

SALMON ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT  
ON FINAL ACTION ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

The Salmon Advisory Subpanel (SAS) has met with representatives of the Groundfish Management Team, the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel and representatives of the trawl industry to discuss salmon bycatch in the whiting, midwater rockfish trawl, and exempted fishing permit (EFP) fisheries. The SAS has submitted comments to the Council regarding the Salmon Endangered Species Act (ESA) Consultation. The SAS has carefully considered a range of possible inseason adjustments for 2017 and offers the following comments.

The anticipated 2017 salmon fishing closures from Florence, Oregon to Horse Mountain in California pose a huge financial and social impact to California Tribes, coastal communities, and the salmon fishing industry and families. These closures are primarily prompted by conservation concerns for Klamath River basin Chinook salmon and address impacts associated with directed troll and recreational fishing. The National Marine Fisheries Service ESA consultation process on salmon bycatch has focused attention on salmon bycatch in the whiting and groundfish trawl fisheries and has highlighted the continuing need to minimize bycatch.

The SAS has considered a range of potential inseason adjustments for the trawl fleet, including immediate and multi-year fishing closures in the Klamath Management Zone (KMZ), the establishment of very restrictive bycatch caps, and moving trawl fishing activity offshore. The SAS concludes, however, that placing restrictive controls on these fisheries carries with it the potential for even more economic loss to the coastal communities.

The SAS reminds the Council that Klamath Chinook salmon will not meet escapement goals for 2017, by a historically high margin, likely due in part to high incidence of parasite infections of out-migrating smolts and poor ocean conditions. The SAS anticipates that the stock may be declared overfished, requiring a rebuilding effort. Any fishery-related removals of younger age class fish will complicate rebuilding efforts and further compromise this stock. The SAS anticipates that stock performance for 2018 will be similar for the same reasons. Faced with that potential, the SAS recommends that trawl fishing in the KMZ be conducted to significantly minimize or eliminate salmon bycatch. The SAS supports the industry efforts to move the fishing effort away from the KMZ, to conduct the proposed trawl gear EFP to refine actual salmon bycatch and allow more flexibility.

The SAS recognizes that prosecuting groundfish fisheries north of the KMZ has the potential to exacerbate management concerns and bycatch of other groundfish stocks. However, due to the very low abundance of Klamath fall Chinook and the hardships faced in salmon fisheries, the SAS requests that the Council place a very high priority on minimizing the bycatch of Klamath fall Chinook when considering the management of groundfish fisheries.