



Red Abalone Decline Factsheet

The poor condition of red abalone populations led the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) to close the fishery in 2018. California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) surveys in 2018 found lower densities of abalone and numerous fresh empty shells which indicated continued high mortality. The CDFW recommended extending the closure until 2021 and the Commission adopted that recommendation at their December, 2018, meeting.

Ocean conditions have negatively impacted abalone resources in northern California. Over the past five years, ocean warming reduced kelp growth and a massive purple sea urchin population explosion has cleared most of Mendocino and Sonoma counties of the kelps and other seaweeds which abalone depend upon for food. Normal ocean temperatures in recent years did not offset the effects of the purple sea urchins and abalone populations continued to decline. The urchins are much less affected by low food levels than abalone and while abalone populations have declined sharply, urchin numbers remain high. Surviving abalone populations largely exist in very shallow waters with deep water populations all but gone. This leaves abalone populations highly vulnerable to fishing effort and unable to sustain a fishery.

The CDFW does not have an estimate of when the red abalone fishery will reopen, but it is likely that sales of abalone cards will be limited when the fishery resumes. The condition of abalone populations is very poor, and it will probably take a long time before abalone populations could support past levels of fishing. Recent reports of abalone or fresh shells washing ashore during winter storm wave events indicate that mortality is still high. It is very unlikely a fishery would be reopened while abalone populations continue to decline.

The circumstances under which the fishery can be reopened will be determined through action of the Fish and Game Commission, pursuant to a new Red Abalone Fishery Management Plan (RAFMP). For more information and to get involved please visit: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/Red-Abalone-FMP>

Many Tribes have indicated a desire to co-manage the species with the CDFW and the Commission. These Tribes are seeking a Tribal allocation separate from the commercial and recreational fisheries. Tribes wishing to participate in the co-management of the red abalone and marine resources are encouraged to submit a letter to the Commission and CDFW stating their desire. Tribes are also encouraged to submit comments regarding the updated Recreational Red Abalone Fish Management Plan, scheduled to be adopted by the Commission on April 15, 2020.

For more information on how to get involved please contact Mr. Javier Silva, Noyo/Sherwood/Yokayo Pomo, at jsilva9806@gmail.com or (916) 515-707 and California Indian Environmental Alliance at (510) 848-2043 or visit www.cieaweb.org.