



Contact: Jim Milbury (562) 980 - 4006
Melissa Neuman (562) 980 - 4115

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NOAA Fisheries Service Requests Comments on Draft Recovery Plan for Endangered White Abalone

LONG BEACH, Calif. - NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) is seeking public comment on a draft plan released today that will assist in the recovery of endangered white abalone, a species of marine mollusk that once thrived off the coast of Southern California. Access to the draft plan, and methods for the public to provide comment, can be found at the end of this release.

The white abalone (*Haliotis sorenseni*) was once abundant off the coast of Baja and Southern California, although the species remained somewhat hidden at depths of 70 to 200 feet, far deeper than their shallow-water cousins of reds and blacks. The development of deep-sea diving equipment, along with the reputation of the white abalone's excellent taste, caused intensive commercial harvesting to begin in about 1969. By 1972 commercial landings of white abalone peaked at 143,000 pounds and by 1978, the numbers plummeted to below 5,000 pounds.

Today, estimates of white abalone densities are several orders of magnitude lower than historic estimates and there may be just a few thousand individuals left in Southern California.

In 2001, white abalone was listed as the first federally endangered marine invertebrate under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA). Once a species is listed under the ESA, a recovery plan must be developed and implemented to allow for the conservation and survival of the animal. Consequently, a team of scientific experts was appointed to develop a plan, the draft of which is now available for public comment.

The draft recovery plan is available online at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/recovery/plans.htm> or by submitting a request to the Assistant Regional Administrator, Protected Resources Division, Southwest Region, NMFS, 501 West Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200, Long Beach, Calif., 90802-4213.

Comments on the plan must be received by December 18, 2006 and may be submitted by: email to whiteabalone.recoveryplan@noaa.gov; fax to (562) 980-4027; or mail to Chief, Protected Resources Division, Southwest Region, National Marine Fisheries Service, 501 West Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200, Long Beach, Calif., 90802-4213.

In 2007 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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Helpful Websites:

For the federal register announcing recovery plan availability, the electronic version of the recovery plan and the ways to submit comments, please see:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/recovery/plans.htm>

Other sites:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

NOAA's Southwest Regional Office: <http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/>

NOAA's Southwest Fisheries Science Center: <http://swfsc.noaa.gov/default.aspx>