



PRESS RELEASE

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Seafood Processors Remain Concerned About COVID-19 Impacts to Industry

Seafood processors are hoping to see significant improvements in 2021 over last year as more people are vaccinated against the coronavirus (COVID-19) and restaurants begin to open again.

Fishermen and seafood processors are the backbone of many coastal communities, providing economic stability by generating thousands of local year-round jobs. West Coast fisheries, including groundfish/rockfish, pink shrimp, Dungeness crab, salmon, albacore tuna and Pacific hake (whiting), are the key to retaining workers in seafood processing facilities and critical infrastructure in many port communities. But, like many businesses nationwide, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant toll on fishing and seafood businesses.

“Last year was really tough for seafood processors who depend on restaurants and food service for their primary business model,” West Coast Seafood Processors Association (WCSPA) Executive Director Lori Steele said of 2020. “Some processors closed temporarily or had to lay off many workers. Others had to consolidate or completely restructure their business plans to try to keep their doors open year-round.”

As recent information shows, fresh seafood sales to restaurants make up 60 to 80 percent of a processor’s revenues. Restaurant closures and continued capacity restrictions have directly affected WCSPA members, but businesses and industry leaders are cautiously hopeful for the rest of this year.

“We anticipate demand for seafood to increase in 2021 as more vaccines are made available to the public and the country begins to re-open. However, this process will be slow. Supply chains will remain disrupted, and some markets will take years to fully recover,” Steele added. “Unfortunately for the seafood sector, the economic impacts of this pandemic will be experienced for quite some time still.”

WCSPA members and many of the fishermen who deliver to them have been able to apply for some Federal aid from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed in March 2020. Lawmakers made \$300 million available to fishermen and processors around the country and recently

provided another \$300 million for distribution later this year. States developed spending plans for distributing the funds to fishing/seafood businesses that experienced losses greater than 35 percent during the first half of 2020 due to the pandemic. While funds have been very slow to reach some companies in critical need – seafood companies in Washington and Alaska are still waiting for the first round of funding – the assistance is a much-appreciated boost for these companies.

“We’d like to thank the West Coast delegation for working to make this funding available for the seafood industry,” Steele said. “It is absolutely critical to help ensure the viability of the businesses that anchor West Coast ports and coastal communities.”

About WCSPA

The West Coast Seafood Processors Association represents small and large processors involved in the processing of U.S.-caught seafood in Washington, Oregon and California. In addition, some companies engage in harvesting, distribution, transportation, retail sales, aquaculture and international trade. Collectively, WCSPA members process the majority of Dungeness crab, Pacific pink shrimp, groundfish (flatfish and rockfish) and Pacific hake (whiting) landed on the West Coast.

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Links to More Information:

CARES Act: <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/cares>

NOAA Fisheries Initial Impacts Assessment of the COVID-19 Crisis on the U.S. Commercial Seafood and Recreational For-Hire/Charter Industries:

<https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-02/Initial-COVID-19-Impact-Assessment-webready.pdf>

West Coast Fisheries Impacts from COVID-19:

<https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-02/West-Coast-COVID-19-Impact-Snapshot-webready.pdf>

NOAA Fisheries Updated Impact Assessment of the COVID-19 Crisis on the U.S. Commercial Seafood and Recreational For-Hire/Charter Industries:

<https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-02/Updated-COVID-19-Impact-Assessment-webready.pdf>