

Pacific Seabird Group



DEDICATED TO THE STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF PACIFIC SEABIRDS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

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August 9, 1999

Ed Cassano
Sanctuary Manager
Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary
113 Harbor Way
Santa Barbara, CA 93109

Re: Squid Fishery and Seabirds in the Channel Islands

Dear Mr. Cassano:

On behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), we want to express our concern regarding the effects of the growing squid fishery on the rare and declining seabirds of the Channel Islands. As you may know, PSG is an international organization formed in 1972 to promote knowledge, study and conservation of Pacific seabirds. PSG's members come from the entire Pacific Basin, and include biologists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, government officials who manage seabird populations and refuges, and individuals with interests in marine conservation. PSG is actively involved in seabird-fishery issues, including the development of longline regulations in Alaska and Hawaii.

PSG is especially concerned about the health of the populations of Xantus' murrelets (< 1,000 pairs) and ashy storm-petrels (< 500 pairs) that nest on Santa Barbara Island, as well as the populations of ashy storm-petrels (< 500 pairs) that nest on Santa Cruz Island. These species generally lay eggs in March and fledge young from June through November. We understand that the squid fishery conducts substantial fishery operations in the vicinity of the Channel Islands and uses very high intensity (up to 100,000 watt) light boats to attract squid to the surface where spawning swarms are netted by purse seines. The fishery has been very active in shallow waters

near Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa islands where the artificial lights illuminate the colonies at night. We are concerned that lighting increases the predation rate on these seabirds by gulls and owls (and have some evidence to support this), and that surface/ bush-nesting murrelets (some breed in rock crevices as well), in particular, are disturbed by lighting of their habitat.

We understand that the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary is currently in the process of revising its management plan, and we request that you include evaluating the effects of the nocturnal squid fishery on seabirds in this process. If it becomes apparent that this fishery presents problems for seabirds, we would work with you to persuade the National Marine Fisheries Service and California Department of Fish & Game to take reasonable steps to mitigate the problem and/or manage the fishery effectively.

Sincerely,

Craig S. Harrison

cc: Penelope Dalton, Director, National Marine Fisheries Service
Dr. Doyle Hanan, California Department of Fish & Game