State of California
Department of Fish and Wildlife

Memorandum

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Date: January 8, 2020

To: Melissa Miller-Henson
Executive Director
Fish and Game Commission

From: Charlton H. Bonham
Director

Subject: Petition to Change Bag Limit and Seasonal Closure of California Grunion (Tracking Number: 2019-14)

A petition submitted by Dr. Karen Martin to the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) proposes to amend Section 27.60(b) and Section 28.00, Title 14, California Code of Regulations. The proposed changes are to create a 10 fish bag limit for California Grunion (Grunion), and to change the open season to July 1 – March 31 south of Pt. Conception, and September 1 – March 31 north of Pt. Conception. The rationale provided by Dr. Martin states Grunion are vulnerable to overharvest and habitat loss due to their unusual life cycle.

Grunion are an iconic and endemic species to California. They have a unique spawning strategy by beaching themselves at night during the four high tides following a full and new moon from February through September. During these spawning runs, the female's half bury themselves in the sand while the males curl around them releasing milt to fertilize the eggs before both return to the ocean. These predictable runs have become a cultural event in southern California sometimes drawing large numbers of individuals to observe this unique behavior and/or recreationally harvest grunion as they come ashore.

There is no commercial fishery for Grunion and a recreational bag limit has not been established. In 1927, a seasonal closure of April 1 through June 30 was enacted due to signs of a depleting population. This seasonal closure was amended in 1947 to reduce the closure to April 1 through May 31 due to signs of a recovering population. This seasonal closure is still in effect today, which protects the peak of the spawning period.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has very limited data on Grunion since they are not frequently caught using traditional fishery methods (e.g. hook-and-line, trawling, etc.) and are difficult to monitor due to their unique life cycle. The only abundance data available are from a group of citizen scientists, the Grunion Greeters, who monitor Grunion runs along the southern California coastline.

Over the past 15 years, their data show a decline in the frequency and numbers of Grunion in those runs. Additionally, Grunion are vulnerable to spawning habitat loss due to sea-level rise, beach erosion, and coastal development.

As outlined in the 2018 Master Plan for Fisheries scaled-management framework, the Department proposes to prepare an Enhanced Status Report (ESR) for Grunion in early 2020. The ESR will compile available information on the species, fishery, current management and monitoring efforts, and will help inform future management needs. The Department agrees the existing management measures for the Grunion fishery may need to be adjusted to address specific overharvest and habitat loss concerns. Once evaluated through the scaled-management framework, the Department proposes to provide an update to the Marine Resources Committee in July 2020 in San Clemente, CA to discuss possible regulatory amendments.

ec: California Department of Fish and Wildlife

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