

California State Senate

SENATOR MIKE MCGUIRE

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S SECOND SENATE DISTRICT



March 10, 2016

Felicia Marcus, Chairwoman
State Water Resources Control Board
P.O. Box 100
Sacramento, CA 95812-0100

Re: Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture Salmon Protection Items for 2016 Sacramento River Management

Dear Chairwoman Marcus:

I truly appreciate all of your efforts during our historic drought. I wanted to reach out to you today regarding California's devastated salmon runs.

As you know, the Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture held the 43rd Annual Zeke Grader Fisheries Forum on February 11, 2016. We heard compelling testimony from the commercial and recreational fishing community about the ongoing impacts to the California salmon fishery and the livelihoods of the thousands of fisherman who depend on the fishery.

I don't need to tell you this, but the Dungeness crab season is a disaster and the 2015 salmon season was not much better. The closure of California's commercial crab fishery has made the fishing crisis significantly worse, because many commercial fishermen rely on both a healthy crab and salmon fishery for their livelihood. The combination of the collapse of both fisheries has resulted in devastating economic impacts to fishermen and deep concern about their future in the industry.

This is a critical time for California's salmon populations, which, when healthy, support a \$5.7 billion fishery and 94,000 jobs. The 2015 salmon season produced poor landings, far below projections. Only 112,400 salmon returned to the Sacramento Valley to spawn in 2015, below the minimum agency target. Fishermen are deeply concerned about a potential repeat of the 2008-2009 closures of the California salmon fishery, which included significant restrictions on the Oregon fishery. Federal agencies anticipate that fishing will be further restricted in 2016 than in 2014 and 2015, with the 2016 ocean preseason forecast of only 299,600 for Sacramento fall run salmon – less than half of the previous two years.

The drought, along with our State's water management practices, significantly harmed salmon runs during 2014 and 2015, including the loss of 95% to 98% of juvenile wild Sacramento River fall and winter run salmon likely causing increased restrictions in the 2017 and 2018 fishing seasons.

The State Water Resources Control Board's (Board) salmon protection requirements, particularly for the Sacramento River, are critical to avoiding another disaster and assisting with the recovery of salmon runs and fishing opportunity following the end of the drought.

I urge the Board to ensure all salmon runs are protected in 2016, from both temperature impacts and redd dewatering, and avoid a repeat of the disastrous impacts experienced in 2014 and 2015. This is particularly important for fall run Chinook, as the Board is the main body to ensure that fishery beneficial uses are protected.

Temperature management should be the priority focus for the Board. Specifically, storage targets for Lake Shasta should be set to provide appropriate temperature management for salmon survival throughout the spawning and incubation season.

The Board should require a margin of safety in designing requirements for temperature objectives in 2016. The Board should set a lower maximum temperature threshold of 55 degrees Fahrenheit or less, acknowledging optimal temperature of 43 to 50 degrees, and require a margin of safety for any error or unexpected events. Without such a margin of safety, any deviation from modelling data or unexpected development, as experienced the last two years, can result in unacceptable negative impacts to salmon.

The Board should also require the Bureau of Reclamation to work with water users and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife on water delivery timing to minimize or eliminate dewatering of redds, including fall run salmon redds.

I urge your prompt attention to provide maximum salmon protection this year, prevent a third consecutive year of disastrous impacts, and avoid potentially devastating fishery closures. If I can be of any assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me personally or Committee Consultant, Tom Weseloh, at (707) 445-6508.

I look forward to your response and continuing to work with you and the Board to protect our precious salmon resources.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MIKE MCGUIRE', with a stylized flourish at the end.

MIKE MCGUIRE
Senator