

## California Department of Fish and Game's Response to the Sabellid Worm Infestation

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The California Department of Fish and Game's (Department's) goal is the eradication of the sabellid worm infestation. The approach used to achieve the goal is guided by legislative mandate and has changed as research information became available. This presentation will describe the Department's response to the infestation in light of those changing conditions.

The Department became aware of the sabellid worm infestation in late 1994. Biological information was limited and the approach used by the Department took advantage of the cooperation that already existed between the abalone aquaculture industry and University researchers. Appreciable resources to address what appeared to be an aquaculture problem had already been marshaled, including obtaining Rapid Response funding for research from California Sea Grant. When that research determined in early 1995 that the worm was an exotic from South Africa, the Department sought recommendations from its Aquaculture Disease Committee.

Based on those recommendations, the Department's approach changed. While cooperative research was encouraged, the Department also committed its resources to addressing the problem and placed a prohibition on the planting of

cultured abalone in the wild. Department resources were focused on determining the extent of the infestation and assisting in minimizing its spread through California's aquaculture industry.

When research subsequently showed that the worm was capable of infesting other mollusks, the Department required each facility to develop a plan for eradication and made its development a condition for renewal of aquaculture registration. Those plans, which include specific requirements imposed by the Department, have been implemented and are being evaluated further by the Department. Ongoing cooperative risk assessments are focusing on the control and eradication of the one known infestation in the wild. Surveys are also being conducted to determine whether other introductions to the wild have occurred as a result of past abalone enhancement efforts that used cultured abalone.

While these efforts are ongoing, the Department has also implemented a reorganization that effectively increases its ability to focus on aquaculture issues through the formation of an aquaculture team. This team is interested in expanding existing partnerships that are responding to this problem and in creating new partnerships to address a variety of related issues including the control and management of exotic introductions.