

# Pacific Council News

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This newsletter reports mainly on decisions made at the March and April 2016 Pacific Fishery Management Council meetings, held in Sacramento, California and Vancouver, Washington. The Council recommends commercial & recreational fishery management measures for Federal waters off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California. All Council recommendations are subject to approval by National Marine Fisheries Service. [Sign up for other notices here.](#) The Council has five public meetings a year. The public comment deadline for the June 2016 Council meeting is 11:59 p.m. on May 26; email [pfmc.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:pfmc.comments@noaa.gov).

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## *Salmon News*

### **2016 SALMON SEASONS ANNOUNCED**

At its April meeting in Vancouver, Washington, the Council adopted ocean salmon seasons that provide recreational and commercial opportunities coastwide. The adopted salmon fisheries off the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington achieve conservation goals for a multitude of individual salmon stocks and provide for freshwater fisheries.

#### **Washington and Northern Oregon (North of Cape Falcon, Oregon)**

Fisheries north of Cape Falcon (near Nehalem in northern Oregon) depend largely on Columbia River Chinook and coho stocks. Columbia River fall Chinook returns are expected to return at high levels, and Columbia River coho are expected to return at reduced but moderate levels in 2016. However, coastal Washington and Puget Sound coho abundance is dramatically less than in recent years, and some wild coho stocks are expected to return at very low levels. In response, the Council has been challenged with shaping fisheries to provide access to relatively abundant Chinook stocks while protecting natural coho populations.

North of Cape Falcon, there is an overall non-Indian total allowable catch of 70,000 Chinook coastwide (compared to 131,000 last year) and 18,900 marked hatchery coho in the area off the Columbia River (compared to 170,000 last year).

#### *Recreational Fisheries*

The recreational fishery north of Cape Falcon does not include a mark-selective Chinook season this year, but opens to all salmon on July 1 and ends in late August or when Chinook or coho quotas are reached. Recreational fisheries in all port areas will have access to 35,000 Chinook (compared to over 50,000 Chinook last year), but coho retention is only allowed in ocean areas off the Columbia River with a modest quota of 18,900 (compared to 150,800 last year).

#### *Commercial Fisheries*

Tribal and non-Indian ocean commercial fisheries are designed to provide harvest opportunity on strong Chinook returns primarily destined for the Columbia River while avoiding coho stocks of concern. Coho retention is prohibited in all commercial fisheries north of Cape Falcon this year.

Non-Indian ocean commercial fisheries north of Cape Falcon include traditional, but reduced, Chinook seasons in the spring (May-June) and summer (July-August), and any coho caught in the commercial fishery must be released. The Chinook quota of 19,100 in the spring is approximately half of the 2015 quota, while the summer season Chinook quota is similar to last year at 23,400 Chinook.

Tribal ocean Chinook fisheries north of Cape Falcon are reduced from 2015 levels with a quota of 40,000 fish (compared to 60,000 last year).

#### **California and Oregon South of Cape Falcon, Oregon**

An expected abundance of roughly 300,000 Sacramento River fall Chinook (compared to 650,000 last year), combined with modest coho expectations for the

Columbia River, will support recreational and commercial opportunities for ocean salmon fisheries off Oregon and much of California. The 2015 Columbia River coho abundance forecast in 2016 is over 500,000 fish (compared to over 800,000 last year) and will allow for recreational coho opportunities this summer.

The Klamath River fall Chinook abundance forecast for 2016 is substantially lower than recent years and the primary reason for fishery constraints in Oregon and California. Long-running drought conditions, coupled with suboptimal ocean conditions, have raised serious concerns for Sacramento River winter Chinook salmon, which are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act and have experienced very low survival as juveniles in 2014 and 2015. Fisheries south of Point Arena, California, particularly recreational fisheries in the greater Monterey Bay region, will continue to experience late-season reductions to minimize interactions with winter Chinook.



Photo: California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife.

#### *Recreational Fisheries*

Recreational fisheries in California and southern Oregon are primarily focused on Chinook salmon and include openings in May, June, July, August, and the Labor Day weekend, in the Brookings/Crescent City/Eureka area. Fisheries further south all opened on April 2 and will continue through November 13 in the Fort Bragg area, through October 31 in the San Francisco area, through July 15 from Pigeon Point to Point Sur, and through May 31 south of Point Sur.

Recreational fisheries off the central Oregon coast allow Chinook retention from March 15 through October 31. Coho fisheries consist of a 26,000 mark-selective coho quota fishery in mid-summer from Cape Falcon to the Oregon/California border (compared to 55,000 last year) and a 7,500 non-mark selective coho quota fishery in September, open from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain (compared to 12,500 last year).

#### *Commercial Fisheries*

Commercial fisheries from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain, Oregon opened on April 8 and will run through October 31 with intermittent closures to reduce impacts on Klamath fall Chinook. Fisheries in the Humbug Mountain-to-California-border area are April 8 through May, with Chinook quota fisheries in June (720) and July (200). Fisheries from the California border to Humboldt South Jetty will open on September 9 with a 1,000 Chinook quota (compared to 3,000 last year).

Between Horse Mountain and Point Arena (in the Fort Bragg area), commercial Chinook salmon fisheries will be open June 13 to 30, August 3 to 27, and September 1 to 30.

In the area from Point Arena to Pigeon Point (San Francisco), the season is open May 6 to 31, June 13 to 30, August 3 to 28, and during the month of September. From Pigeon Point to the Mexico border (Monterey), the Chinook season is open in May and June. There will also be a season from Point Reyes to Point San Pedro, open October 3 to 7 and 10 to 14.

#### **Management Process**

The Council developed the management measures after several weeks spent reviewing three season alternatives. The review process included input by Federal and state fishery scientists and fishing industry members; public testimony, and three public hearings in coastal communities. The Council received additional scientific information and took public testimony before taking final action. The decision was forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for approval and implementation.

In addition, the coastal states will decide on compatible freshwater fishery regulations at their respective Commission hearings.



Monitoring mainstem  
Klamath River  
Juvenile Chinook  
Salmon Outmigration.  
Photo: USFWS.

NMFS: National Marine  
Fisheries Service.

## **SACRAMENTO RIVER WINTER CHINOOK CONTROL RULE TO BE UPDATED**

The Council's Sacramento River Winter Chinook Workgroup plans to develop indicators to predict ocean abundance in the upcoming fishing year, as well as ways to evaluate the relative risks and benefits of alternative harvest policies. Sacramento River winter Chinook are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, and are caught incidentally in California ocean fisheries that target healthier stocks such as Sacramento River fall Chinook. The Council has expressed concern that the existing harvest policy might be unnecessarily restrictive by

not allowing a minimal level of incidental catch when escapements are low. There are also concerns that the harvest policy might not respond quickly enough to forward-looking indicators of stock strength because of its dependence on past spawner escapements. The Workgroup is tentatively scheduled to meet June 15-16, 2016 at the NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center in Santa Cruz, California to review progress and to prepare a report for the Council's June meeting in Tacoma, Washington.

## **PACIFIC HALIBUT HARVEST LEVELS SET FOR 2016**

Harvest levels for 2016 halibut fisheries were set by the International Pacific Halibut Commission in January. The Area 2A total allowable catch for Pacific halibut is 1.14 million pounds—170,000 pounds more than in 2015.

Every year the Council adopts regulations governing incidental harvest of halibut in the salmon troll fishery and primary fixed gear fishery for sablefish north of Point Chehalis, Washington. These regulations allow incidental harvest of halibut while assuring that quotas are not exceeded.

### **Salmon Troll Fishery**

The 2016 Pacific halibut Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A allocates 15 percent of the non-Indian commercial halibut allocation to the salmon troll fishery as incidental catch. The Council's goal is to harvest the incidental quota during the April-through-June salmon troll fishery, and then to harvest any remaining quota from July through the remainder of the salmon troll fishery. In recent years, this goal has been achieved.

The Council adopted final incidental landing restrictions for the salmon troll fishery as follows: From May 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016 and April 1-30, 2017, license holders may land no more than one Pacific halibut per each three Chinook, except one Pacific halibut may be landed without meeting the ratio requirement, and no more than 20 halibut landed per trip. Limits may be modified by inseason action.

### **Primary Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis**

The total Area 2A halibut quota is large enough this year to provide for incidental halibut



harvest in the primary fixed gear fishery for sablefish north of Point Chehalis. This incidental fishery is allocated to that portion of the Washington sport allocation in excess of 214,110 pounds, provided a minimum of 10,000 pounds is available, up to a maximum of 70,000 pounds. The Council also recommended that limits for the fixed gear primary fishery north of

Point Chehalis be set at two fish plus 110 pounds of halibut per 1,000 pounds dressed weight of sablefish. These regulations aim for the fleet to attain the halibut allocation at about the same time as the end of the primary sablefish season (October 31) and to ensure equitable sharing of halibut landings among the fishers.

### **FINAL ACTION TAKEN ON HALIBUT INCIDENTAL GROUND FISH REGULATIONS**

The Council recommended that NMFS have the authority to close retention of Pacific halibut in the limited entry fixed gear sablefish primary fishery if the International Pacific Halibut Commission posts on its website that the Pacific halibut quota for this fishery has been reached and further retention is prohibited. Closures will also be announced on the NMFS halibut hotline at 1-800-662-9825 (press 7, then 2).



Salmon troller Sea Maid off the Oregon coast. Photo: NOAA.

NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service.

## *Highly Migratory Species News*

### **COUNCIL MOVES TOWARDS AUTHORIZING DEEP-SET BUOY GEAR**

The Council is considering the creation of a deep-set buoy gear fishery.

In March, the Council directed its Highly Migratory Species Management Team to begin developing alternatives for authorizing a deep-set buoy gear fishery. Deep-set buoy gear fishing is already taking place under exempted fishing permits.

Deep-set buoy gear shows promise as an alternative method for catching swordfish that could complement or supplement existing swordfish gear types like harpoon and drift gillnet. Experience to date suggests that deep-set buoy gear results in minimal bycatch, especially of sensitive bycatch species like sea turtles and marine mammals, and could be a commercially viable small-scale fishery. The chance that unwanted catch dies after being caught is further reduced because the gear is actively tended, and a strike on any one piece of gear is immediately apparent. This allows the fisherman to rapidly retrieve the gear and release the animal alive if it is protected or unmarketable. Because of these benefits, the Council is interested in smoothly transitioning the fishery from its current exempted fishing permit phase to an authorized, regulated fishery, which would require a new fishery management plan amendment and other actions.

The alternatives being developed will cover gear definitions, authorized areas, target and prohibited species, licensing, a requirement for the gear to be actively tended, and other matters. The Council will get an update in June, then plans to review and potentially adopt a range of alternatives in September.

### **INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

The International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific



Old-school navigation system. Photo: J. Gilden.

EFH: Essential Fish Habitat (a designation under the Magnuson-Stevens Act).

ISC: International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean

NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service.

Ocean (ISC) is sponsoring a workshop May 24-25, 2016 to solicit input on management objectives for North Pacific albacore. The Council's highly migratory species advisory bodies have developed proposed management objectives, which were submitted as part of the ISC process and considered in December. The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel and Management Teams will hold a webinar on May 12 to provide advice to Council-sponsored attendees to this workshop. The webinar is open to the public.

### U.S.-Canada Albacore Treaty

The current fishing regime under the U.S.-Canada Albacore Treaty will expire at the end of the 2016 fishing season, which means that albacore fishing by either country in the other country's exclusive economic zone would stop unless a new fishing regime is negotiated. The State Department plans to convene a U.S. delegation meeting in the near future to review all current data on the fishery; the

Council urged the State Department to convene a similar meeting in the fall to review information collected on the 2016 fishing season, as well as other information. The Council will discuss this issue further in November 2016.

## Groundfish News

### ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT AND ROCKFISH CONSERVATION AREA ALTERNATIVES REVIEWED

The Council is reviewing proposed changes to essential fish habitat for groundfish, including Rockfish Conservation Areas.

In September 2015, the Council created a range of alternatives for potential changes to these areas. All of the changes will be included in Amendment 28 to the groundfish fishery management plan.

In April 2016, the Council received an [update](#) on the alternatives and analytical approach proposed by the Council's Essential Fish Habitat (EFH)/Rockfish Conservation Area Project Team. The Team's report described the suite of alternatives in ten distinct subject areas. Four address fishery management actions, and six are classified as administrative actions.

The *fishery management alternatives* include: 1) EFH conservation area changes contained in public proposals (including the [Collaborative proposal](#)); 2) new EFH conservation areas within current Rockfish Conservation Area boundaries; 3) adjustments to the trawl Rockfish Conservation Area; and 4) use of Magnuson-Stevens Act discretionary authorities in waters deeper than 3500m. (Current groundfish EFH only extends to 3,500m depth, meaning that much of California's Exclusive Economic Zone is not essential fish habitat. Using Magnuson-Stevens Act discretionary authorities is one way to protect Federal waters that are outside of designated EFH.)

The Council narrowed the range of alternatives adopted in September to focus on the public proposals submitted by the Collaborative Group and the [Oceana/Natural Resources Defense Council/Ocean Conservancy](#) group. The Council chose not to consider any changes within the tribal "usual and accustomed areas" off the coast of Washington, as government-to-government consultations between the tribes and NMFS are ongoing. The EFH conservation area alternatives include mostly increases – with some decreases – in the total amount of EFH areas closed to bottom trawl activities.



Paul Kujala shows a trawl net to members of the Council in Astoria in April.  
Photo: J. Gilden

ABC: Acceptable biological catch. A level recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee. The ABC considers the uncertainty in estimating the overfishing limit and, for groundfish, is always less than that limit.

ACL: Annual catch limit. Accounts for all sources of fishing-related mortality, including research catches and discards. The ACL is based on conservation, socioeconomic, and ecological considerations, as well as risk.

EFH: Essential fish habitat.

NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service.

P\*: the probability of overfishing. For example, a P\* of 0.5 means there is a 50% risk of overfishing. A P\* of 0.1 means a 10% risk of overfishing. The P\* value is a policy determination that reflects the preferred level of risk tolerance in setting a overall harvest level for a stock. The highest P\* allowed for groundfish is 0.45.

## INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

At its March meeting, the Council adopted landing limits for the limited-entry sablefish daily trip limit fishery north of 36° N. latitude of 1,125 pounds per week and 3,375 pounds per bimonthly period. This change would be more efficient for vessels, as three full weekly limits would equate to one bimonthly trip limit (i.e. 1,125 lbs x 3 weeks = 3,375 lbs), and would help ensure that the fishery, which saw increased effort last year, remains within its landing target. In April, the Council also recommended a decrease in the open access fixed gear sablefish trip limits north of 36° latitude to 300 lbs. daily, or one landing per week up to 850 lbs., not to exceed 1,700 lbs. per two months, to go into effect at the start of period 4 (July 1). This trip limit reduction would help ensure that the fishery, which saw increased effort last year, remains within its landing target.

The Council recommended that NMFS issue surplus carryover for all non-whiting individual fishing quota species where the annual catch limit (ACL) is less than the acceptable biological catch (ABC), including sablefish north of 36° N. latitude and canary rockfish. Surplus carryover for petrale sole is not eligible under the current NMFS policy, given that the ACL is equal to the ABC. The Council recommended NMFS issue eligible carryover pounds up to the point where the ACL plus surplus carryover equals the ABC.

## GROUND FISH: 2017, 2018 ANNUAL SPECIFICATIONS ADOPTED

In April, the Council adopted final preferred 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications for groundfish stocks and stock complexes under default harvest control rules for most stocks as shown here. The Council adopted new harvest control rules for canary rockfish, darkblotched rockfish, California scorpionfish, and widow rockfish as follows:

- Canary rockfish: 1,526 metric ton (mt) annual catch limit (ACL) in 2017-18 with ACL = annual biological catch (ABC) (P\* = 0.45) thereafter;
- Darkblotched rockfish: 490 mt in 2017-18;
- California scorpionfish: 150 mt ACL in 2017-18; and
- Widow rockfish: ACL = ABC (P\* = 0.45); 13,508 mt and 12,655 mt in 2017 and 2018,

The trawl Rockfish Conservation Area alternatives include complete removal of the trawl Rockfish Conservation Area, retaining discrete area closures for overfished species, and using block area closures to address conservation concerns as they arise.

The *administrative alternatives* include 1) life history descriptions, EFH descriptions, and major prey items; 2) fishing gear effects; 3) non-fishing effects and conservation measures; 4) information and research needs; 5) review and revision process; and 6) clarifications and corrections. The Administrative alternatives were unchanged in April.

The Council will consider an analytical document in September or possibly November, and will have the opportunity to select preliminary preferred alternatives. Final action on the Amendment 28 package is tentatively slated for early 2017.



respectively.

In addition, the Council selected preliminary preferred annual catch targets for canary rockfish of 1,060 mt for trawl sectors (shorebased individual fishing quota program, mothership, catcher-processor) and 407 mt for non-trawl sectors (limited entry and open access fixed gears and recreational). The Council adopted preliminary preferred management measures, including allocations for all fisheries, for public review. [Detailed descriptions of those measures are posted here](#). Final action on management measures for 2017-2018 groundfish fisheries is scheduled for the June 2016 Council meeting.

In June, the Council will also consider new management measures, including allowing petrale sole and starry flounder, along with species in the “other flatfish” complex, to be retained at any depth during the recreational seasonal depth closures in California; creating nine new overfished species hotspot closures for recreational fisheries in California; and allowing flatfish retention in the Oregon recreational fisheries at any depth during the seasonal depth closure.

Council staff, in coordination with the Groundfish Management Team and the NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center, have prepared [an analytical document](#) that describes the impacts associated with the range of 2017-2018 groundfish harvest specifications and adjustments to routine management measures, which will be published in the June briefing book.

## MIDWATER SPORT FISHERY RECOMMENDED



In March, the Council recommended regulations for a midwater long-leader recreational fishery in Oregon to provide access to abundant and healthy midwater species while avoiding interactions with overfished rockfish. The fishery would take place seaward of a line approximating the 40 fathom depth curve in Oregon from April through September. If approved by NMFS, no more than one line will be allowed, with three hooks, a minimum of 30 feet between the sinker and the lowest hook, and a non-compressible float required above the hooks. Small plastic worms and flies will be allowed along with weighted hooks; bait and large lures would be prohibited. Further, lingcod retention will be prohibited. All other existing state and Federal groundfish regulations, such as bag limits, rockfish conservation areas, etc., will remain in effect.

The regulations were based on results from fishing activities conducted under exempted fishing permits held by the Oregon Recreational Fishing Alliance since 2013. The permits allowed the organization to test the gear described above in an area (seaward of 40 fathoms) that was otherwise closed to recreational groundfish harvest.

## VESSEL MOVEMENT MONITORING PLANS ADJUSTED

In April, the Council refined its plan to remotely track fishing vessels. The Council created three management measures that would assist the enforcement of closed fishing areas or increase the efficiency of some fisheries.

The first management measure allows vessels that are required to have electronic vessel monitoring systems (VMS) to choose from various VMS options. VMS is a system that allows managers and the Coast Guard to track vessels while fishing.

The second management measure was changed to exempt groundfish trawlers who want to test trawl gear from the need for observers. Trawlers participating in the tests would not be allowed

Bottom fishing.  
Photo: James Young,  
[Flickr Creative Commons](#).

NMFS: National Marine  
Fisheries Service.





Canary rockfish.  
Photo: Ricky Romero,  
[Flickr Creative Commons](#).

A cod-end is the narrow end of a tapered trawl net, where the fish are retained.

NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service.

to harvest fish or test gear in essential fish habitat conservation areas, and trawl nets must be open or without a cod-end. Mid-water trawl vessels would also be allowed to change their whiting fishery declaration while at sea.

The third measure would allow shorebased, fixed-gear, individual fishing quota vessels to move pot gear from one management area to another during a single trip. Under these regulations, vessels would still not be allowed to harvest fish from any additional management areas with fish aboard the vessel from a previous management area (i.e., fish from multiple management areas could not be mixed during a single trip).

For more details, [see the briefing book materials](#) for this issue.

## GROUNDFISH ELECTRONIC MONITORING MOVES FORWARD

In April, the Council made some changes to their final preferred alternative for the proposed electronic monitoring program that applies to the groundfish individual fishing quota (IFQ) fixed-gear fishery under the catch shares program. In November 2015, the Council selected its final preferred alternatives for a similar program for the whiting midwater trawl fishery. This spring, the Council will provide a final environmental assessment with recommended alternatives for both fisheries to NMFS for implementation. The Council intends to have both electronic monitoring programs in place by January 1, 2017.

The Council's changes for the fixed-gear fishery in April include allowing vessels to use individual vessel monitoring plans (a written document of the vessel's plan to handle catch/discard, installation and maintenance requirements of an electronic monitoring system, protocols for data storage and transfer, and other responsibilities) indefinitely until a change is made to the plan. In addition, vessels could switch between electronic monitoring and an observer any time throughout the year.

If approved by NMFS, the proposed electronic monitoring program will allow vessel owners to use electronic monitoring, rather than an observer, to monitor discard in the fishery. Vessel operators will be required to record all discard by species and weight to debit their IFQ accounts, and video reviewers will verify the recorded discard by examining 100 percent of the video data collected.

At the April meeting, the Council also reviewed and approved draft electronic monitoring regulations for

### ENFORCEMENT CORNER

In early April, a Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Officer received a tip that an open access sablefish vessel moored in the Port of Ilwaco had closed-season halibut on board. The officers were advised the fish were going to be offloaded after dark. Two officers responded and set up surveillance. After several hours of observing the vessel, the skipper and crew were observed opening the hold and pulling out two large coolers. At the same time, a vehicle quickly pulled up to the head of the ramp. The officers contacted the suspects as they were about to load the coolers into their vehicle. The culprits confessed, and nine illegally harvested halibut totaling 225 lbs were seized, along with two rockfish. The skipper had built a false wall in his hold allowing him to conceal the fish. The halibut were donated to a local charity and charges will be forwarded to the prosecutor's office.

the whiting midwater trawl and IFQ fixed gear fisheries. NMFS intends to put the regulations for both fisheries in place by January 1, 2017.

In addition, NMFS expanded the number of participants in the electronic monitoring test fishery (exempted fishing permit, or EFP) for the trawl catch share program and extended the expiration date of the EFP. The Council had extended the EFPs for all electronic monitoring vessel participants through 2018 in order to collect more information, but due to the lack of fishery information for the bottom trawl and non-whiting mid-water trawl fisheries, the EFP for these fisheries may be needed through December 31, 2018. The EFPs will end when fleetwide electronic monitoring regulations are put in place for each fishery.



A fisherman hauling a skate over the rail, as seen by the camera of an electronic monitoring system. Skates are bycatch species in the halibut fishery.

Photo: NOAA.

IFQ: Individual fishing quota.

NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service.

## **ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGIES IMPLEMENTATION PLAN PROGRESSES**

The Council plans to explore electronic technology solutions, such as fish recognition software, to monitor landings in the shorebased individual fishing quota program in lieu of shoreside monitors. The Council has recommended that the Pacific Fisheries Information Network Committee review the current list of logbooks that are collected to explore the potential for creating electronic logbooks and their usefulness in fisheries management. These topics are included in the Council's West Coast Region Electronic Technology Plan.

## **STOCK ASSESSMENT PLANS CONSIDERED FOR GROUND FISH AND COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES**

In 2017, full stock assessments will be considered for lingcod and for blue, deacon, yelloweye, and yellowtail rockfish. In addition, updated assessments will be considered for bocaccio and darkblotched rockfish. The assessments will be used to inform fisheries management in 2019 and beyond.

The Council is soliciting comment on this preliminary list. The Council may consider assessments for arrowtooth flounder (update), blackgill rockfish (update), bank rockfish (full), Pacific ocean perch (full), cabezon off Oregon and Washington (full), and California scorpionfish (full or data-moderate) if NMFS Science Centers' workload allows. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife expressed concern they have limited resources to contribute to additional nearshore assessments beyond those on the initial prioritized list.

The Council adopted proposed changes to three terms of reference for public review as recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee. The Council also included proposed changes to the groundfish and coastal pelagic species stock assessment review process terms of reference as recommended by the Coast Pelagic Species Management Team for public review.

Final action on groundfish stock assessment priorities and the three terms of reference is scheduled for June 2016.

## **U.S. TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH OF PACIFIC WHITING SET**

The total allowable catch of Pacific whiting under the U.S.-Canada Whiting Treaty agreement has been set at 367,553 metric tons (mt) for the U.S., slightly more than 2015's total allowable catch of 325,072 mt. The Council recommended 1,500 mt of Pacific whiting be set aside to

accommodate the expected catch in research activities and incidental bycatch in non-whiting fisheries.

## **COUNCIL DISCUSSES REMOVAL OF OUTDATED TRAWL REGULATIONS**

In March, the Council selected a final preferred alternative for gear regulations that it determined were outdated as a result of the trawl catch share program.

The catch share program, which began in 2011, required 100 percent at-sea monitoring and individual vessel accountability for catch of many groundfish species. For those species, trip limit regulations were no longer needed, and other regulations became obsolete. Since that time, the Council and its advisory bodies have been exploring which remaining regulations should be changed or lifted.

In March the Council recommended allowing vessels to carry and use multiple trawl gears types on a single trip (fish caught using different gears must be stowed separately); eliminating minimum mesh size regulations for the cod-end and body of the net; eliminating restrictions on cod-ends; eliminating chafing gear restrictions; allowing a new haul to be brought onboard and dumped before all catch from previous haul has been stowed; and changing the selective flatfish trawl gear definition and restrictions. The selective flatfish trawl gear definition would be changed to allow the use of four-seams nets, and the restriction that requires use of selective flatfish trawl gear shoreward of the Rockfish Conservation Area in the area north of 40° 10' N. latitude would be replaced by a restriction that requires use of small footrope trawl in that area. This June, the Council will consider whether to allow vessels to fish in more than one management area on the same trip.

## **TRAWL CATCH SHARE PROGRAM TO BE REVIEWED**

In April, the Council reviewed preliminary plans for reviewing the trawl catch share program, as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The Council will address these plans in more detail in June, at which time it will also consider the timing and location for coastal hearings and composition of a community advisory board to advise the Council on impacts of the program. The Council will also discuss NMFS guidance on the review, and will hear a report from the catch share workshop that was held in Portland Oregon in February.

## **COMMERCIAL JIG GEAR EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT CONSIDERED**

In March, the Council considered extending an exempted fishing permit (EFP) for commercial jig gear, used to target yellowtail rockfish, for an additional two years. (Exempted fishing permits provide a way to test innovative fishing gears.) The jig gear EFP is sponsored by the San Francisco

Community Fishing Association with Mr. Dan Platt and Ms. Barbara Emley, and allows the testing of mid-water commercial jig gear within the rockfish conservation area.

The Council forwarded the application for public review and possible final adoption in June. When it develops its final recommendation, the Council will be considering whether to require 30 percent observer coverage, 100 percent observer coverage; or 30 percent observer coverage augmented by electronic monitoring. The Council also recommended extending the southern

NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service.



Darius Kasprzak demonstrates a jig rig. Photo: Island Institute.



boundary for the EFP to Point Conception, and adding up to three additional vessels to the EFP. The Council adopted set-asides and reduced the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife research set-aside for yelloweye to account for impacts needed for this EFP (0.03 mt).

The Council is scheduled to make its final recommendations for 2017-2018 EFPs at the June 2016 meeting in Tacoma, Washington, including an EFP to allow testing of commercial pot gear for targeting lingcod within the Rockfish Conservation Areas off Washington and Oregon.

EFP: Exempted fishing permit. A permit issued by National Marine Fisheries Service that allows exemptions from some regulations in order to study the effectiveness, bycatch rate, or other aspects of an experimental fishing gear.

NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service.

## *Habitat and Ecosystem News*

### **HABITAT COMMITTEE DISCUSSES SACRAMENTO WINTER-RUN CHINOOK, WIND POWER PROJECT, KLAMATH DAM REMOVAL**

On April 22, the Council sent a letter on protection of Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon to the California State Water Resources Control Board and the Bureau of Reclamation. The letter, developed by the Habitat Committee, expresses the Council's concerns about the Bureau of Reclamation's Drought Contingency Plan and makes recommendations for improving the plan. The 2015 Sacramento winter-run Chinook salmon brood had an egg-to-fry survival rate of approximately 4.5 percent, well below its long-term average of 26.4 percent. The Council suggested improvements to the model that Reclamation uses to predict winter-run Chinook salmon survival, elevating the conservation status of the stock, conserving cold water storage in Lake Shasta, stabilizing the river to avoid dewatering of redds and stranding of fish, and other measures. The letter is posted [on the Council website](#).

In addition, the committee received a presentation from Trident Winds, which is proposing to install a 650- to 1000- megawatt facility approximately 30 miles offshore of Morro Bay, California, using floating platforms. Trident aims to install the wind farm by 2025. The Habitat Committee will continue to monitor this project, which is still in its very early stages.

The Habitat Committee heard good news related to removal of the four lower Klamath dams. Following the expiration of the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement, the States of Oregon and California, PacifiCorp, and the Federal government recently announced an agreement-in-principle. Under the agreement, PacifiCorp and the other parties will move forward with amending the Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement with the focus on removing four dams from the Klamath River. If all goes as planned, PacifiCorp will transfer the title of the Klamath River dams to a non-federal entity that will assume liability and take the appropriate steps to decommission and remove the dams in 2020.

Finally, the Council voted to sign the NMFS charter forming a regional planning body focused on marine planning for the West Coast. Ms. Michele Culver will continue to serve as the Council's representative on the regional planning body.

### **A LOOK AT THE STATE OF THE CALIFORNIA CURRENT ECOSYSTEM**

In March, NMFS delivered the fourth annual [State of the California Current Ecosystem Report](#) to the Council. The California Current Ecosystem encompasses waters from Vancouver Island, Canada, to Baja California, Mexico, including the entire U.S. west coast Exclusive Economic Zone (out 200 nautical miles). The report includes time series of ecosystem status indicators



A prototype floating wind turbine. Photo: Untrakdrover, Wikimedia Commons.



through 2014.

The purpose of the report is to present ecosystem information to the Council in a succinct, straightforward format. The report synthesizes data to present key environmental, biological, and socioeconomic indicators, highlighting trends in physical, biological, and socioeconomic components of the ecosystem. The report was prepared by the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment Team, composed of staff from the Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers, and was presented by Drs. Chris Harvey and Toby Garfield.



Copepod with eggs. Photo: Kat Masback, NOAA AFSC.

Following the presentation, the Council asked that next year's report contain more information about recreational fisheries, as well as research recommendations.

*Highlights from this year's report:*

Due to record high sea surface temperature anomalies in the northeast Pacific and off Baja California, combined with the third largest El Niño this century, there has been lower productivity in the California Current Ecosystem at almost every trophic level (trophic levels are essentially positions in the food chain).

Northern copepods, which are an important forage food for fish and have been nicknamed "cheeseburgers of the sea," decreased in the north, meaning less energy available to their predators. Instead, they were replaced with lower-energy copepods likened more to celery than cheeseburgers. At the same time, forage species with low and intermediate energy content (such as young rockfish and squid) were patchy.

Pacific salmon faced additional stresses due to drought, warm weather, warm streams, and in 2015, 95 percent below-normal April 1 snow-water equivalent storage. There was unusually high mortality for California sea lions and Guadalupe fur seals, as well as for common murrens. All are further evidence of overall lower productivity in the ecosystem.

Commercial fishing landings remained high through 2014, driven mainly by landings of Pacific hake and coastal pelagic species. However, newly-developed indicators of coastal community vulnerability show that fishery-dependent communities experienced increasing socioeconomic vulnerability from 2000 to 2010.

## *Coastal Pelagic Species News*

### **SARDINE ASSESSMENT, HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS, AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES SET**

In April, the Council adopted the 2016 sardine stock assessment and approved the biomass estimate of 106,137 metric tons (mt), with the following specifications: an overfishing limit of 23,085 mt; an acceptable biological catch of 19,236 mt; and an annual catch limit of 8,000 mt.

As a result of several years of declining biomass, both the 2015 and 2016 biomass estimates fell below the cutoff value of 150,000 mt. Because of this, there will again be no directed non-Treaty fishery for the 2016-2017 sardine season. The only catch allowed will be Treaty-Indian, incidental, live bait, research, and other minor sources of mortality.

The Council adopted the following automatic inseason actions:

- An incidental per landing allowance of 40 percent Pacific sardine in non-treaty coastal pelagic

species (CPS) fisheries until a total of 2,000 mt of Pacific sardine are landed.

- When the 2,000 mt is achieved, the incidental per landing allowance would be reduced to 20 percent until a total of 5,000 mt of Pacific sardine have been landed.
- When 5,000 mt have been landed, the incidental per landing allowance will be reduced to 10 percent for the remainder of the 2016-2017 fishing year.

In addition, the Council adopted a 2 mt incidental per landing allowance in non-CPS fisheries, and asked the CPS Management Team to explore management options to account for a small artisanal fishery.

## *Business Matters*

### **UPDATE ON FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION**

The Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing Enforcement Act (HR 774) was signed into law on December 5, 2015. [The Council commented on this act in March 2015.](#)



A search and rescue boat from Coast Guard Station Cape Disappointment. Photo: USCG.

The Coast Guard Authorization Act (HR 4188), was signed into law on February 8, 2016. The Act authorizes Coast Guard appropriations for 2016-2017; among many other provisions, it keeps the Newport, Oregon helicopter facility open until January 1, 2018, and makes it more difficult to close the facility after that date.

The Council has received requests for comments on two bills. The first, the California Long-Term Provisions for Water Supply and Short-Term Provisions for Emergency Drought Relief Act (S. 2533) was introduced by Congresswoman Dianne Feinstein. The Council will send a letter on S. 2533 that reflects comments made by the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations.

The second, Ensuring Access to Pacific Fisheries Act (HR 4576), relates to the Conventions on the Conservation and Management of High Seas Fisheries Resources in the North and South Pacific Oceans. This bill and others could provide a seat for the North Pacific, Western Pacific, and Pacific Councils on the North Pacific Fisheries Commission, and a seat for the Western Pacific Council on the South Pacific Fisheries Commission. A draft letter on this Act will be included in the June briefing book.

In addition, a California State Senate Bill, SB 1114, has been submitted that would phase out the California drift gillnet fishery. Since this is an issue the Council is already considering, the Council [sent a letter](#) on the bill on April 26.

## *Appointments*

At its March and April 2016 meetings, the Council made the following appointments to advisory bodies:

- Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel California seat - Dr. Don Maruska
- Groundfish Management Team West Coast Region seat - Ms. Karen Palmigiano
- Groundfish Management Team Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife seat - Mr. Patrick Mirick
- Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team Northwest Fisheries Science Center seat - Dr. Kym

- Jacobson
- Habitat Committee Idaho Fish and Game seat - Mr. Lance Hebdon
- Habitat Committee Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife seat - Ms. Randi Thurston
- Highly Migratory Species Management team NMFS West Coast Region seat - Mr. Lyle Enriquez

The Council is soliciting nominations for the vacant Washington Private Sport seat on the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel. The Council intends to fill the seat at the June Council meeting. [Nomination information is available here](#). The Council will also consider composition and solicit nominees for an ad hoc Community Advisory Board to engage in the five-year review of the Council’s catch share program after the June Council meeting.

## *Upcoming Meetings*

### **JUNE COUNCIL MEETING TO BE HELD IN TACOMA**

The next meeting of the Pacific Fishery Management Council is scheduled for June 23-28, 2016 in Tacoma, Washington. Public comment materials received by **11:59 pm, May 26**, will be mailed to Council members and appropriate advisory bodies prior to the June meeting. This is known as the “Advance Briefing Book Deadline.”

Public comment materials received at the Council office **after May 26, 11:59 pm, but by 11:59 pm, June 14** will be included in the supplemental materials distributed to the Council on the first day of the June meeting. This is known as the “Supplemental Public Comment Deadline.”

See the [Council’s Briefing Book Public Comment Deadlines webpage](#) for complete details on how to submit comments.

## *June Council Meeting Agenda*

### **GROUND FISH**

- ◆ NMFS report
- ◆ A-21 At-Sea Allocations
- ◆ Final approval of exempted fishing permit(s)
- ◆ Inseason adjustments
- ◆ Adopt final 2017-2018 management measures
- ◆ Five-year catch share program review planning
- ◆ Omnibus workload planning
- ◆ Final stock assessment plans and terms of reference
- ◆ Gear change regulations for management lines

### **SALMON AND HALIBUT**

- ◆ Sacramento Winter Chinook Control Rule Update
- ◆ Scoping halibut catch sharing plan allocation changes

### **HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES**

- ◆ NMFS report
- ◆ International Issues
- ◆ New EFP preliminary approval
- ◆ Biennial specifications and management measures
- ◆ Deep set buoy gear and Federal HMS permit update

### **OTHER AGENDA ITEMS**

- ◆ Habitat issues
- ◆ Appointments
- ◆ Comments on Western Region Climate Change Action Plan

## *Upcoming Advisory Body Meetings*

### **HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL AND HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM WEBINAR**

Dates: May 12

Purpose: To provide advice to Council-sponsored attendees to the Second North Pacific Albacore Management Strategy Evaluation Workshop sponsored by the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean.

Contact: Kit Dahl ([Kit.Dahl@noaa.gov](mailto:Kit.Dahl@noaa.gov))

For More Info: [See detailed meeting announcement](#)

### **AD HOC ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP WEBINAR**

Dates: May 19

Purpose: To discuss and draft comments on the NOAA Fisheries Climate Science Strategy Western Regional Action Plan.

Contact: Kit Dahl ([Kit.Dahl@noaa.gov](mailto:Kit.Dahl@noaa.gov))

For More Info: [See detailed meeting announcement](#)

## *Council Staff Strives to “Go Green”*

Over the past several years, the Council staff has tried to be more efficient with our resources, taking a “reduce, re-use, and recycle” approach. Some changes have been noticeable, while others are less visible. Here are some highlights.

*Reducing paper:* The Council has cut its paper use nearly in half through greater use of electronic-only briefing book materials and use of Dropbox. This saves both resources and money. Using Concur for expense claims has eliminated the need for paper claims, envelopes, and postage. In the office, we save paper that has been printed on only one side, and re-use it for low priority print jobs in office printers, as well as for scratch pads. Salmon reviews and preseason reports are now only printed by request.

*Power & Carbon:* The Council’s increasing use of webinars instead of in-person meetings has cut down on travel costs and the use of fossil fuels. In addition, motion sensor light switches are used throughout the Council office, automatically turning off office lights when nobody is in the room (and sometimes when they are!). Using power strips with individual on/off switches has reduced “vampire electrical consumption.”

*Recycling and Re-using:* The Council staff holds several recycling drives each year, taking Styrofoam, old batteries, old CDs, old gym shoes, and other hard-to-recycle materials to nearby recycling locations. We also take donate old computers, binders and office products to Schoolhouse Supplies and Free Geek.

Have an idea about how the Council can be more green? Contact our [Green Team!](#)