

October 24, 2002 (703) 519-9691

California Bans Recreational Fishing in Channel Islands

(Alexandria, VA) In what many anglers fear may be the first in a series of sweeping nationwide closure yesterday California Governor Gray Davis dismissed the concerns of anglers and scientists by slamming the door on some of the most popular recreational fishing areas in Southern California.

"We all have an interest in seeing healthy fish, especially anglers," said Mike Nussman, President and CEO of the American Sportfishing Association. "The sportfishing community has long supported focused closures as part of a larger management strategy, but this single-minded philosophy of banning public access absent any scientific or economic merit is misguided."

Under a decision announced late yesterday at a meeting of the California Fish and Game Commission in Santa Barbara, 175 square miles of coastal waters surrounding the Channel Islands, equaling about 30 percent of Southern California's best fishing areas, will be placed permanently off-limits (including catch and release fishing). Not only will thousands of people in the region no longer be able to pursue America's most popular outdoor leisure time sport, but local charter boats, hotels, restaurants and other businesses that rely on angler dollars will suffer. Annual losses in retail sales due to the closures may reach \$50 million according to a recent analysis by Southwick Associates, a leading natural resource economic consulting firm.

California is second only to Florida in the number of anglers and the amount of money spent on fishing. More than 2.4 million people in California spend \$2.38 billion on recreational fishing each year. In excess of 43,000 jobs and \$60 million in state tax revenue is tied to recreational fishing according to an American Sportfishing Association analysis of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service data.

Anglers are concerned that California may be only the first domino to fall, triggering a broader movement towards unnecessary bans of recreational fishing. Further closures are likely in California and similar efforts are underway in other coastal states including Oregon, Massachusetts and Florida. These efforts, aggressively pushed by several environmental activist organizations, have moved forward despite concerns raised by anglers, conservation groups, respected outdoor journalists, and scientists.

Determined not to allow the California decision to set precedent, anglers and conservation organizations have united to launch the Freedom to Fish campaign. It is a reflection of their shared interest in advancing marine management programs based on sound science and ensuring angler access when recreational fishing is not jeopardizing fish populations. Led nationally by the American Sportfishing Association, the group of supporters includes B.A.S.S./ESPN, Coastal Conservation Association, International Game Fish Association, Jersey Coast Anglers Association, National Marine Manufacturers Association, Recreational Fishing Alliance, Sportfishing Association of California, and United Anglers of Southern California. With a combined membership of over a million, these groups worked with the ASA to craft the Freedom To Fish Act, now pending in Congress, and helped mobilize more than 5,000 angler letters petitioning Congress for its passage.

"With Atlantic striped bass, redfish, white seabass, and many other sportfish, anglers have demonstrated their willingness to sacrifice fishing access or technique when it was necessary to recover fish populations," Nussman said. "What we're seeing now is the theoretical fervor for marine protected areas getting far ahead of the scientific evidence to support such measures."

Numerous independent authorities on fisheries management have expressed unease over the lack of any empirical evidence in support of marine protected areas and disputed the environmentalists' claim that anglers would benefit from massive closures (see attachment). In findings presented earlier this year to the California Fish and Game Commission, Dr. Robert Shipp, an authority on fisheries management and Marine Sciences Chair at the University of South Alabama, noted that better implementation of existing regulations would be a more common-sense method for recovering depressed fish populations.

Characterizing yesterday's decision on the Channel Islands, Tom Raftican, president of the popular angler organization, United Anglers of Southern California said, "the Commission went blasting ahead with a ready, fire, aim approach... California anglers have just been knocked flat by the train leaving the station. Other states need to take notice because they're next."

To join the Freedom To Fish campaign to protect fish and citizens opportunity to go fishing, please visit www.FreedomToFish.org.

The American Sportfishing Association is the recreational fishing trade association, with more than 500 members representing the fishing and boating industry, state and federal natural resource agencies, angler advocacy groups, and outdoor journalists. The American Sportfishing Association initiates and supports efforts to advance healthy fisheries, fishing opportunities, and a profitable sportfishing industry.

Supporters of the Freedom To Fish Act include the American Sportfishing Association, B.A.S.S., Coastal Conservation Association, International Game Fish Association, Jersey Coast Anglers Association, National Marine Manufacturers Association, Recreational Fishing Alliance, Sportfishing Association of California and United Anglers of Southern California. For more information, visit www.FreedomToFish.org.

Please also take a look at the attached newsletter "MPA News" published by the University of Washington. Their report on measuring the effects of marine protected areas supports our contention that the science of MPAs has not caught up to the rhetoric.

[MPA News](#)

David Rosenthal
West Coast Angler