

Illegal fishing is baloney when it comes to BC Abalone

@hantoniak_
Helen Antoniak
hantoniak@me.com

The Issue

British Columbia's Northern Abalone (*Haliotis kamtschatkana*) populations are critically low and as of 2009, the species is listed as endangered by COSEWIC.¹ While abalone face several large threats including disease and sea otter predation, illegal fishing is by far the most detrimental.² Despite the current SARA protections from harvesting, harassment, and habitat destruction, illegal fishing continues to negatively impact.^{1,3}

abalone
population
size

smaller populations are unstable and put abalone at risk of extinction^{5,6}

recovery
rates

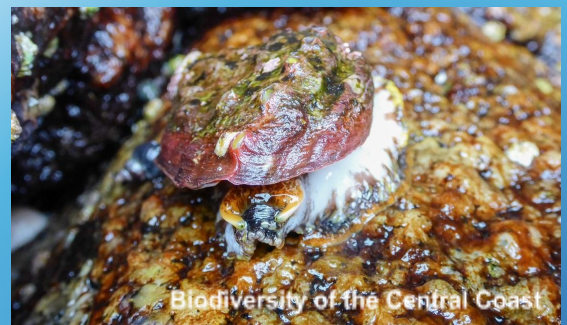
harvesting larger (mature) individuals reduces the species' reproductive ability to recover

other
important
species

depletion triggers a cascade effect felt across the entire food web

So what?

Northern Abalone are extremely vulnerable to over-depletion as they are long-lived and mature slowly, making it difficult to recover from small population sizes.¹ **To stop further declines in their populations, we need to put an end to illegal fishing;** or at the very least, reduce its occurrence. If illegal fishing persists at the current rate, we risk losing Northern Abalone entirely, creating a detrimental ripple effect felt throughout coastal food webs, the economy, and First Nations communities.^{4,6} Environmentally, the loss of abalone means removing a vital nutrient source from the diets of many species such as river and sea otters, eagles, sea stars, and giant octopuses.² Indigenous communities have already lost access to Northern Abalone for food and ceremonial purposes so if the mollusc becomes extinct, the subsequent cultural effects will be devastating.^{3,8}



Biodiversity of the Central Coast

Current Recovery Efforts and Protections

Most current protections are doing little to halt dwindling abalone stocks. The closure of Northern Abalone fisheries in 1990 and current marketplace genetic testing have not been effective because they are passive solutions which do not prevent illegal harvesting.² Despite the creation of Abalone Coast Watch programs and groups such as The Abalone Recovery Implementation Group (AbRIG), populations have not recovered meaning there is still more to be done.^{2,6,7} **We cannot rehabilitate abalone populations without removing the problem that is harming them first.** Therefore, there is an urgent need to actively combat the illegal fishing of Northern Abalone along the British Columbian coast.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Prioritize Monitoring**- Increasing funding for already existing coastal monitoring groups will result in more consistent and effective surveillance. This increases the likelihood that abalone poachers will be caught, acting as a proactive deterrent.
2. **Other fishery subsidies**- To shift away from abalone poaching, subsidizing other fisheries will incentivize people to move towards a more accessible and profitable fishing industry.
3. **Increase penalties for abalone poachers**- Being caught illegally harvesting Northern Abalone can already lead to jail time, heavy fines, and a forfeit of diving rights and equipment.⁸ Increasing these penalties will deter poachers as the risks of being caught will outweigh the profit from illegally harvesting and selling abalone.
4. **Incorporate Indigenous knowledge**- Abalone populations were steady prior to settler arrival so First Nations communities should be given more conservation authority.^{9,10} This allows for the incorporation of their knowledge of resource governance and stewardship in the development of future abalone management and protections.

References

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- ⁷ Fisheries and Oceans Canada. "Action Plan for the Northern Abalone (Haliotis Kamtschatkana) in Canada." *Species At Risk Act Action Plan Series*, Government of Canada, 2011, https://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual_sara/files/plans/ap_haliotide_abalone_1111_eng.pdf
- ⁸ Fisheries and Oceans Canada. "Deterring Abalone Poachers with Stiff Penalties." *Government of Canada, Communications Branch*, 22 Mar. 2022, <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes/publications/sara-lep/recovering-retablissement/2007-06-eng.html>
- ⁹ Lee, Lynn Chi, et al. "Drawing on Indigenous Governance and Stewardship to Build Resilient Coastal Fisheries: People and Abalone along Canada's Northwest Coast." *Marine Policy*, vol. 109, Nov. 2019, p. 103701., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2019.103701>
- ¹⁰ Marine Stewardship Group. "Abalone CoastWatch." *Haida Gwaii Marine Matters*, <https://www.marinematters.org/programs/abaloneWatchProgram.html#2>

Contacts:

David Eby, BC Premier

Telephone: 250-387-1715

email: premier@gov.bc.ca

Nathan Cullen, BC Minister of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship

Telephone: (778) 405-3094

email: LWRS.minister@gov.bc.ca

Kelly Greene, Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Aquaculture

Telephone: (250) 387-3655

email: kelly.greene.MLA@leg.bc.ca

Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

Telephone: 604-664-9220

email: DFO.Minister-Ministre.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca (DFO), joyce.murray@parl.gc.ca
(personal)

Ken Sim, Vancouver Mayor

email: Ken.Sim@vancouver.ca

Note: I give my consent to this assignment being used with the people who collaborated with us and for future course participants.