

The future of the local fishing industry, a tough livelihood that managed to thrive in these waters for nearly half a century, now appears as murky and uncertain as the blue-black sea over the underwater trench known as Monterey Canyon.

A mounting tide of government regulations, soaring fuel and equipment costs, the unpredictability of nature and the degradation of the fishing habitat have combined to reduce this industry to a subsistence level.

"We're getting squeezed from all sides," said Stan Fullerton, as colorful and outspoken as any fisherman who ever plied these waters. "There are simply too many people out there who view the ocean and its contents as a political tool.

"Fishing around here is strictly on a subsistence level unless you have several hundred thousand dollars to invest," said Fullerton, one of only a handful of full-time fishermen working out of Santa Cruz Harbor.

With the collapse of the sardine fishery in the 1950s, salmon fishing became the most lucrative catch for local anglers. However, in the spring of 1981, salmon fishing is far from lucrative.

A combination punch of severe government regulations and the long-range effects of the two-year drought in the late '70s has sent the Salmon industry reeling.

In an effort to protect what it feels is a declining resource, the federal government last year cut six weeks out of the salmon season—two weeks at the beginning of the season in April and the entire month of June. It was the elimination of these prime mid-season weeks that infuriated fishermen all along the coast.

"The salmon are obtainable in quantity during June. A man can make his whole year in the month of June," said an obviously disgruntled Tom Shanahan, who has pursued the salmon up and down this coast for 20 years.

The roots of this controversy lie in the creation in 1976 of the National Fisheries Management Council. This congressional act was a politically popular move since it expanded US territorial waters from a three-mile to a 200-mile limit, thus expelling the Russian, Japanese and Korean factory fleets which continually harvested huge quantities of fish along the Pacific coast.

The popularity of this move by the federal government overshadowed another equally important facet of the new fisheries management plan.

"Everyone thought this law was merely a way to kick the foreign fishermen out, but it is clearly a document designed to preserve the resource," stated Michael Orbach, associate director of UCSC's Center for Coastal Marine Studies. "When you become involved in a situation this complex there are bound to be

conflicts."

The salmon fishery, according to Orbach, has been declining since the turn of the century, primarily due to habitat degradation—logging, industrial pollution and coastal development.

"Unfortunately the council doesn't have any control over this type of thing, they can only regu-

mento River run. What we don't know is the exact role in the decline or comeback of the fishery that the fishermen play."

Some biologists—and most of those engaged in the taking of salmon—believe the sharp curtailment of the fishing season is just "a drop in the bucket biologically," but a disastrous move economically.

opening of the season from May 1 back to the original April 15 date. They pondered this decision virtually up to the last minute but, when the morning of April 15 dawned, the word came down—there would be no fishing until May.

This season the fishermen clearly have their backs to the bulkhead. The Reagan budget does not

Moss Landing is almost exclusively a commercial fishing port, with almost 90% of the slips occupied by commercial boats. Dock-side facilities for offloading, icing and fueling the boats are more than adequate. The poor weather and a concentration of heavy industry near the port have discouraged intense recreational use of the harbor.

Monterey Harbor, although equipped to a fair extent to handle commercial fishing vessels, is caught up in the conflicting interests of the pleasure boater and the commercial fisherman.

From the standpoint of commercial fishing, Santa Cruz Harbor is the black sheep of the family. There are no offloading facilities whatsoever, there is no ice and, if any large transient boat from the albacore fleet wanted to refuel in the port, it would tie up the fuel dock for an entire day.

As it now stands, each and every winter when the storms rage into the bay the "harbor of refuge" routinely reverts back to the often-landlocked lagoon it had been for centuries until dredging began in the early '60s.

The dominance by pleasure craft and yachtsmen in the harbor is a complex and somewhat legalistic problem, according to Harbor-master Steve Scheiblaue.

"It was basically a political decision made back in the '50s when it became obvious that to get a harbor built state money would be needed," the Harbormaster explained.

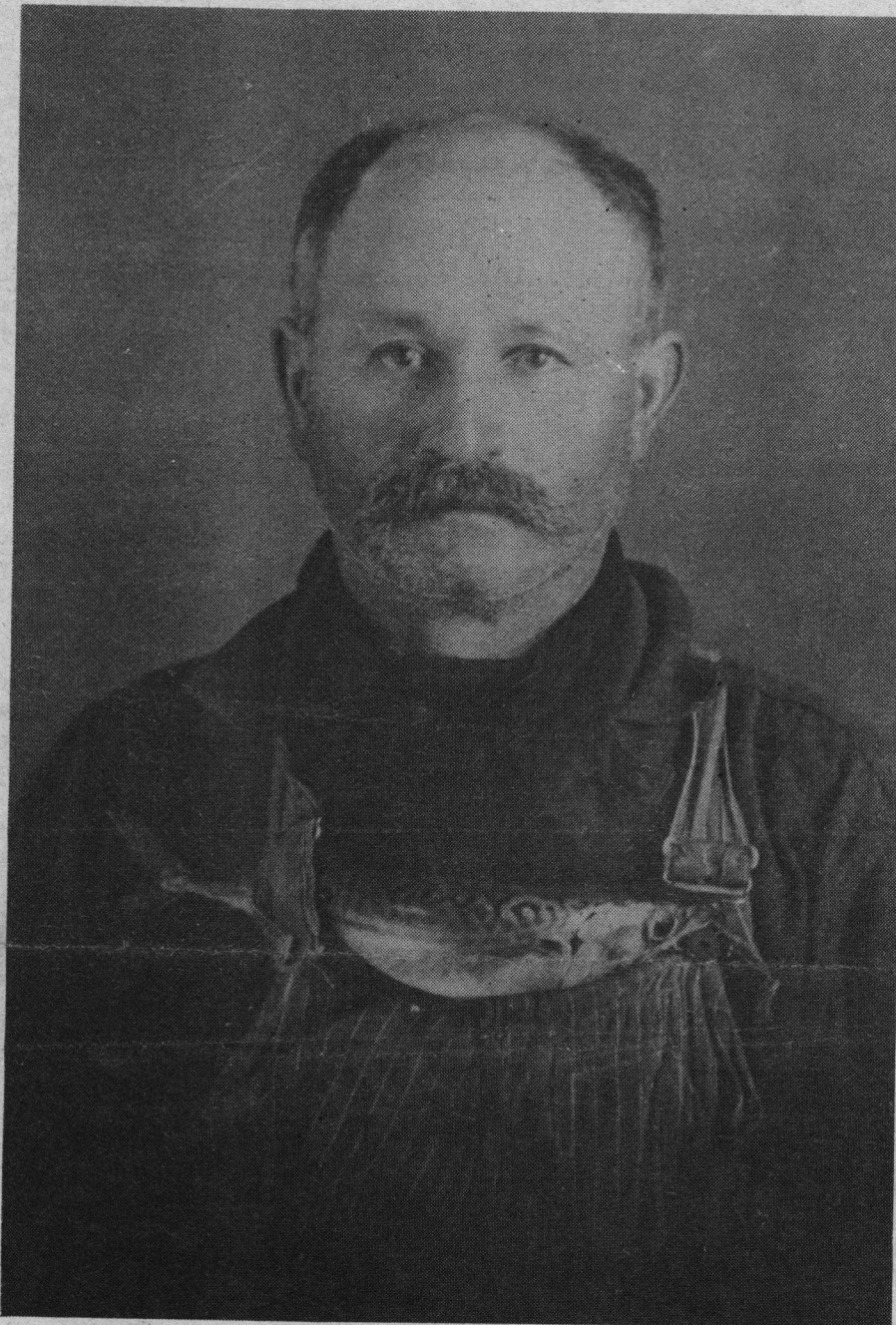
"The language of the loan agreement between the state and the port district makes it very clear that the facility must be a regional one—that is, one which is designed to accommodate all types of people and boats.

"If the original plan had been to develop a commercial facility like Moss Landing, the harbor never would have been built," Scheiblaue said.

In addition, some of those holding the local political reins at the time owned the commercial fishing facilities on the wharf and did not want to see any competition spring up at the new harbor, according to Scheiblaue.

Boaters were attracted to the harbor at a fairly slow pace in the '60s and the annual silting up of the harbor mouth discouraged use by full-time commercial fishermen. The '70s saw a major change in this situation. The economy of the Santa Clara Valley exploded in a phenomenal boom. This affluence was reflected by the huge increase in pleasure yachts berthed at the harbor, which—despite a major expansion—soon could only offer 10-to-20-year waiting periods for some slips.

With the harbor dominated by pleasure craft owned by people from all over Northern California, the port district now feels comfortable enough to push for more facil-



The Decline of Our Fishing Industry

late the fishermen and the fishery," Orbach explained.

When the prolonged drought of 1976-77 severely curtailed or disrupted the major spawning activity in coastal rivers and streams, the federal government did just that. It simply told the fishermen they could not catch as many fish.

"There is no doubt that the decline of the fishery was exacerbated by the drought," Orbach stated. "The spawning rate has been low but some stocks appear to be coming back, such as the Sacra-

Tim O'Neill

"The role that fishing pressure plays remains scientifically unclear," Orbach explained.

Unfortunately, the economic impact of the fishing ban is crystal clear. After struggling through the first shortened-season many fishermen from Monterey Bay applied for federal disaster loans through the Small Business Administration. This was enough to shake up a few of the government regulators, who began considering moving the

include any of the monies which in the past have been allocated for disaster relief for small businesses.

"The local fishermen are just now getting over feeling tricked," Orbach related.

As if life on the sea wasn't tough enough, some fishermen, particularly those who berth at the Santa Cruz Harbor, find life within the jetties almost intolerable. There are three harbors on Monterey Bay—some contend there are only two and one-half—Santa Cruz, Moss Landing and Monterey.

ities for commercial fishermen.

Harbor General Manager Brian Foss has come up with a plan for a \$1.5 million commercial fishing facility—known as a transfer station—to be located in the front harbor. According to this plan, half the money would come from federal funds originally set aside for development of the now defunct Lighthouse Field convention center plan. The remainder of the money would come from the concessionaire who eventually runs the facility.

Local fish wholesaling is as tightly controlled an enterprise as it ever was and finding an operator for the facility might not be easy for Foss.

Although most fishermen working out of the harbor think the transfer station would be beneficial to them, there are those who question the port district's priorities.

"They can build the finest facility on the coast and it won't matter a damn if the boats can't get in or out of the harbor," said a disgusted Stan Fullerton, referring to the chronic problem of the harbormouth filling in with sand each winter.

Fullerton, whose family has fished for generations in the Pacific Northwest, made no effort to disguise his feelings for the port district commissioners.

"They regard us as idiot children," he said bitterly. "They don't

like fishermen because we want things. Like, we want to be able to get out of the harbor and we want to have enough water in our slips so the boats don't sink in the mud."

The small craft harbor in Santa Cruz is an engineer's nightmare. For millions of years it was a shallow freshwater lagoon fed by small streams running from the mountains to the coast. When the harbor was built, the lagoon was dredged but the silting from the streams continues, particularly in the back harbor.

The entrance to the harbor was dredged through the surf line a short distance. Each winter, however, the steady "river of sand," which runs along the coast, quickly fills in the channel and spreads hundreds of yards into the front harbor.

"I don't think there is any doubt that the US Army Corps of Engineers designed a defective harbor," Fullerton said.

Since the completion of the front harbor in 1964, there has been an ongoing battle between the Corps of Engineers and the port district over who is responsible for the costly maintenance of the harbor channel.

The district's primary weapon in the battle has been a century-old law which gives the corps the responsibility for maintaining navigable waterways such as the

harbor entrance.

Every year, as routinely as the winter swells make the entrance a nightmare for mariners, the corps has attempted to wash its hands of the responsibility. Once again this year, they have served notice to the port district that the dredging that is taking place now will be the last funded by the corps.

With the tight money policy of the Reagan Administration behind it, the corps may be successful in bowing out this time.

The port district, aware of this situation, appears ready to take some drastic action. Slip renters in the harbor were recently sent a questionnaire listing various alternatives should the corps be successful in handing this boondoggle over to the port district.

The district asks slip owners how much of a slip rent increase they would tolerate to keep the channel open during the winter months. The choices range from 15-50% increases from the current charge of \$2.28 per-foot per-month.

The questionnaire then asks, if given a choice, which winter months would be most important to the slip renter to have the harbor mouth navigable.

"In order for me to fish on a subsistence level, I have to fish seven days a week or whenever the weather permits," Fullerton said

"For them to even ask this kind of question is ludicrous."

Having already staggered the fishermen with regulations and indifference, the federal government appears ready to deliver the *coup de grace*.

For the last five years the federal Department of the Interior has actively pursued the possibility of offshore oil development in the Santa Cruz, Bodega, Point Arena and Eel River Basins. In a somewhat pathetic last minute campaign ploy, then-President Carter instructed Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus to remove the four basins from the drilling list.

Carter lost the election and no sooner had the ink dried on President Reagan's inauguration papers than his Interior boss, James Watt, made it clear that the new administration would be much more accommodating to the oil companies than the previous administration.

Oil reserves in the combined four basins amount to only 196 million barrels, according to United States Geological Survey (USGS) estimates. That is enough oil to run this fuel-hungry nation for about 12 days at current rates of consumption.

In addition, the USGS predicts that exploration and drilling in the basins would result in "2.3 major oil spills" and "160 minor spills." A major spill is anything greater than

1,000 barrels.

This latest threat to the fishery has been met with unanimous opposition from both local and state fishing associations, as well as by nearly every conceivable local government agency.

This is one of the few times that onshore agencies and groups have given so much support to a position taken by the fishermen, a situation that confounds Fullerton.

"You can put up with the problems nature confronts you with," philosophized this man of the sea, who once pursued a highly successful career as an artist and sculptor. "But it's getting to be too much."

It is possible that, in the future, fishing will provide more of an escape than an income for men like Stan Fullerton.

"I'm a primary provider of food for a protein-poor population," he said quite simply. "I put down 1,200 feet of net and take whatever comes in."

The future of the fishing industry in and around Monterey Bay is perilous at best and there are those who fear that it will go the way of the sardine fishery, which abruptly and mysteriously disappeared in the 1950s.

Unlike the once plentiful sardine, however, if the fishermen cease to harvest these waters it will be no mystery why. □