SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON MASS MARKING AND
CODED-WIRE-TAGGING

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) received a briefing from Professor Dave Hankin, Humboldt State University and Chair of the Expert Panel that recently reviewed the coastwide salmon coded-wire-tag (CWT) recovery program for the Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC). The Panel conducted a comprehensive review of the existing CWT program and how the system provides data that are crucial to the support of the Pacific Salmon Treaty and salmon management on the U.S. West Coast. The Panel's report identifies various problems with the existing CWT system and provides 15 recommendations on how to rectify them. One is to consider a "Grand Experiment" to test critical assumptions underlying stock and fishery assessment methods, such as mortality rates of released fish and the adequacy of hatchery stocks as indicators of natural stocks.

The SSC commends the Expert Panel for their very thorough investigation of the CWT program, for the excellent documentation of the CWT system that their report provides, and for proposing steps to implement its recommendations. The SSC understands that the PSC has established a Working Group to develop an Action Plan to further define the tasks associated with the Expert Panel's recommendations; the SSC urges the Council to support the activities of the Working Group and to provide them with a clear statement of the Council's goals and objectives for the CWT program. The SSC sees merit in conducting experiments to test model assumptions and gather additional data, but will not be able to evaluate whether the proposed Grand Experiment would deliver new information at a reasonable cost until details of the experiment have been developed. The SSC concurs with the Expert Panel's finding that mass marking and mark-selective fisheries compromise the integrity of the CWT system and its ability to provide reliable data in support of salmon management. However, the SSC concurs that the CWT system currently provides the best available data.

PFMC
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