



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
West Coast Region
Sustainable Fisheries Division
510 Desmond Drive SE, Suite 103
Lacey WA, 98503
January 21, 2016

Dr. Donald O. McIsaac, Ph.D.
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101
Portland, OR 97220-1384


Dear Dr. McIsaac:

Thank you for your letter of January 15, 2016 requesting that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) encourage our partners with the Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC) to reach agreement on the PSC Chinook Model calibration in time for the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Pacific Council) to prepare for the April meeting. You further asked for a recommendation from NOAA Fisheries about how to proceed in the event that there are delays in the calibration process similar to those in 2015.

NOAA Fisheries and the Pacific Council are required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to use the best available scientific information. Going into the March meeting, and prior to having a model calibration from the PSC for the upcoming year, the Salmon Technical Team (STT) typically uses the prior year's final FRAM run coupled with the current year's abundance estimates as a starting point. However, as new information regarding northern fisheries comes in from the PSC process, the STT incorporates that information into the FRAM for Pacific Council assessments. We recommend this general approach for 2016 and believe it will likely allow us to eliminate the need in 2016 for reliance on the disputed 2015 pre-season abundance index. The objective should be to use the best available information to evaluate the Pacific Council's salmon management alternatives that go out for public comment.

Prior to the April Council meeting, the PSC's Chinook Technical Team (CTC) typically produces an agreed-to model calibration resulting in abundance indices that determine the impacts in northern fisheries for the upcoming fishing season. In 2015, the CTC did not come to consensus and the fishing level to be used for analysis in Southeast Alaska was uncertain as the Council began the April Council meeting. The uncertainty was resolved based on direction provided by the Pacific Council that the STT use impacts in northern fisheries based upon best available scientific information, and that the best information was associated with the abundance indices produced by the latest CTC model calibration. In the event that we find ourselves in the same situation this year, we recommend that the STT again use the best available information on anticipated impacts in the northern fisheries in its assessment of Council



adopted management measures for 2016. At that time, and should it be necessary, NOAA Fisheries will assess whether a CTC calibration from this year's analysis constitutes the best available information and inform the Pacific Council of its opinion and recommendation.

NOAA Fisheries notes optimistically that, at the request of the PSC, the CTC's Analytical Work Group (AWG) recently completed a review of the maturation rates and environmental variables used in the PSC Chinook Model that were one of the subjects of debate during last year's dispute. The AWG forwarded their results to the full CTC for their review and recommended that they be incorporated into the calibration process. Upon concurrence of the full CTC and PSC, I expect that those recommendations will be adopted for use in 2016. NOAA Fisheries hopes that these and other circumstances will lead to a CTC consensus on an abundance index for northern fisheries in 2016.

I appreciate your interest in clarifying how the Pacific Council will manage the process for setting salmon fishing seasons for 2016.

Sincerely,



Robert Turner
Assistant Regional Administrator
Sustainable Fisheries

cc: Ms. Dorothy Lowman, Chair, Pacific Fisheries Management Council
Mr. Charles Swanton, Director, Division of Sport Fish, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Dr. Robert Kope, Chair, Salmon Technical Team