

Sacramento River Winter Chinook Incidental Harvest Policy Review

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) appreciates the opportunity to work with the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) to improve the rule controlling the incidental take of Sacramento River Winter Chinook (SRWC). NMFS wants to ensure that it and the Council share similar expectations for the schedule by which the rule will be reviewed.

At the highest elevation, NMFS sees a four-stage process and expects that each stage may overlap in time with its successor. First is the development of an improved SRWC index of abundance that incorporates indicators of strength for the year-class that will be primarily affected by ocean fisheries. NMFS believes that this activity will be led by the Southwest Fisheries Science Center. Second, the new index of abundance will be used in collaboration with the Council's new SRWC Workgroup (Workgroup) to develop a range of control rule alternatives and a preferred approach. Third, the Council will consider and adopt a recommended control rule. Fourth, NMFS will analyze the Council's recommendation for compliance with the requirements of the Endangered Species Act and complete the necessary regulatory work to adopt the control rule.

While NMFS aspires to the goal of adopting a new control rule for application in 2017, it knows that the schedule to meet that goal will be challenging – and points out that uncertainties remain about the *ability* to develop a new winter run abundance index. Under all circumstances, NMFS believes that communication with the Workgroup will be key to an expedited schedule. NMFS recommends that the Council's schedule include the first meeting between NMFS and the Workgroup in May, 2016, to discuss the initial framework of the developing approach. NMFS envisions additional meetings through the summer of 2016 to ensure that the Workgroup is familiar and comfortable with the model as it is in development so that little time is necessary to later understand how proposed alternatives were derived.

NMFS believes that initial consideration by the Workgroup of alternative control rules can occur in late-summer, 2016. However, NMFS also believes that the Council must adopt in September, 2016, a preliminary preferred alternative if the rule is to apply to the 2017 fisheries.

In adoption of a schedule for development of the new control rule, the Council should be mindful of the work that will need to be completed between late summer, 2016, and the conclusion of the September Council meeting.