

Groundfish Fishery Salmon Consultation

NMFS is in the progress of summarizing fishery information to characterize the interaction of the groundfish fishery with salmonids, including Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed salmonids. The current consultation will cover all fishing under the groundfish fishery management plan (FMP) and will evaluate the conservation measures specified in past biological opinions (NMFS 1999¹, NMFS 2006²). Since implementation of the trawl rationalization program, changes have occurred in the fishery relative to the bycatch of salmonids. We are seeking Council input on the following approaches for fishery conservation measures.

A. Reinitiation Threshold Structure - The current biological opinion specifies the salmonid bycatch threshold for the Pacific whiting midwater trawl fishery (11,000 Chinook) and bottom trawl fisheries (9,000 Chinook). Other configurations could include:

- (1) *Fleetwide* - A fishery-wide Chinook bycatch threshold for all sectors combined.
- (2) *At-sea/Shoreside* - Two separate Chinook bycatch thresholds.
 - (a) At-sea Pacific whiting sectors, including tribal catch processed at-sea;
 - (b) Combined Shorebased IFQ fishery and all other sectors that land catch Shoreside.
- (3) *Midwater/all_other* - Two separate Chinook bycatch thresholds.
 - (a) Midwater trawl (whiting and non-whiting, tribal and non-tribal) threshold;
 - (b) Bottom trawl and all other gears.

A fleetwide threshold could result in fewer years where the fishery exceeds the reinitiation threshold. However, a fleetwide threshold could also be counterproductive if it results in vessels rushing to catch target species before the fishery is restricted by salmon bycatch. Given the seasonality of different gear sectors and target fisheries, high salmon catch in early fisheries could result in restrictions for later fisheries. Establishing a threshold for the at-sea fisheries that is separate from the shorebased fisheries (option (2)) is consistent with the current trawl fishery allocation structure and adaptable as the IFQ fishery restrictions shift over time. Separate thresholds for midwater trawl and all other gears (option (3)) would be most similar to how the salmon bycatch was managed in 2014. These 3 configurations are provided only as examples and others are possible.

B. Potential Management Action Triggers

Inseason Management Action Triggers - Triggers could be used to invoke specific management measures, including: depth-based measures, area closures (“hot spots”), or gear restrictions such as requiring use of salmon excluders. For vessels targeting Pacific whiting, current regulations include the Ocean Salmon Conservation Zone, which closes waters shoreward of the 100 fm depth contour when the 11,000 fish threshold is exceeded or projected to be exceeded. Examples of action triggers include:

¹ <https://pcts.nmfs.noaa.gov/pcts-web/dispatcher/trackable/NWR-1999-1779>

² <https://pcts.nmfs.noaa.gov/pcts-web/dispatcher/trackable/NWR-2006-754>

- Exceeding bycatch rates – e.g. 0.05 Chinook/mt
- Exceeding or projected to exceed a reinitiation threshold
- Exceeding a specific proportion of a threshold or number of Chinook (coastwide or in a specified area)

Reinitiation Triggers - Elements that trigger reinitiation are those that indicate that fishery interaction with ESA-listed salmon is substantially different than what had been considered in previous opinions. Such thresholds could include:

- Exceeding a specific number of fish in a fishing year
- Exceeding a specific number or proportion of a stock, as revealed by a post season data review of coded wire tags or genetic information
- Exceeding a multi-year average

C. Adaptive Management

Fisheries in Federal waters must comply with both ESA-based management measures to limit the bycatch of ESA-listed runs of salmon, and the more general bycatch minimization requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). For consistency with the Salmon FMP and the MSA, the Council must annually consider regulations to minimize salmonid bycatch in the fisheries monitored under the biological opinion. Following a year with low bycatch, Council consideration may be as simple as an evaluation of the catch rates in the various sectors of the fishery and the overall catch. However, following a year with high bycatch, the Council may need to develop new management measures to better constrain salmonid bycatch. The Council may wish to engage its ESA workgroup to add salmon considerations to their schedule and to evaluate new data on salmon stocks and bycatch in the groundfish fisheries following completion of the biological opinion.