



# Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

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**To: The Honorable Ken Helm, Chair  
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water**

### House Bill 2219

**Debbie Colbert, Deputy Director for Fish and Wildlife Programs**

**Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide background relevant to House Bill 2219. HB 2219 modifies the statutory structure for commercial fishing laws for sea urchins. The bill requires the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (OFWC) to liberalize the existing limited entry urchin fishery permit system to create a separate unlimited purple sea urchin fishery. The bill further requires designation of kelp forest threatened areas and kelp forest restoration areas. Associated with these newly designated areas would be Department monitoring and evaluation of purple urchin grazing impacts on those designated areas as well as encouragement of localized purple urchin harvest.

The bill is seeking to address purple urchin over-population and its impact on kelp forests by encouraging a greater commercial harvest of that species. While this approach could be effective for a species where commercial laws are limiting harvest, Oregon's limited entry urchin fishery is currently underutilized by commercial fishers – that is, not all permits are being utilized and each permit authorizes unlimited harvest of urchin. In a typical year, only seven to ten of the permits are used with two to five permits unused and available by lottery.

The lack of participation in this fishery is likely related to the low market value of this species. In urchins, market value is currently driven by the amount of roe (or “uni”) that can be collected and utilized by the sushi industry. Because purple urchins are small, they generally produce a smaller amount of roe; additionally, because kelp beds are depleted, the urchins are essentially in starvation mode and are producing less roe than they would otherwise. For both reasons, there is little market for purple urchins. So, statutory changes to the commercial fishing statutes as envisioned by HB 2219 are not likely to reduce purple urchin overpopulation or restore kelp forests.

The root cause of kelp forest degradation is likely two-fold: 1) the negative impacts of the marine heatwave on kelp (well-known to be vulnerable to warm temperature and low nutrients), and 2) the impact of the marine heatwave on the urchin-predator, *Pycnopodia*, the ravenous sunflower sea star which is under threat of extinction due to marine heatwave-related disease.

The Department appreciates that the intent of the bill is to restore kelp forests and would welcome an opportunity to discuss opportunities to better understand and address the root causes and solutions for kelp bed degradation.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comment.

### **CONTACTS:**

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