

# Fisheries and Sea Otter Conservation Coalition

~working for Balanced Marine Ecosystem Management

## What's Happening with Sea Otters?

For the past several decades many people have been concerned about the small sea otter population in California and the threats from various activities that could jeopardize their survival.

In 1986, Congress adopted legislation setting a goal for federal agencies to conserve sea otters and protect potentially impacted fishing industries. Shellfish is a primary food for sea otters and shellfish populations can easily be decimated by otters. As a result of Congressional direction, the US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) adopted a plan to start a new colony of sea otters far removed from the current mainland population and maintain a sea otter management zone which would let regulated shellfish fishing (including sea urchin) to continue.

After implementing only part of the plan, the FWS stopped the program intended to recover sea otters and protect fishing. It claimed that a few sea otter mortalities were risking all sea otters, even though some mortality was expected from the beginning. The FWS undertook a review of the original plan and in 2005 announced that it favored abandoning a 20 year management program of balancing sea otter recovery and fishing protections. Its new plan is a "no management plan" which allows sea otters to go wherever they want. The FWS' unreasonable action will lead to inevitable conflicts between sea otters and legal fishing activities and sea otters and other protected marine species.

While the FWS focuses on the negligible benefits to sea otters to be derived by sacrificing the sea urchin industry and others, the real threat to sea otter is not being addressed. It is widely recognized that the most serious killer of sea otters is pollutant discharges and poor water quality. If the hundreds of sea otter deaths from pollution were prevented, sea otters would reach recovery goals in a few short years.

The **California Sea Urchin Commission** has taken the lead to ensure the original policy, to balance sea otter recovery and fishing protections, is obeyed. We have formed the **Fisheries & Sea Otter Conservation Coalition** to protect fishing opportunities while sea otter recovery programs are underway. Early in 2006, the Sea Urchin Commission submitted comments on the new FWS plan. We found that they used outdated information, had inappropriately applied scientific modeling, and was ignoring the significant water quality problem facing sea otters. These comments and other points of concern are posted at the Coalition's website: [www.fsocc.org](http://www.fsocc.org).

California Sea Urchin Commission, California Trap and Lobster Association, Ventura County Commercial Fishermen's Association, California Wetfish Producers Association, Southern California Trawlers Association, Recreational Fishing Alliance, West Coast Seafood Processors Association, Los Angeles Commercial Fishermen's Association, California Abalone Association

1621B 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Sacramento, CA 95814 - 916.444.8194 - Fax 916.444.8195 - [www.fsocc.org](http://www.fsocc.org)