

ODA and industry attempt to clear up consumer confusion over listing

Oregon wild-caught salmon safe and sustainable

June 29, 2010... Oregon wild-caught salmon are safe to eat and the fishery is not being depleted. That's the message Oregon's commercial salmon industry and the Oregon Department of Agriculture are sending to consumers. The message comes in response to a "red-listing" by the Monterey Bay Aquarium (MBA) and its SeafoodWatch program that advises the public to avoid purchasing Oregon wild-caught salmon. The listing is based on what the aquarium perceives as a fish sustainability issue, not a food safety issue, but the result has caused confusion among consumers as well as fishermen and the media.

"I've had calls and e-mails from consumers who are confused about the red-avoid listing," says Nancy Fitzpatrick, executive director of the Oregon Salmon Commission. "Many people think it means the salmon are not safe to eat. Nothing could be further from the truth."

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) granted a commercial salmon fishing season along the Oregon coast this year.

"Salmon is a highly regulated fishery on the West Coast and one of the most intensively managed in the U.S.," says PFMC Executive Director Don McIsaac in response to MBA's action.

Ed Cassano, SeafoodWatch program executive director, reassured Fitzpatrick that the listing is based on MBA's perception of sustainability issues, not food safety. MBA is concerned about Sacramento River salmon runs and believes the PFMC should not have allowed the current commercial salmon fishing along the Oregon coast.

ODA Assistant Director Dalton Hobbs emphasizes that Oregon wild-caught salmon remain safe to eat. He also disputes MBA's interpretation of the sustainability issue.

"The PFMC and federal fishery managers use science to determine whether coastal salmon can be harvested, when, and how many fish can be caught," says Hobbs. The 'red-avoid' listing sends a confusing message to consumers that eating Oregon wild-caught salmon this summer will lead to the demise of the fishery. Science tells us otherwise."

After a two-year closure of the fishery, Oregon salmon fishermen have been allowed to harvest this year on mixed stocks off the Oregon coast. Fishermen are landing Chinook salmon from many healthy river systems. Even so, PFMC took a conservative approach this summer by limiting the season to roughly half the number of days of a typical season.

"All Oregon salmon are sustainably harvested according to the best available science," says Jerry Reinholdt, a member of PFMC's salmon advisory subpanel.

---more---

Several owners of retail seafood stores have contacted the Oregon Salmon Commission with questions from their customers regarding the "red-avoid" classification. The owners are assuring them that the salmon is safe to eat, and has been harvested under federal management guidelines.

“Oregon salmon is caught by hook and line, then cleaned and iced immediately,” says Hobbs. “Fishermen bring a quality product to buyers who maintain this quality to ensure a premium product to the consumer. Anyone who enjoys the great taste of Oregon wild-caught salmon should feel good about purchasing a local product from an important sector of the coastal economy.”

This year’s main coastal salmon season, which began May 1, will close August 25. The south coast fishery in the Klamath Zone has small quotas of salmon that can be caught during limited days in July and August.

For more information, contact Nancy Fitzpatrick, Oregon Salmon Commission, at (541) 994-2647 or Dalton Hobbs, ODA, at (503) 872-6600.