



Georgia Strait Alliance

"Caring for our Coastal Waters"

www.GeorgiaStrait.org

SARA Listing Consultations
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Georgia Strait Alliance Supports Status Change for Northern Abalone

Earlier this year, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) re-assessed Northern Abalone (*Haliotis kamtschatkana*) and changed the status of the species under SARA from "threatened" to "endangered". Consequently, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has requested public input to the decision-making process prior to the Minister of Environment, in consultation with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, making a re-listing recommendation. Accordingly, and as part of the process, the Georgia Strait Alliance (GSA) would like to register its strong support for re-listing the Northern Abalone as "endangered".

As the only citizens' group focused on protecting the marine environment in and around the whole Strait of Georgia, the Georgia Strait Alliance is a key stakeholder in the fate of Northern Abalone. We are an organization committed to a future that includes clean water and air, healthy wild salmon runs, rich marine life and natural areas, as well as sustainable communities supported by well-managed fisheries on renewable resources such as Northern Abalone.

While the Georgia Strait Alliance endorses a change in status for Northern Abalone, GSA is concerned that the failure of recovery efforts to-date appears reflective of insufficient intervention by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to curb and reverse the effects of poaching. Therefore, without related actions by the federal government to strengthen enforcement in conjunction with augmented conservation measures, re-listing alone cannot serve a meaningful purpose.

The history of the Northern Abalone is a particularly poignant saga of unsustainable harvest levels, poor management and illegal activity that warrants review as context to this discussion. During the 1970's and 80's, British Columbia enjoyed a valuable commercial dive fishery for abalone. The harvest reached a peak in 1977, when over one million pounds were taken. However, in 1990, with landings falling to 110,000 pounds (a drop of approximately 90%), the entire abalone fishery (commercial, recreational and Wanted Alive aboriginal) was closed and remains closed today. Indeed, Northern Abalone is the only commercial species on the coast of British Columbia with a total ban on harvesting. Nevertheless, the species has continued to decline due to illegal poaching and in 1999, COSEWIC declared the Northern Abalone "threatened", a status that was reconfirmed in 2000 - but now we are looking at a change to "endangered".

A National Recovery Strategy for Northern Abalone in British Columbia was developed with the goal of recovering the species back to sustainable levels. Although the Georgia Strait Alliance notes that several aquaculture projects are underway in British Columbia in an attempt to rebuild stocks plus there are associated research and monitoring efforts, the biggest threat – poaching – remains. Given that poachers often kill individuals before they've had a chance to reproduce, this explains why, even with a total fishery ban, the population is not recovering.

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Poaching continues and is difficult to eradicate. More effective enforcement and the imposition of penalties that are severe enough to deter illegal harvesting are the responsibility of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. However, please be assured that the Georgia Strait Alliance will continue to play its role in recovery efforts for Northern Abalone by increasing public awareness on the threats to the species, and enlisting their help in urging divers to stop taking abalone and letting restaurant managers know that consumption of the species is unacceptable.

In closing, the Georgia Strait Alliance not only supports the re-listing of Northern Abalone to “endangered” under SARA but also urges the federal government to learn from the unfortunate history surrounding the decline of the Northern Abalone and provide the increased support necessary to recover the species.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Elnor Ph.D.

GSA Advisory Committee

cc: Christianne Wilhelmson
Managing Director, GSA