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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PIER FISHERMEN: HOW FAMILIAR
ARE THEY WITH THE SPORT FISHING REGULATIONS?

by

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ABSTRACT

Anglers frequently violate sport fishing regulations out of ignorance, by mistake, or by deliberate action. To determine whether unfamiliarity with the regulations plays a major part in this problem, we asked pier fishermen a series of questions which tested their knowledge of the regulations.

We discovered that on any given weekday, only 7% of the anglers on a pier kept a copy of the regulations with them for reference. The remaining fishermen had to depend upon memory for the rules; however, only 31% of the anglers knew three or more of those rules.

Pier anglers are not well-enough informed to follow the size limit regulations. However, anglers on piers do not often catch size-regulated fish. Unless these anglers engage in another type of fishing (such as from a boat) they will not significantly detract from the success of fishery management programs for size-regulated fish species.

1/ Marine Resources Region, Administrative Report No. 80-2
January 1980.

2/ Marine Resources Region, California State Fisheries Laboratory,
350 Golden Shore, Long Beach, California 90802.

INTRODUCTION

Fishery management regulations designed to conserve or enhance sport fish resources cannot be effective unless fishermen cooperate with these regulations. Anglers must be aware that the take of certain species is regulated, they must be able to recognize those species when encountered, and they must be willing to release the regulated fish they catch.

During a 1975-78 survey of southern California sport fishermen by Department personnel, it was noticed that many of the violations were due to anglers' ignorance of the sport fishing regulations and inability to identify regulated fish species. To determine if these factors contribute a serious obstacle to the success of fishery management programs, we conducted several studies designed to test the knowledge of two segments of the sport fishery: pier fishermen and private-boat fishermen. This report contains the results of the test of pier fishermen's familiarity with the 1979 California Sport Fishing Regulations.

The purpose of this survey was to find out 1) if anglers are aware that fishing regulations exist, 2) which size limit regulations are most/least familiar to the angler, 3) how many anglers keep a copy of the regulations with them for reference when fishing, 4) how many anglers ought to keep a copy with them because they don't know all the size limit regulations, 5) how many anglers don't need to keep a copy with them because they know the size limit regulations, and 6) how many anglers with regulations received the copy unsolicited, and how many had to specifically request them from an agency.

If anglers are not familiar with the regulations and do not keep a copy with them for reference when fishing, then violations of the law will occur through angler ignorance. In consequence, the sport fish resources will definitely suffer.

OPERATIONS

During November, 1979, each public or private fishing pier in Los Angeles and Orange Counties was sampled for one weekday. Every third or fourth person on the pier was approached and asked to participate in a fishing survey ^{3/}. Those anglers who agreed to participate (most were cooperative) were asked a series of ten questions (Figure 1). The interviewer did not provide any answers while the test was in progress, and the test was voided if another person prompted the angler being interviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We interviewed 290 anglers on 12 piers. More than 94% of the anglers reported that they were aware that California had laws about sport fishing. Those few people who did not know that fishing regulations exist were mostly first-time anglers or out-of-State anglers.

There are only six minimum size limits which marine fishermen in southern California need to know: 12 in. for the three *Paralabrax* bass spp.; 22 in. for the California halibut, *Paralichthys californicus*; and 28 in. for both the California barracuda, *Sphyrnaea argentea*, and the white seabass, *Atractoscion nobilis*. We found that 26% of the anglers interviewed knew none of these size limits. Only 31% knew three or more of the size limits.

The most familiar size limit to pier anglers was the one for California halibut. Slightly more than one-half of the anglers knew the correct size limit for this fish. Less than one-third of the anglers were aware of the correct limit for bass, and less than one-fourth knew the correct limit for California barracuda. The least well-known size limit was that of the white seabass; only one-tenth of the anglers were familiar with this regulation (Table 1).

^{3/} About 2% of those approached were non-English speaking and were not included in the survey.

FIGURE 1. Questionnaire for sport fishing regulations test.

REGULATIONS TEST

LOCATION _____	DATE _____
COUNTY _____	WEEKEND _____
SAMPLER _____	WEEKDAY _____

ANGLER: M or F

1/ How long have you been fishing off the southern California coast?
 less than 1 year 6-10 years
 1-5 years over 10 years

2/ How often do you go fishing each year? _____

3/ Are you aware that fishing regulations exist?
 yes no (if "no", skip to # 10)

4/ Do you have a copy of the fishing regulations?
 yes no (if "no", skip to #8)

5/ Is it at home, or do you have it with you?
 at home with him/her

6/ Where did you get it? _____

7/ Did you have to ask for it?
 yes no

8/ Do you know the size limits on any fish?
 yes no (if "no", skip to # 10)

9/ Which ones? (List names of fish and limits)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

10/ Do you have a fishing license?
 yes no

COMMENTS:

TABLE 1. Angler Familiarity with Minimum Size Limits.

Species	Limit	% of anglers knowing correct size limit	% of anglers with incorrect* size limit
California halibut	22 in.	55	8
<i>Paralabrax</i> bass spp.	12 in.	31	1
California barracuda	28 in.	23	6
White seabass	28 in.	10	2

* an incorrect size limit refers to any limit which is smaller than the legal minimum size limit.

As might be expected, anglers with considerable fishing experience were much more familiar with the regulations than were novice anglers (Table 2). About 50% of the anglers who fished at least once each week knew three or more of the fishing regulations. In contrast, less than 5% of the anglers who fished five times or less each year were familiar with three or more regulations.

TABLE 2. Proportion of Anglers Knowing Three or More Size Limit Regulations.

	Total # of anglers sampled	Total # knowing 3 or more regulations
<u>Fishing frequency</u>		
Occasionally (> 5 times/year)	74	3 (4%)
Regularly (1-2 times/month)	91	25 (27%)
Frequently (once/week or more)	125	62 (50%)
<u>Fishing experience</u>		
Less than 1 year	78	9 (12%)
1-5 years	63	16 (25%)
6-10 years	32	8 (25%)
10+ years	117	57 (48%)

Since most anglers did not know the minimum size limits for the six regulated species, they should have been carrying a copy of the sport fishing regulations for reference. However, we found that on a given day, only 7% of the pier anglers had a copy in possession. An additional 29% claimed to have a copy elsewhere (at home, etc.) but an unavailable-for-reference copy is not of much use when an angler is fishing.

Of the 105 fishermen who claimed to have a copy of the regulations, only 20 said that they had requested the pamphlet from an agency; the rest received the pamphlet unsolicited. This means that most anglers do not make a specific effort to obtain a copy of the regulations.

Many people placed restrictions on fish for which there are no legal minimum size limits. For instance, some anglers told us there are size limits on bonito, flounder, mackerel, perch, pile perch, rockcod, sculpin, steelhead, and tomcod. Some offered limits on fish whose names left some doubt as to which species the person really meant, such as black bass, bull bass, haddock, and seatrout.

Incidental Information

We collected some information that, although not directly related to the purpose of this survey, should be documented.

A valid fishing license is not required to fish on a public pier, yet 51% of the anglers we interviewed did have a valid license, indicating that they participated in other types of fishing (from boats, beaches, or in fresh water).

The ratio of the number of male anglers to female anglers was 6.33:1.

On a given day in autumn, about 25% of the anglers on southern California piers are occasional anglers (those who fish five times or less each year). Another 25% is composed of anglers who fish once or twice each month (12-25 times each year); and the remaining 50% is composed of frequent anglers (those who fish once or more each week).

CONCLUSIONS

This survey showed that while almost all pier fishermen are aware that angling regulations exist, few fishermen can quote the regulations from memory. Fewer still carry a copy of the regulations with them when fishing. Thus, these fishermen are not prepared to follow the rules if they should happen to catch a size-regulated fish.

However, the probability that a pier angler will catch a size-regulated fish is not very high. The vast majority of pier-caught fish are perch (Embiotocidae); croakers (Sciaenidae), excluding white seabass; and Pacific bonito, *Sarda chiliensis* (Pinkas, Oliphant, and Haugen, 1968). Less than 5% of the catch is composed of size-regulated species. Therefore, pier fishermen do not ordinarily exert a significant influence on the success of conservation programs for size-regulated fish species.

One more factor should, perhaps, be considered. We found that 51% of the pier anglers interviewed had a valid California ocean fishing license. Since a license is not required for pier fishing, this indicated that the anglers fish some place other than piers. If these anglers fish from boats they will be much more likely to encounter the size-regulated species, and will then have a greater influence on the success of the fishery management programs.

REFERENCES

- Pinkas, Leo, Malcolm S. Oliphant, and Charles W. Haugen. 1968. Southern California Marine Sportfishing Survey: Private Boats, 1964; Shoreline, 1965-66. Calif. Dept. Fish and Game, Fish Bull., (143):1-42.