

Monterey Abalone Company (MAC) is a small in-the-ocean abalone farm located underneath Monterey's Commercial Wharf. We have built a system of walkways under the wharf from which we suspend cages in which we grow out red abalone (H. rufescens). As do California's other abalone farms, Monterey Abalone relies on harvesting kelp, primarily giant kelp (Macrocystis sp.) along with some bull kelp (Nereocystis sp.) to feed our abalone.

As Reefcheck has documented, and as an observer can plainly see, the biomass of kelp growing in southern Monterey Bay is currently much reduced compared to what has been the normal since the return of the sea otter to our area. This reduction in biomass has occurred since the explosion of the purple sea urchin (*S. purpuratus*) population.

The reduction in kelp biomass has impacted MAC by making it more difficult for us to obtain kelp to feed our abalone. This is especially true in the winter months when large swells tear out the kelp canopy. This winter we are travelling further than ever to find kelp, even to the extent of trailering our skiff and crew to Santa Cruz to harvest kelp there. We have never needed to harvest in Santa Cruz before in the history of our farm. This has impacted our business by increasing our cost of feeding our abalone, and because we have not been able to find all of the kelp we need this winter we are experiencing slower growth of our stock. While we expect that spring will bring a re-growth of the plants that still exist, we are very concerned that continued creation of urchin barrens will exacerbate the situation.

MAC is a small business, so we must make mention of the several other, much more important local industries and organisms that also benefit from healthy kelp beds. Tourism, for example, is very important to Monterey County (it is a \$2.5 billion industry), and Monterey Peninsula's kelp beds are an iconic attraction for tourists who come to dive, kayak, fish, and simply look at them. The commercial fishing industry benefits from the survival of juvenile rockfish that recruit to the kelp beds. Sea otters are also beneficiaries of the ecosystem services provided.

Monterey Abalone Company strongly supports the inclusion of the Tanker Reef area in regulations that increase the allowable take of purple sea urchins. We urge the Commission to make the change as soon as possible so that kelp can begin to re-establish itself.