

## SCHOOLS NEED DRASTIC STEPS TO FIX

By **SHARON MICHAELS**  
*Guest commentary*

**A**s a retired elementary teacher with more than 25 years of experience in the Salinas public schools, I applaud and congratulate Paul Karrer's courage and honesty in his March 2 commentary, "Not Fair to Blame Principals."

The underlying causes of low student achievement cannot be addressed until they are accurately recognized and, unfortunately, that would be a painful acknowledgement. To do so smacks of racism, classicism or a relinquishment of our fantasy that all people (including children) are the same in their needs and abilities, all of which we as a society are loath to admit to publicly.

Huge percentages of children of poverty enter the school system already years behind their advantaged classmates, and this is a gap that is almost impossible to close in a contemporary classroom, especially with the practice of social promotion, which moves a student to the next grade because of age and not skills.

Exchanging the entire staff of a high performing public or even private school with that of an underperforming school would very likely yield no discernible changes in student test performances. This is because the problem is *not* the teachers or principals.

This is a well-known but rarely admitted fact, understood by most educators: Schools cannot magically change the culture or values that are established by and reinforced by the family. Learning is far more a reflection of what students

## Fishing halibut locally better than importing

By **CHUCK DELLA SALA**  
*Guest commentary*

**A** flaw in the language of a 2004 California law (SB1459) made it illegal to use light touch trawl gear to fish for halibut in Monterey Bay. This has resulted in little local halibut available in our fish markets and restaurants.

The halibut that is served is flown from the Pacific Northwest or trucked from the Santa Barbara area. Having truly local, fresh and sustainable seafood available to area restaurants would be good for business, and good for all of us who value this fresh product. The city of Monterey is leading an effort to have the legislature amend the state law.

Bottom-trawl fishing, as practiced elsewhere in the world with much heavier gear over sensitive rocky habitats, can harm fish habitat. However, this is not the case for this halibut fishery that was reviewed under the toughest regulations ever developed for a fishery.

Halibut live on sandy, soft bottom habitat, not in rocks. The Fish and Game Commission found, after reviewing relevant science studies and Department of Fish and Game underwater videotape, that the fishery minimizes bycatch, is likely not damaging seafloor habitat, is not adversely affecting ecosystem health, and is not impeding reasonable restoration of kelp, coral or other biogenic habitats.

Few in the public are aware of this, but it is readily verified.

If readers are still worried about seafloor disturbance, they are welcome to watch video of trawl gear in action, skipping along the tops of seafloor sandwaves, and make their own decision (Fish and Game Commission archives, [www.cal-span.org/cgi-bin/archive.php?owner=CFG&date](http://www.cal-span.org/cgi-bin/archive.php?owner=CFG&date)

=2008-02-07, Agenda 9A, timecode 5:12:40).

Additional video shows the net riding six to eight inches above the seafloor, not scraping it. Other before-after video of halibut trawling near Port San Luis clearly shows "notching" of sand ripples as the only marks left.

Storm waves like those seen recently, and winter sediment from the Salinas and Pajaro rivers, change the seafloor far more every year than this trawl gear. The special light touch gear required by state law does not harm the ocean floor.

Further, a 2009 Science Magazine report shows that California fisheries are the most highly regulated in the world (Worm, et al 2009). All this while we import over 80 percent of our seafood from countries that we know have greater impacts on fish, habitat, turtles and marine mammals.

California male halibut mature at age 1-2, females at 4-5, so they have spawned about one to four times before reaching legal size. They are a fast reproducing species. Scientific research shows that halibut are in abundance, and not vulnerable to collapse.

Based on readily available best science, California halibut should be on the Monterey Bay Aquarium's "Best Choices" list right now. Facts are facts: Please check them out, and support this low-volume, high-value, low-impact sustainable community fishery.

You can obtain further information about this fishery by going to [www.alliancefisheries.com](http://www.alliancefisheries.com), under "ACSF News."

We hope the public will support the City of Monterey's effort to put local, fresh halibut back on our menus.

*Chuck Della Sala is mayor of Monterey. Joining him in writing this commentary were Dominic Mecurio of Cafe Fina, fisherman Jiri Nozicka and retired NOAA Fisheries biologist Richard Parrish.*

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**Pat Cannon**  
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