

**Our Ocean Backyard—*Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs,
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#279 January 6, 2019

What are the fishing boats bringing in?

There are a lot of benefits to living on the coast, and one of those is the availability of fresh seafood. We both catch and eat a lot of different kinds of fish and shellfish in California.

The State Department of Fish and Wildlife keeps a yearly record of all commercial fishery landings and then reports this on their website. The list they keep track of includes all of the living stuff taken from the coastal ocean, whether fish or something else. Crabs and lobsters, shrimp and urchins, squid and eels, are all part of the soup.

It's a much longer list than you might think from a casual walk through the fish market section of your favorite grocery store. In 2017, California's ocean bookkeepers reported on 224 different species, of which 174 were fish, with the rest being crustaceans, shellfish and echinoderms.

While our typical fish market or restaurant menu basics are all there (salmon, Dungeness crab, sole, prawns, halibut, and tuna), the commercial catch list includes some bizarre things that most of us probably have never seen or heard of, and couldn't image eating: Brown Bullhead, Monkeyface Prickleback, Quillback Rockfish, Shovelnose Guitarfish, Longjaw Mudsucker, Thornback Skate, Longspine Thornyhead, and Spotted Ratfish. This long list includes 54 different kinds of rockfish and, surprisingly, 17 different types of shark, typically sold as white fish.

At the top of California's 2017 commercial fish catch in tonnage was market squid or Calamari. These slippery little cephalopods make up about 2/3 of the total commercial catch year after year, and in 2017 almost 69,000 tons were landed. Some of the squid goes into local Asian fresh fish markets or is used for bait, but about 80% is exported, mostly to China.

Market squid was also number one in total dollar value last year, bringing in \$69 million for the squid fishers or about 35% of the total commercial catch value. You have to bring in a lot of squid to make much money, however, as the price at the dock this past year averaged about 50 cents a pound. You also have to fish at night with bright lights to attract the spawning squid to the surface where they are netted.

But the irony is that most of the Calamari consumed in the United States is actually imported, simply because processing squid is a labor-intensive process. Hard to believe, but it's cheaper to ship our market squid to be processed by \$7/day laborers in China, and

make a 12,000 mile round trip before it ends up on your dinner plate in Santa Cruz. Sounds crazy, but I think it's simple economics.

Coming in at No. 2 in both tonnage and value last year was Dungeness crab, earning \$47 million for the crab boats. This was 6.2% of the total catch weight at 6,440 tons, but 24% of the total commercial fishery income.

The 3rd ranking catch in income, and at the other end of the value scale from market squid, was California spiny lobster. These clawed crustaceans averaged \$18.90 a pound at the dock and brought in just over \$13 million last year, or 6.8% of the total commercial income. They are labor intensive to catch, but have the highest per pound return of the entire commercial catch.

Moving down the 2017 catch list in tonnage, after market squid and Dungeness crab, was Northern anchovy, tuna (all types combined), sole, shrimp and prawns, Pacific mackerel and then, a surprise, red sea urchins, which combined totaled 90% of the total catch. Not a lot to each inside an urchin, but what is there is considered a delicacy in Asia.

In dollar value, the list is a bit different with market squid still no. 1, followed by Dungeness crab, spiny lobster, Northern anchovy, shrimp and prawns, sablefish, and tuna.

Following Spiny lobster in average value per pound paid at the dock was Chinook salmon (\$9.78/pound), halibut (\$5.92/pound), and Dungeness crab (\$3.65/pound).

The Department of Fish and Wildlife keeps track of landings at nine commercial fishing ports (and Santa Cruz isn't one of them). From north to south these include Eureka, Ft. Bragg, Bodega Bay, San Francisco, Monterey, Morro Bay, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles and San Diego. Santa Barbara is surprisingly No. 1 in both tonnage (45.7% of the statewide catch), and also total value (33.5% of the total). The great bulk of the Santa Barbara catch is Spiny lobster, Calamari and red sea urchins.

Los Angeles is the second most important commercial fishing port in the state, and when combined with Santa Barbara, landed two-thirds of California's total catch (69,270 tons), which generated nearly 50% of the total income (\$95 million) in 2017. Commercial fishers will always have their challenges, but it still is a big business, although with significant year-to-year fluctuations.