



Katie Frankowicz/The Daily Astorian
Dozens of pyrosomes have washed up on beaches.

Pacific heat wave known as 'the Blob' appears to be in retreat

By JES BURNS
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Ocean conditions off the Pacific Northwest seem to be returning to normal after a three-year spike in water temperature.

It's promising long-term news for fishermen who are looking ahead in the short term to yet another year of low salmon returns.

A report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration outlined the latest ocean observations for the organization that sets salmon catch limits off the West Coast. The Pacific Fishery Management Council will set those limits in early April.

The extended marine heatwave of the past few years has been nicknamed "the Blob."

"The high pressure system over the North Pacific basically got stalled out and stuck there. And so the ocean warmed up about 6 degrees Fahrenheit," NOAA's Toby Garfield said.

Then a strong El Niño came through that reinforced these conditions.

"There have been a number of these events, these marine heat waves, that have occurred in the North Pacific. But the one we had in '13, '14, '15 was the by far the largest in the record going back 45 years," Garfield said.

And the effect on sea life was serious. Whales, sea lions and seabirds starved because the warm water didn't support tiny nutrition-rich plankton called copepods at the base of the food chain.

Within the past year, the El Niño effect has dissipated, and other longer-term climate cycles are shifting back toward a more average level.

"We finally saw some of those northern, fat copepods off the coast of Oregon, which was a very good signal," said Jennifer Fisher, a researcher with NOAA and Oregon State University. "But the caveat to that is that we saw that transition for only a couple months."

Fisher says they will test again this coming summer to see if the trend holds.

Fisher's tempered optimism is not unique. Elsewhere scientists are still finding lingering effects of the Blob.

"If you look in the North Pacific, the deep water is still very warm," Garfield said. "Which means there's still a lot of heat being stored."

In addition, last summer, there was a major low-oxygen event that caused crab die-offs. Warm water species, like the gelatinous pyrosomes, continue to linger off the Northwest coast. And the number of reported cases of whales entangled in near-shore fishing gear remained high — an indication they are being forced to find food outside their normal hunting grounds.

Overall, the cooler water temperatures federal scientists began seeing in 2017 should mean some improvement in Northwest fisheries in the coming years — including salmon. But NOAA says it will take a few years for the salmon to respond to the decline of the Blob.

The return to more normal conditions is promising, but the West Coast fishing industry is still cautious.

"The problem is that normal itself appears to be changing because of long-term climate change. We have a lot of problems in the ocean and a lot of changes in the ocean, and those are very worrisome," said Glen Spain with the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations.

The NOAA report flags Oregon's Port Orford and Washington's Tokeland as the Pacific Northwest's most socially and economically vulnerable to downturns in the commercial fishing industry.

Brown fires state librarian as specifics remain elusive

Dahlgreen claims she was not given feedback

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown fired state librarian MaryKay Dahlgreen on Tuesday, an apparent surprise to the state's association of library professionals, the chairwoman of the state library board and Dahlgreen herself.

While the governor's office says Dahlgreen failed to meet lawmakers' expectations, it did not provide specifics.

Dahlgreen says the governor did not provide her with specific written feedback on her performance, either.

Dahlgreen had served as state librarian since 2012, and had worked for the state library since 1996.

The state librarian is appointed by the governor and subject to confirmation by the state Senate.

Kate Kondayan, a spokeswoman for Gov. Brown, said in an email Wednesday that Dahlgreen "fell short of clear and timely expectations from legislators, and as a result of these performance issues, did not have the Senate support necessary for confirmation."

Kondayan continued: "Once qualms about (Dahlgreen's) confirmation came to light, and in consideration of stability for state library staff and programming, the governor's office offered to pursue a collaborative transition out of the role. Ms. Dahlgreen instead chose to be terminated and leave the state library under unplanned and immediate circumstances."

In response to that statement, Dahlgreen said she

was "very proud" of the work she did during her tenure.

"The work I've done at the state library is the best work I've ever done," Dahlgreen said Wednesday.

"I don't regret a minute of it, and I would also like to point out that I was never provided with written concerns about my performance."

Dahlgreen said that during some budget hearings, there were some times when she "was questioned very closely." "And when I was asked to provide further information, I did that," Dahlgreen said. "I always followed up. There were some very pointed questions about my performance and my feeling is that I addressed every single one of those concerns."



MaryKay Dahlgreen

Three years ago, the Legislature changed how the state librarian is chosen.

It used to be that the state librarian was appointed by a group of trustees.

But in 2015, the Legislature passed a law that "grandmothered" Dahlgreen into the position until July 1, 2017, at which point she would be subject to gubernatorial appointment and Senate confirmation.

That 2015 law also converted the group of trustees into a board and, advocates say, made its composition more representative of library patrons.

Reappointment process

Dahlgreen says that in July, she approached the governor's office to find out what to do to apply for reappointment. In December, she was asked to provide "materials and a letter of interest" on the position.

She says her name was on the list of executive appointments that the governor's office submitted to the Senate

would look into it and get back to me," Dahlgreen said.

The governor's office followed up nearly a month later, she says, and explained that she did not have support from the Senate and gave her a choice: resign or be dismissed.

After giving it some thought over the weekend, Dahlgreen chose to be fired.

"I believe that there was no reason for me to resign," she said.

Buzzy Nielsen, president of the Oregon Library Association, penned a letter to the governor expressing his concerns on Tuesday.

"Both the state library and Dahlgreen have been invaluable partners in the Oregon Library Association's efforts to support libraries, library workers and the patrons they support statewide," Nielsen wrote. "We are confused about this seemingly sudden decision, made without consultation with key stakeholders and despite Dahlgreen's strong track record as agency head."

Dahlgreen's confirmation would have required a simple majority vote — 16 votes.

A spokeswoman for the Senate Republicans said Wednesday that she was not aware of any opposition to Dahlgreen in the Republican caucus.

Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, confirmed through a spokesman that the statement from the governor's office was accurate, but declined to comment further because it was a "personnel/performance related matter."

Ann Malkin, the chairwoman of the State Library Board, said she thought Dahlgreen did a good job responding to the Legislature's requests.

"I think she was very attuned to what Legislature was asking for, as was the board, and there was not resistance on anybody's part to implementing those changes," Malkin said.

"We are confused about this seemingly sudden decision, made without consultation with key stakeholders and despite Dahlgreen's strong track record as agency head."

Buzzy Nielsen,
president of the Oregon Library Association


The state librarian may not be a particularly high-profile job, but the Oregon State Library does important work, advocates say.

The state library helps public libraries share resources and adapt to changing technologies; provides support for library patrons who are blind or have impaired vision; and assists state agencies with research.

Rules Committee, and she was supposed to appear at a hearing before the committee in February.

The day before that hearing was supposed to happen, though, she says she was told there might be a problem.

"I received a call from the governor's office telling me that there appeared to be some problem with my appointment with the Senate, and that they



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