

What is a fishery?

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When you hear about fisheries in the news, you think of fish - salmon or squid or other species of marine life - and maybe fishing boats that are used to catch them. While these are key components of a fishery, there's a lot more to fisheries that it is useful for citizens, consumers and resource managers alike to know, whether to manage them, make consumer choices or just better understand their communities.

Looking to our local fishing ports - Santa Cruz, Moss Landing and Monterey - and nearby communities like Watsonville, Pajaro and Salinas, you can see the many parts of a fishery, and begin to understand how they are all connected. From a human perspective, a fishery includes fishermen - skippers and crew - who use fishing boats and trap, trawl, troll, purse seine or other gear to catch albacore, Dungeness crab, halibut, rockfish, salmon, spot prawn, squid, sardine and other species. Some fishermen sell their catch directly to consumers right off the boat or at local farmers' markets. However, most deliver their catch to buyers at local ports. These buyers or processors then process the catch in facilities very similar to and sometimes shared with agricultural producers, before distributing it locally, elsewhere in the state, nationwide or even internationally.

Along the way, there are many people and businesses that provide goods and services in support of fisheries, and in turn, depend in them. These include harbors, fuel docks, hydraulic and electrical service providers, fishing gear and equipment vendors, and grocers, to name a few. Together, all of these people, places and businesses constitute fishing communities.

Two other interesting features of fisheries are their seasonality and their management, which are often closely related. While some fish species such as rockfish are available locally throughout the year, others such as salmon or squid are more seasonal. Albacore range close to our area only during the summer months, and then only if water temperature and other environmental conditions are right. These same factors are part of the reason fresh local troll-caught salmon are only available from about early May till the end of September or so. The other reason is that the federal Salmon Fishery Management Plan closes the fishery for the rest of the year to protect local as well as other salmon stocks. All of our local commercial fisheries are managed with state and/or federal management measures such as gear restrictions, closed areas and catch limits.

Sustainable fisheries - in ecological and human terms - depend on understanding fisheries as interconnected systems of people and resources. For more information about our local fisheries, please contact Sea Grant Marine Advisor Carrie Pomeroy at the UC Cooperative Extension Santa Cruz County office: 831-763-8002, cmpomeroy@ucdavis.edu.