

Trawl Gear Modification Exempted Fishing Permit Update

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is providing this report to update the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) on the status of the “Selective Flatfish Trawl Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP): Monitoring and Minimizing Salmon Bycatch When Targeting Rockfish in the Shore-based Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Fishery.”

EFP South of Oregon/California Border

At its November 2016 meeting, the Council reviewed and recommended this EFP to NMFS for approval. The purpose of this EFP was to collect information on the effects of various gear configurations on the nature and extent of bycatch in an experimental fishery targeting pelagic rockfish species throughout 2017, while minimizing bycatch to the extent practicable. In February 2017, NMFS approved the EFP for fishing north of 42°N latitude, but deferred a decision on EFP fishing south of 42°N latitude pending final information on the status of Klamath River Fall-run Chinook (KRFC). Following the March Council meeting, we were to reevaluate available information and make a determination on whether to include the southern portion of the EFP at a later date. Through this report, we are notifying the Council and the public that we have denied the EFP south of 42°N latitude for 2017.

The Council’s Preseason Report I for the salmon fisheries, published in early March, indicated that the KRFC stock may be approaching an overfished condition. As a result of this information, the Council at its March and April meetings reaffirmed its desire to limit midwater trawl effort south of 42°N latitude. The Council voted to exclude from the proposed action to be analyzed in the salmonid biological opinion the removal of the selective flatfish trawl requirement, outside of the EFP, and whiting processing south of 42°N latitude, until more comprehensive salmon bycatch management measures can be developed for the groundfish fishery. In light of the developments and decisions by the Council described above, the EFP applicants indicated to us that they are not going to pursue an EFP south of 42°N latitude this year. Therefore, as stated in the May 5th *Revision to Exempted Fishing Permit Program for the Groundfish Trawl Fishery North of 42°N Latitude – Supplemental Decision Memo*, we have formally denied the EFP south of 42°N latitude for 2017, consistent with the Council’s intent to limit midwater trawl effort in this area for the present.

Bycatch Monitoring

NMFS has also approved revisions to the approach used to monitor and minimize bycatch in the EFP. At the March 2017 Council meeting, the EFP applicants and the Council requested NMFS revise its adaptive management approach to provide more certainty to groundfish fishermen and salmon fishermen about the amount of allowable bycatch in the EFP. NMFS worked with the Council’s Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to develop a total bycatch estimate for the EFP that could be used as a Chinook salmon harvest guideline for the EFP. This approach was adopted by the Council and recommended to NMFS to use in monitoring bycatch occurring under the EFP.

We have approved the Council’s proposed approach to use a harvest guideline of 3,547 Chinook salmon to assess bycatch occurring under the EFP. This guideline is based on an analysis prepared by the GMT for the 2017-2018 harvest specifications that projected the bycatch of Chinook salmon by midwater trawl vessels should the entire allocations of midwater rockfish species be attained in 2017 ([March 2017 Council meeting, Agenda Item I.3.a, Supplemental GMT Report 3](#)). The guideline applies to catch from EFP vessels, as well as non-EFP vessels targeting rockfish in the midwater trawl fishery beginning May 15, 2017. NMFS will monitor total bycatch and bycatch rates of Chinook salmon from both EFP and non-EFP vessels in the non-whiting midwater rockfish fishery against the 3,547 Chinook harvest guideline. In addition, no more than 800 Chinook, or a two months’ share of the total harvest guideline, may be taken prior to May 15. This limit will be used to ensure that the EFP does not have a disproportionate impact on those ESA-listed Evolutionarily Significant Units (ESUs) present in the ocean early in the year. Any bycatch taken during this time would be subtracted from the total harvest guideline, ensuring that the fishery remains below the total guideline for the entirety of the year.

NMFS will also use area-specific bycatch rates developed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to monitor changes in the distribution of bycatch across salmon management areas. NMFS will monitor total bycatch weekly and meet regularly with EFP sponsors and participants to proactively address bycatch issues. As of May 24, 2017, a total of 44 trips have been taken by EFP and non-EFP vessels, landing 2,417,684 lbs of groundfish and only 7 Chinook salmon. No coho salmon, green sturgeon, or eulachon, have been caught.

Table 1. Summary of EFP Activity

Group	Vessels	Trips	#s of Fish				Groundfish (lbs)
			Chinook	Coho	Green Sturgeon	Eulachon	
EFP	7	34	4	0	0	0	1,589,322
Midwater Non-Whiting	5	10	3	0	0	0	828,362
Total	12	44	7	0	0	0	2,417,684

*Based on fish tickets, observer, and EM data as of May 24, 2017.

Number of Vessels

Under the February 2017 decision memorandum authorizing the EFP Program, 32 vessels were issued EFPs. At the April meeting, the industry requested that additional vessels be authorized to fish under the EFP Program. Following this request, NMFS published a public notice on April 18, 2017, requesting additional participants. The enrollment period was open for one week, but no additional vessels joined the EFP.