

# Commercial Fishing Is A Dying Business

By JAY SHORE  
Sentinel Staff Writer

Commercial fishing out of Santa Cruz has never been a big business, but it soon may be no business at all.

Fisherman and fish dealers on the Municipal Wharf say that when this generation of commercial fishermen goes none will take its place.

The small craft yacht harbor lists 66 commercial fishing boats, but the men who know say there are but a dozen fishermen here who make their living off the denizens of the deep.

The 50-odd fishing boats are accounted for by weekend fishermen say the insiders.

And who are the insiders? Malio Stagnaro, patriarch of the Cottardo Stagnaro Fishing Corp., and Stagnaro Bros. Sea Food Co. and their employees. Both businesses are on the Municipal Wharf.

These men claim the business is unprofitable, the hours are long, the pay is not steady, the investments are high, and the work is hard. And that's why the fisherman here is a dying breed.

"Young people aren't going into it," said Malio Stagnaro, who's 77 and has been in the fish business all his life. "It doesn't have the good family life. The fish have been captured and have disappeared.

"There's no bait in the harbor, and the large fish follow the feed. The big fish won't come here bringing their lunch bucket," he said.

"I used to be a fisherman myself," said Steve Ghio, 59, an employe with Stagnaro Bros. "But I couldn't make a living. There's no more fish around."

But Dan Miller, an associate marine biologist with the department of fish and game in Monterey, takes a different view.

He said, "There is bait in the harbor, but it's variable this year. Last year there was an abundant amount of bait."

He also thought there would always be some commercial fishing done here, and that it would not necessarily be unprofitable.

"There are some people going into salmon fishing which is profitable. It is possible to make a living with commercial fishing," he said.

"I know a lot of guys who have made a damn good living. But a greater percentage have not made it. You can make a yearly living on salmon and albacore.

"Much of the commercial fishing here was transferred to Monterey and Moss Landing. Dealers left and consolidated their efforts. Moss Landing is more convenient to work out of,

and their harbors are quiet," he said.

In the beginning of the century commercial fishing in Santa Cruz employed many people relative to other vocations. However, the business was never big in the industrial sense.

Miller agreed that the biggest problem facing fishermen is

economics. "The problem is not because the fish are not there," he said.

But others don't see it that way. They tie economics with fewer fish. For example, John Stagnaro, 58, recalled, "We used to have to put boats on 300 lb. (fish) limits." He said there are no limits today.

Miller answered the fewer fish complaint, saying there were fewer "large size, in-shore fish. However, that's not the case off shore. The problem is that most Santa Cruz commercial fishermen fish in shallow water."

Ernie Stagnaro, 51, talked of the trade's drawbacks. "There's

no guaranteed wage. One day you make a dollar, the next day you lose it.

"You get up at 2 a.m. and come back at six in the evening. There's no pension. No nothing," he said.

John Stagnaro looked at the fisherman's costs. "Electronic equipment is expensive, but is needed to track and pick up fish. Nets can cost \$1,500 to \$2,000. They are always being mended too. A basking shark can wind himself up in one and drag it out to sea.

"The boat needs two paint jobs a year and regular upkeep. It costs \$40 to \$50 a month to harbor it," he said.

Skip Tara, 36, an employe with Stagnaro Bros., said his father and grandfather were fishermen. He broke the tradition because of the trade's insecurity.

"The consumption of fish has changed," said Tara. "When the Catholics took fish off the Friday menu, we felt the change in one week. And the emphasis on mercury in fish! I've seen little difference in the fish caught today and the fish caught 60 years ago.

"Also," he continued, "California has no quota on fish like other states do."

Malio Stagnaro said that up until 1946 sardines roamed the area. But no more. "The fish were overtaken," he said.

Miller put the blame on overfishing and a changing environment, meaning pollution.

One complaint by Tara and Stagnaro was that drag boats fishing for bottom fish — rock cod, lingcod, halibut, flounder — were destroying breeding grounds.

Miller disagreed. "Draggers are not destroying any breeding grounds." He said commercial fish don't lay their eggs on the smooth ocean floor where draggers search for fish.

Fish which lay their eggs on the sea bed do so in rocky areas where the draggers can't go, according to Miller.

The fact is that although many fishermen don't know the source of their troubles as people like Miller do, the fisherman still has a rough time.

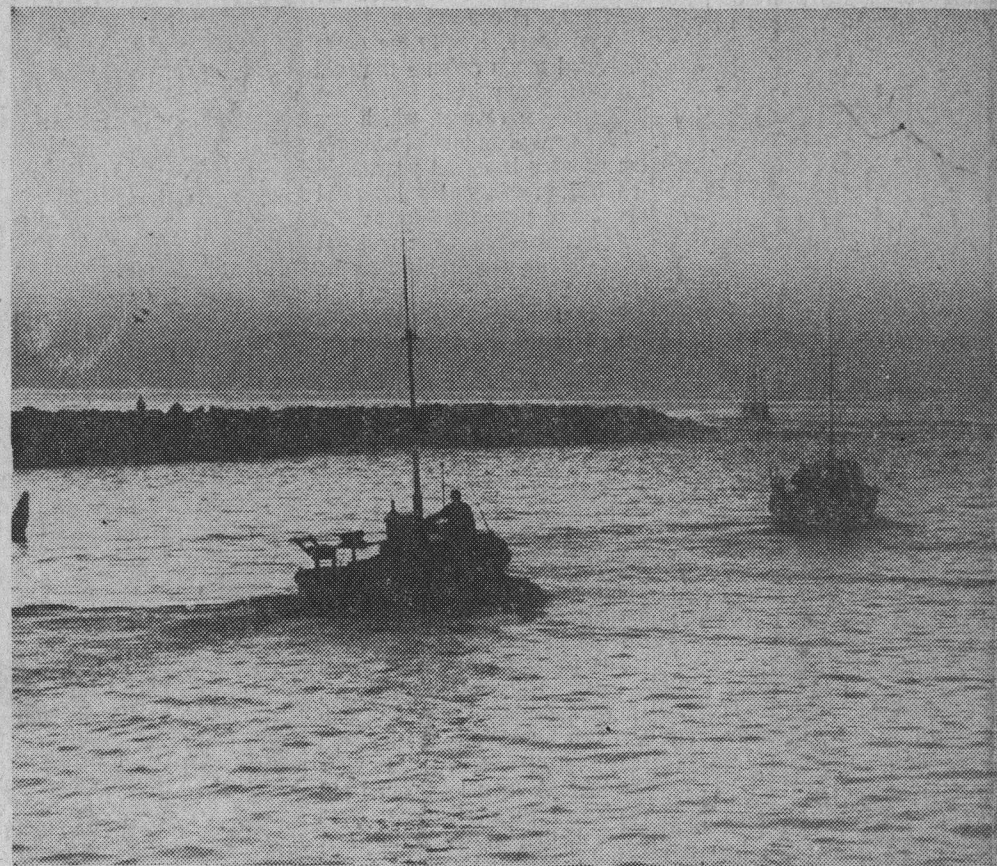
The small-time fisherman must face bigger competition with more money and technology, and seek fewer fish than ever before.

As tough as the old timers were in the past, the new breed must be tougher to make a go of it.

terim, something would have to be done."

The alternative to the bond election, according to Ray, would siphon off so much money from Capitola's general fund it would halt all other improvements in the city until the wharf could stand on its own financial feet.

Ray recommends the city obtain a 120-day option from Shanahan until the election can be held in April and to give the city time to obtain fee title to the facility from the County of Santa Cruz. The county has indicated it will turn over title to the pier if the city decides to buy the lease from Shanahan.



It's 6:30 a.m. and the fishermen are leaving the Yacht Harbor on a cold morning to fight the elements and

bring home enough fish to earn a living. Sentinel Photographer Pete Amos was

wide awake at the early hour to catch the rugged men begin their arduous and uncertain day.

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### Bond Election Recommended For Capitola Wharf Purchase

By DON RIGHETTI  
Sentinel Staff Writer

Capitola City Manager Ryder Ray will recommend at tonight's city council meeting the proposed city purchase of Capitola Wharf be left up to the citizens in the form of a \$500,000 bond election.

The election, if approved, would add a thumping 40 cents to current tax rates in the city.

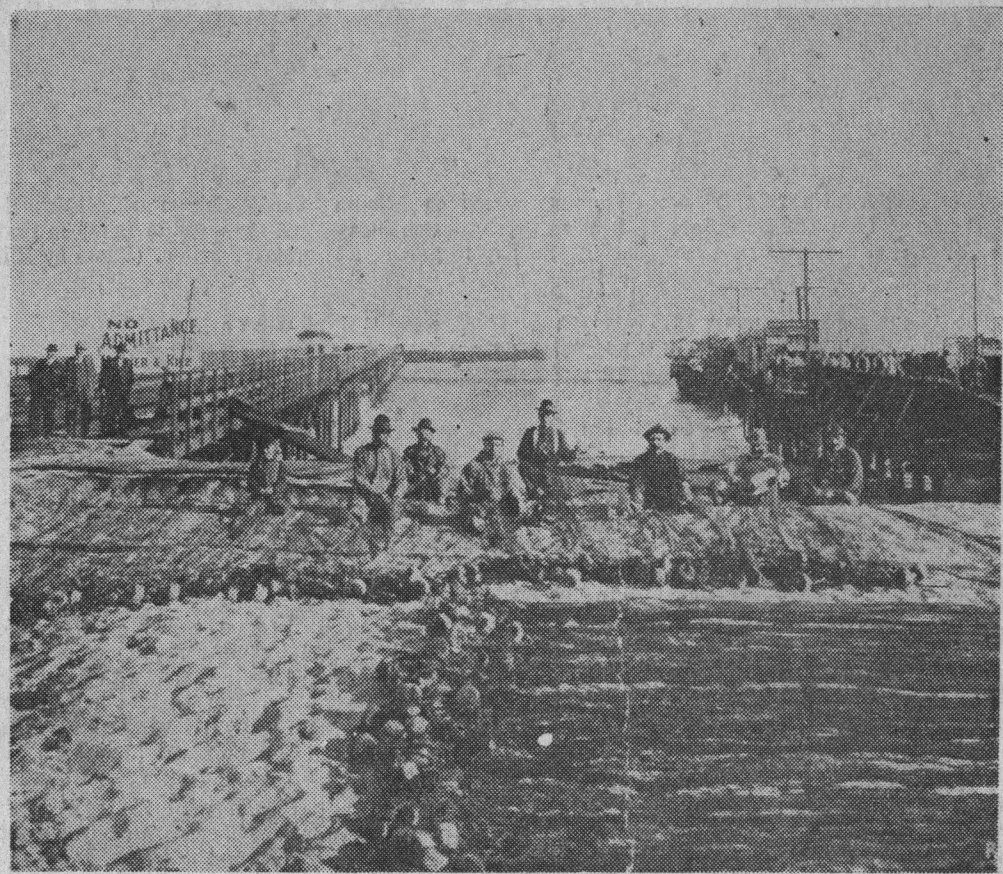
Ray's report shows that a cent repair would be a facility



This picture was taken off a 1912 picture post card. It shows fishermen cleaning their catch on one of the old

wharves built in the late 19th century. Four wharves were built prior to the Municipal Wharf which was constructed

during 1913 and 1914. The postcard belongs to John Stagnaro of Stagnaro Bros. Sea Food Corp.



When they weren't fishing, fishermen spent most of their time mending their nets. This picture was probably taken in 1913. That was when construction started on the Municipal Wharf (left). If all the piling of the wharf was lined back to back, it would stretch from Santa Cruz to Monterey County.

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