dangerous," Fullilove wrote on page 6 of the March 1992 edition. "Fencing off reserves is a fishery management tool that could become the darling of politicians and special-interest groups with anti-fishing agendas and little regard for the complexity of fish population dynamics."

At the time, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council was considering roping off 20 percent of the coastal waters off of each state in the region to be designated as reserves.



The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council proposes a series of marine protected areas across the region. (NF March 1992)

As of Feb. 12, 2009, the council had established eight deep-water marine protected areas off the four states in its jurisdiction — North

and South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

Despite the fact that the council spent the better part of two decades designing and establishing these areas, there is no conclusive evidence — more than a decade after their implementation — that they are working.

"There was either no change or a decrease in managed reef fish abundance in each MPA relative to adjacent fished areas," according to a study published in the journal *Science Direct* in May 2021 ("No effect of marine protected areas on managed reef fish species in the southeastern United States Atlantic Ocean," Chris Pickens, et al). "Based on these metrics, it does not appear that the SEUS MPAs have yet been effective at protecting managed reef fish species."

University of Washington Professor of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences Ray Hilborn confirmed in June last year that marine protected areas are essentially regulating a few activities in an area without

addressing the full scope of ocean uses and effects from land-based industries and a global pollution problem.

"If you look at what the threats to the oceans are, they're ocean acidification, climate change, invasive species, various kinds of pollution, land runoff, and none of those are impacted by MPAs," Hilborn said.

MPAs, he noted, are protecting only from a limited scope of uses.

"Fundamentally, all MPAs are doing is regulating fishing, and maybe oil exploration and mining," he said. "It's just the wrong tool. The illusion that you're protecting the ocean by putting in MPAs, it's a big lie."

The best response is a solution tailored for the problem, rather than broad strokes of ocean closures.

"What I would like to see is very explicit targets in what are we trying to achieve in biodiversity, and for each one of those targets, what's the best tool to achieve it," Hilborn said. "In almost every case, you're going to be modifying fishing gear, and how fishing takes place, rather than closing areas to all fishing gears."

Investment in technology, research and development is considered the pinnacle for every other industry because that is what sets us apart from the animals we hunt. With our ingenuity comes the responsibility of proper stewardship of our finite

resources.

Jessica Hathaway is the editor of *National Fisherman*.



Ray Hilborn, University of Washington Professor of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences



Large reef fish, like this Warsaw grouper caught in the mid-1970s, are a rarity these days, but it's the big fish that produce the greatest number of offspring. By creating no-harvest zones off the South Atlantic coast, managers hope to improve the brood stock in surrounding areas. (NF March 1992)

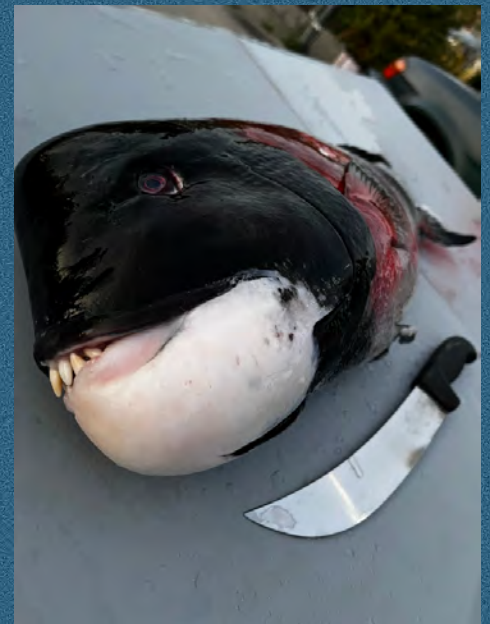
My buddy Adrian flew in from Maui the day after our march meeting and we headed down to Baja. We drove straight through to Bahia Conception! We took my inflatable catamaran out to a couple of islands and looked around. Didn't see too much action but managed to shoot some small barred pargo, cubera and a nice golden trevally came in on me and gave me a nice shot I couldn't pass up! Then we hit another island and I saw something swim into a big lava tube. I swam in a ways and could only see darkness! I swam around, came back and saw it again but still couldn't make out what it was. It was either Cubera or a grouper of some kind. That cave he called home! My buddy saw it a few times but couldn't get close enough either! We managed to get some more barred pargo , some small cubera and a few yellow snapper. We left the big fish for next time! We packed up, got some grub and kept heading south. Made it to one of our old favorite spots and took the boat out and went south, we didn't see much of anything and it was kind of depressing, that spot has always been good to us. The next day we were going to go to another spot but we found out they made it into a sanctuary and we got mixed signals from different people, some said we could fish there, some said no! we wanted to go out anyways but didn't want to piss anyone off, so we took off and went to a spot that a fisherman told us about. I'd always wanted to try this spot before but never did. The next morning we loaded the boat and headed out to the island. We could see pelicans dive bombing everywhere in this bay that was maybe a half mile across. We motored into a sea of sardines, it was the biggest school of bait I had ever seen. We threw the anchor in real shallow and jumped in. The bait was so thick that when you swam to the bottom over the reef you couldn't see anything but bait. It was like diving at night, we could only see about a 3 foot bubble between us and the bait, nothing but bait. Every once in a while you could hear a big boom! But we never saw the grouper since there was so much bait! The bait was in the bay almost a half mile long and a 100 yards out! I ventured out further and finally when I'd hit the bottom past the reef, I could hit the sand and the bait would rise up above me about 4 to 5 feet over my head and i could for the first time see daylight on the outside edge under the bait. Then I saw a school of big yellow tail swim by, I was stoked! The pelicans would just sit out by the edge of the bait and when the yellows would come in they would start dive bombing. Then i was swimming towards shore and started to dive down and the bait parted like the red sea and a school of yellowtail flew by below me. I took a shot straight down and hit the target! I grabbed my shooting line and held on, it's been a while since i've had a fight like that! I finally got ahold of the fish and brained and bled it. It was a fatty! After that my buddy shot 2 and lost 1 and i lost 2 more! Shit happens! We went back to camp exhausted and the next day we did it again.



When we got back out there were seagulls and blue footed boobies all over the water just sitting there, no pelicans. The bait was just as thick but we didn't see any yellows anywhere, just bait. 2 to 3 hours we dove, nothing. I swam to the point past the edge of all the bait and finally saw a fish, a golden grouper, it saw me and tried to hide by just stopping, i blasted it, put it in the boat and then the pelicans showed up dive bombing every where, the yellowtail were back! I swam out to the outside of the bait and a big school swam up and almost hit me, I dropped down and lined up on a nice one and a monster on the far side of the school swam through and right up to me, I blasted it and it took off, i couldn't stop it ,over half my floatline slid through my hands till i got a grip on it and I was headed out to sea leaving a wake behind me. That fish kicked my ass! Finally dispatched it and swam it to the boat. When I went to put it in the fish bag, there was a yellowtail in it already that my buddy shot! They were both giants but mine was a little bigger! It was definitely my pb yt for sure! It was a blast, we were beat! We went to shore. It was really windy that day and when we hit the beach a wave came thru the back of my boat and we were getting thrashed on the cobblestone beach. We finally got it beached and wouldn't you know it, my fish had slid out of the bag and into the shore-break! We never did find it! my friends went 35.7 and mine from the day before went 31.1 all in all it was a fun trip! We hadn't done a long trip like that for years. Can't wait for May, we might do it again!



Earlier in March I entered a calico tournament down in Ensenada just for the hell of it. I had never dove that area so I just wanted to experience it...to say the least, I'll definitely be going back soon. I rounded up 3 of my best diving buddies, we packed the truck and headed down south of the border on a Friday morning. We got there a little earlier than expected, around 1pm. We didn't plan on diving that day but the panguero offered to take us out for a few hours for only 25\$ each, so we quickly threw our gear on the panga and decided to go scout the spots in hopes to find big calicos. It's pretty awesome to see and learn how fisherman operate in different parts of Mexico. So far from my Baja experiences, these pangueros are the ballsiest out there. We left the bay which was protected from the wind, and as soon as we turned the corner, I saw rolling waves in every direction. I immediately thought we were going to head back to the ramp and wait until the next day to dive...nope! The panguero GUNNED it and maneuvered that panga like it was a toy. He zig zagged through these white caps like I've never seen before...all my buddies looked at each other like this guy was nuts! But surprisingly, he was getting us to our destination quickly and rather safely. After a fun 45 minute ride, he dropped us off at some islands and we were greeted with ginormous boulders bigger than my house and 30 foot visibility. We immediately started seeing calicos in every direction but we decided not to shoot any since the tournament was the very next day. So we began shooting other reef fish instead. I was dropping to about 40-60 feet looking for white fish but the clear visibility allowed them to see me from a long way and they never gave me a chance to shoot them.



However, I can easily say I have NEVER seen as many sheepshead as I saw that day. Every other drop I saw a few 20 pounders, some easily over 30 and a ton in the 10-15 pound range. Absolutely insane. I think the amount of urchin, scallops, and mussels is what keeps their population extremely healthy down there. I shot a 22 pounder and a 15 to secure ceviche meat. The smaller one we made ceviche that same night with a few other divers we met that day and the bigger one I took home to share with my friends and family. The next day, which was the tournament day, we had much better weather and went a little further than the day before. We went to a kelp bed where I found out my gun was not shooting straight and missed a few opportunities at some really big calicos. Being very frustrated, I went back to the panga and grabbed my smaller Rob Allen which immediately started giving me great results. I shot 5 calicos throughout the day, none as big as the ones I saw in the morning, but I was stoked to have 5 for the tournament. Unfortunately I didn't place top 3 but I was extremely stoked to have experienced something new, and to have seen some amazing structure but most of all, to have made awesome memories with my friends.

- Jorge Veliz





**NEPTUNES AUCTION!!**

**APRIL 6TH @ 7PM**

**@ ME N' EDS PIZZA**

**HUGE  
SALE**

**This years Neptunes auction will be held at ME N EDS PIZZA on the corner of carson and paramount st. There will be tons of items to auction off from well known dive companies such as Riffe, Yazbeck, Neptonics and much more! Feel free to invite friends and family as there will be lots of pizza, good vibes and even better people! Oh, and dont forget to **BRING CASH!!****

MONTHLY CLUB MEETING

APRIL 6TH @ 7PM



**This month's club  
meeting will be held at  
Me-n-Ed's Pizzeria  
4115 Paramount Blvd,  
Lakewood, CA 90712**

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Jeff Benedict, Brian York, Jon McMullin, Will Wither, Steve Parkford

# 2022 CALENDAR

- March 31st - Last day of Calico Derby
- April 6th - Neptunes Auction
- June 4th - Blue Water meet
- July 16th - White Seabass limit (3)
- August 5th-7th Neptunes Family Catalina Campout
- October 2nd - First day of Lobster Season
- October 15th - Fall Classic
- December 3rd - Christmas Party

# FISH STANDINGS

## CALIFORNIA

Calico Derby

Todd Farquhar - 6.4

Calico Bass

Todd Farquhar - 6.4

White Seabass

Todd Farquhar - 59.7

Yellowtail

Open

Halibut

Open

Sheephead

Richard Cunningham - 24.9

Bonito

Open

Barracuda

Open

Dorado

Open

Bluefin Tuna

Open

Lobster

Open

Hobie Ladd - 8.2

## OUT OF STATE/COUNTRY AWARDS

Yellowfin Tuna

Open

Reef Fish

Open

Pelagic, non-tuna

Hobie Ladd - 31.1 (yellowtail)

## Kent McIntyre Award

Open

## Perpetual Big Fish Trophy

Open





The Long Beach Neptunes are proudly supported by the following entities

**ATOMIC  
AQUATICS**



**HERRANEN**  
SPEARFISHING



FIND REFUGE IN THE SEA





PACIFIC WILDERNESS



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