

2002 salmon supply appears to be on rise at start of season; prices may drop

Fish & Fishing

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What a difference a year makes.

The up-and-down shifts of salmon supply appear to be on the up during the first few days of this year, after a dismal 2001 season for commercial salmon fishermen.

**SANTA
CRUZ**

Local supply of the pink meat of choice along the central California coast began appearing in area markets late this week following the opening of the commercial season Wednesday from Point Arena southward. By this weekend, grocers say they will be stocked with the fish.

Salmon prices were still hovering in the off-season price range at some stores this week as the fish began to just trickle in.

'It usually takes a few days to get the fish in. As we see more fish come in, the price will go down.'

ROB MCPHERSON, MANAGER, STAGNARO'S MARKET

"It usually takes a few days to get the fish in," said Rob McPherson, manager of Stagnaro's market on the municipal wharf. "As we see more fish come in, the price will go down."

At Stagnaro's, salmon filets were going for \$6.95 and steaks for \$5.95 for the handful of salmon the market had received thus far.

Staff of Life received a 700-pound shipment Wednesday, said meat manager Eric Bochat. Steaks were selling for \$4.98 while filets were selling for \$5.98.

"That might hold for a while," Bochat said. "It's not going to drop a whole lot."

Meanwhile, fishermen say opening day was an improvement and compared with the boom season of 2000.

"It was a good opening, better than last year," said fisherman George Fota aboard his boat the Dulcinea. "It was fun yesterday."

Fisherman said that there were plenty of salmon close to home in the Monterey Bay. Fota said he took about 500 pounds by Thursday.

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"Some guys did double that," Fota said.

Fierhmen were getting about \$1.75 per pound for fish under 11 pounds and \$2 per pound for fish weighing more than that.

Last year saw a slow start for commercial salmon fishermen that never seemed to get on track. High winds and a lack of fish kept them in the docks early in the season. When the fish did appear, they were in waters north of Santa Cruz.

Some 2.2 million pounds of salmon were caught commercially in California waters last year, according to state Fish and Game Department Fishermen. That was down from 5.1 million pounds in 2000 and from 3.8 million pounds in 1999.

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