

STATUS REPORT ON REINITIATION OF CONSULTATION FOR
CALIFORNIA COASTAL CHINOOK

At the March Council meeting, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reported its intention to reinstate Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 consultation for the California Coastal chinook Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU). NMFS further advised the Council that if a review of the consultation standard resulted in more conservative criteria, it may be necessary to contemplate inseason action to ensure 2005 fisheries comply with the new criteria.

The existing NMFS ESA consultation standard uses Klamath River fall chinook as a surrogate for the ESU, with the criteria being a projected ocean harvest rate of no more than 16% on age-4 fish. Since the issuance of the 2000 biological opinion on the ESU, the projected harvest rates have met the criteria. The observed harvest rates, however, exceeded the preseason projections in 2002, 2003, and 2004. The observed harvest rates were 23% in 2003 and 52% in 2004. NMFS has reinstated consultation because the observed 2004 harvest rate far exceeded the rates considered in the 2000 opinion, and out of concern that the age-4 harvest rate projections have progressively underestimated the observed values since the model was substantially modified in 2002.

As a result of their concern, NMFS recommended a buffer be considered for 2005 fisheries to reduce the likelihood that the observed rate would exceed the preseason limit. The Salmon Technical Team reported that based on 1) an analysis of average error over the most recent three years and 2) average contact rates over the last three years, the projected age-4 ocean exploitation rate of 7.7% for the adopted 2005 season would be unlikely to exceed an observed value of 16%, even under a 'worst case scenario'.

Dr. Peter Dygert will provide a summary of the NMFS ESA consultation process and preliminary findings.

Council Task: Discuss implications of reinstated consultation process and findings.

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item D.2.d, Public Comment.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview
- b. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Report
- c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- d. Public Comment
- e. Council Discussion and Guidance

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