During the first quarter of this century, abalones were heavily taken for drying, canning, and fresh processing in a number of areas, including Point Lobos. The resource has been over-harvested by the industry during three periods in the last century. The present scarcity of abalones is statewide. Our thousand-ottter herd, which ventures into only a part of the commercial abalone area, is blamed for this third historic decline in the resource.

The Department of Fish and Game began recording the poundage of abalones landed by commercial divers in 1916. Of the more than sixty years of landings prior to 1916, all we know is that they exceeded 4.1 million pounds per year by 1879.

Chinese fishermen, who originated the industry in the 1850's, pressed into Baja and the Channel Islands after stripping all sizes of abalones from the shallow waters of the California mainland shore. These men lost their livelihood in 1900 when local ordinances prohibited commercial abalone fishing in shallow waters.

During the second period of heavy commercial stripping, when abalones were taken in deeper water, yearly landings became increasingly large, reaching a peak in 1929 when over 3.4 million pounds were landed in Monterey by Japanese divers. At first the catch came from Point Lobos and south Monterey Bay, but by 1929 the boats needed to travel as far south as Lopez Point because of diminishing yields closer to Monterey.

Diver Roy Hattori says the area north of the Carmel River was closed to commercial taking only after it had been stripped by hard-hat divers using hand-pump compressors.

In 1929 the area between Cambria and Pt. Buchon was opened at the request of the industry, and some Caucasian divers began working out of Morro Bay, having learned the secret techniques of the Japanese by watching them through binoculars.

The Department of Fish and Game attributed the second collapse of the industry to adverse water conditions (undertow, etc.) in 1939 and on bad weather in 1937 and 1938, but even fewer abalones were landed in the succeeding three years. Commercial landings at Monterey from 1919 through 1941 had exceeded 42.0 million pounds.

The third and current period began after the resource enjoyed almost a closed season during World War II. Yearly landings climbed rapidly, reaching a peak of over 5.0 million pounds in 1957 and again nearly 5.0 million pounds in 1966.

It now appears that the industry is experiencing its third major decline, statewide, from over-fishing. Last year only 3.4 million pounds were landed. The lawful taking of abalones has failed to enhance the resource or to maintain a sustained yield.