

Summary of 2006-2007 Tomales Bay Pacific Herring Commercial Fishery

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Commercial Fishery

The Tomales Bay herring fishery opened on December 26, 2006 and closed February 28, 2007. Thirty-five limited entry commercial herring gill net permits were issued in Tomales Bay and the quota was set at 350 tons for the season. The quota was based on historical spawning biomass data. Two vessels actively fished during the 06-07 season. On December 30th two landings were made with a total of 1.2 tons (2436 pounds) and a roe count of 12.1%. This was the only landing made for the season. Low market price and high operating costs attributed to the low effort.

Monitoring and Assessment

Due to staffing changes, no spawning biomass assessment was preformed in Tomales Bay this season. However, limited monitoring was undertaken when time and weather permitted. Spawn surveys were preformed to determine absence or presence in preferred spawning areas. Trace spawns were detected on January 5th, January, 11th, February 7th and February 13th. Much of the spawn activity was located in the Southern portion of the Tomales Bay near Marconi Cove, Shallow Beach and Tomasini Point. Most spawning activity occurred on Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) and *Gracilaria* spp. During this time, research gillnets were also deployed to obtain herring samples. Only 2 fish were obtained while fishing the research net from a commercial vessel.

Discussion and Comments

Throughout the 2006-2007 season, schools of Pacific Herring were detected in Tomales Bay. This was evident by large groups of marine mammals and bird activity. Due to low rainfall and low turbidity, water clarity made it possible to visually detect schools of herring near the waters surface. This was observed during a research trip while riding with commercial fisherman, Harold Ames. Large schools were clearly visible under spotlight and on the fathometer. Several net sets were made using a multi-panel research net. Only two herring were caught. The two active permittees, and the herring buyer, believe the fish were uncatchable due to their small size. Numerous anecdotal reports were given of herring "swimming through nets." Based on previous records, the buyer reported that fish were of average length but under weight. Tim Furlong of

Garofalo Fish Company, reported that female herring landed in December weighed on average 3.2-3.3 ounces (90-94grams), down from the historical average of 3.6-3.7 ounces (102-105 grams). Several fisherman speculated that the smaller size classes could be attributed to unusually warm ocean conditions and lower food availability. Because no herring samples were obtained, it is impossible to determine the age structure or fish condition for the 06-07 season.

Table 1. Season Landings for the Tomales Bay Gill Net Fishery

Year	Pounds	Tons	Roe Count
Tomales Bay Re-opened with 2 1/8-inch mesh (Outer Bodega Bay Closed)			
92-93	444,312	222.3	11.0
93-94	437,867	218.9	12.3
94-95	550,262	275.1	12.0
95-96	710,573	355.3	13.8
96-97	443,128	222	11.6
97-98*	0	0	0
98-99	104,722	54	15.0
99-00	83,258	42	15.2
Tomales Bay Gill Net Study 2-inch mesh			
00-01	596,987	298.5	12.4
01-02	708,374	354.2	15.4
02-03	156,351	78	14.0
03-04	559,320	279.7	12.6
04-05	59,523	29.8	13.3
05-06	37,039	18.5	13.2
06-07	2,436	1.2	12.1
Average	326,277	163.3	12.3

* No commercial landings