

Focus on Fisheries at Monterey Bay Ports

Previously, this column provided some background on the commercial purse seine fishery for California market squid, one of the top two fisheries in terms of dockside (or “ex-vessel”) value statewide in recent years. But the relative importance of commercial fisheries varies considerably over time and from community to community, depending on environmental conditions, resource availability, the economics of fishing and seafood markets and regulations.

This is definitely the case in the Monterey Bay area, where each of the major ports - Santa Cruz, Moss Landing and Monterey - is characterized by a different mix of fisheries that reflect its history and define its niche in present day fisheries in the region and beyond. For the region as a whole, the top fisheries for 2001-05 have been squid seine, salmon troll, coastal pelagic species (“CPS,” sardine, mackerel, anchovy) seine, groundfish trawl, and sablefish hook-and-line and pot fisheries, with many others also making important contributions.

Monterey and Moss Landing have a similar mix of high-volume, lower price-per-pound fisheries such as squid seine, CPS seine and groundfish trawl and lower volume, higher price-per-pound fisheries like salmon troll and spot prawn trap. Although squid was the top fishery at both ports for 2001-05, the lower volume fisheries accounted for a greater proportion of the catch value in 2004 and 2005. At both ports, the types of fishing, receiving and processing operations, and the seafood products they produce, vary greatly. For example, while much of the squid catch is trucked to nearby processing plants, frozen in bulk, and exported, much of the locally caught and landed salmon, spot prawn and rockfish is packed in ice, and distributed to local and regional restaurants and markets. The biggest difference between these two fishing ports is the volume and value of landings, and by extension, the scale of operations. From 1981 through 1994, Moss Landing and Monterey ran neck-and-neck, with the annual fishery landings ranging from about \$5 million to \$11 million. But in 1995, Moss Landing edged ahead. Recently, the catch landed there has been worth about 4 times the catch landed at Monterey.

Santa Cruz is a starkly different fishing port from its two Monterey County counterparts, with a primary emphasis on lower-volume, higher price-per-pound fisheries to support local and regional restaurants and markets. Salmon has been a mainstay for the port, accounting for nearly half of the catch value for 2001-05. Also in the top five are crab pot, albacore troll and rockfish caught using hook-and-line or trap gear. The only higher volume fishery in the mix is the groundfish trawl fishery.

Despite the differences among our local fishing ports, they face similar opportunities and challenges - adapting to environmental, regulatory, and local as well as global market variability, uncertainty and change – not unlike the growers in our region.

For more information about our local commercial and recreational fisheries, please contact Sea Grant Marine Advisor Carrie Pomeroy at the UC Cooperative Extension Santa Cruz County office: 831-763-8002, cmpomeroy@ucdavis.edu.