

Pacific Council News

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• Reporting on West Coast Fisheries Management •

SALMON	1
HALIBUT	4
GROUNDFISH.....	5
ECOSYSTEM AND HABITAT	11
COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES.....	14
HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES	15
ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER BUSINESS.....	16



A salmon nearing the end of its run. Photo: ODFW.

Salmon

SALMON SEASONS ADOPTED FOR 2018

In March, the Council adopted for public review three alternatives for management measures for 2018 ocean salmon fisheries. At the April meeting, the Council adopted its final recommendation for the 2018 ocean salmon fisheries after receiving further public comment, and input from management entities. The Council will transmit its recommendations to National Marine Fisheries Service for implementation

beginning May 1, 2018.

The season recommendations provide recreational and commercial opportunities for most of the Pacific coast, and achieve conservation goals for the numerous individual salmon stocks on the West Coast.

FINAL
ACTION

“It has been another challenging year for the Council, its advisors, fishery stakeholders, and the public as we strive to balance fishing opportunities with the conservation needs we are facing on Chinook and coho salmon stocks, both north and south of Cape Falcon,” said Council Executive Director Chuck Tracy. “The Council has recommended ocean salmon seasons on the west coast this year that provide important protections for stocks of concern, including Lower Columbia River natural fall Chinook, Puget Sound Chinook, Washington coastal coho,

This newsletter reports on decisions made at the March and April 2018 Pacific Fishery Management Council meetings. The Pacific Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils in the U.S. and 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. The Council has five public meetings a year. The June 2018 Council meeting will be held in Spokane, Washington; the public comment deadline for the meeting is 5 p.m. on May 11. The supplemental public comment deadline is 5 p.m. on May 30. Email comments to pfmc.comments@noaa.gov. [Sign up for other notices here.](#)

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and Sacramento River fall Chinook.”

“This year’s package includes some very restrictive seasons in both commercial and recreational fisheries along the entire coast. Low abundances of Chinook and coho are in part due to the poor ocean conditions the adult fish faced as juveniles when they entered the ocean, and poor in-river habitat and water conditions. Tribal, commercial, and recreational fishers continue to bear a large part of the burden of conservation,” said Council Chair Phil Anderson.

Washington and Northern Oregon (North of Cape Falcon)

Fisheries north of Cape Falcon (near Nehalem in northern Oregon) depend largely on Columbia River Chinook and coho stocks. Overall, Columbia River fall Chinook forecasts are considered low to moderate compared to the recent 10-year average. Hatchery coho stocks originating from the Columbia River together with natural stocks originating from the Queets River and Grays Harbor are expected to return at low levels resulting in very low harvest quotas as was the case in 2017.

North of Cape Falcon, the overall non-Indian total allowable catch is 55,000 Chinook coastwide (compared to 90,000 last year) and 47,600 marked hatchery coho (the same as last year). Fisheries are designed to provide harvest opportunity on healthy Chinook returns primarily destined for the Columbia River, while avoiding coho stocks of concern.

Commercial Fisheries

Non-Indian ocean commercial fisheries north of Cape Falcon include traditional, but reduced, Chinook seasons in the spring (May-June) and summer season (July through mid-September). Non-Indian ocean commercial fisheries in this area will have access to a total of 27,500 Chinook (compared to 45,000 Chinook last year), and a marked coho quota of 5,600 (the same as last year).

Tribal ocean fisheries north of Cape Falcon are similar in structure to past years, with quotas that include 40,000 Chinook and 12,500 coho (the same as last year).

Recreational Fisheries

The recreational fishery north of Cape Falcon opens to all salmon on June 23 in most areas (July 1 in Westport) and ends September 3 or when Chinook or coho quotas are reached. Recreational fisheries in this area will have access to total of 27,500 Chinook (compared to 45,000 Chinook last year), and a marked coho quota of 42,000 (the same as last year).

California and Oregon South of Cape Falcon, Oregon

Fisheries south of Cape Falcon (in northern Oregon) are constrained primarily by Klamath River fall Chinook, Sacramento River fall Chinook and Oregon Coastal Natural coho. The commercial fishery consists of modest Chinook fisheries, particularly in California. Recreational fisheries in Oregon contain both Chinook and coho opportunity, with coho opportunity including both mark-selective and non-mark-selective fisheries.

Commercial Fisheries

Commercial fisheries from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mt. will open on May 4 and

will and continue through August 29 with intermittent closures. This area will also be open continuously in September and October, with weekly limits and a depth restriction in October.

Fisheries from Humbug Mt., Oregon to Humboldt South Jetty, California will be open intermittently from May through August. Monthly quotas will be in place for the Oregon portion of the Klamath Management Zone (KMZ) from June through August. In the California portion of the KMZ, monthly Chinook quotas will be in place from May through August. The quotas all feature landing and possession limits, and the Californian portion of this area will be open five days a week.

Between Horse Mountain and Pigeon Point (Fort Bragg and San Francisco areas), the area will be open for a week in late July, most of August, and all of September. From Pigeon Point to the Mexico border (Monterey), the Chinook season will be open during the first week in May and the last two weeks of June. There will also be a season from Point Reyes to Point San Pedro (subset of the San Francisco area), consisting of two five-day periods in October.

Recreational Fisheries

Recreational fisheries from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mt. will allow Chinook retention from now through October. Coho fisheries consist of a mark-selective quota fishery of 35,000 in mid-summer (compared to 18,000 last year) and a non-mark-selective quota fishery of 3,500 in September (compared to 6,000 last year).



Jeromy Jording, Wendy Beeghley, and audience at the Westport salmon hearing in March. Photo: Jennifer Gilden.

Fisheries from Humbug Mt, Oregon to the Oregon/ California border will be open from mid-May through late August. The area from the Oregon/ California border to Horse Mountain, California will be open from June through Labor Day.

Fisheries from Horse Mountain to Pigeon Point (Fort Bragg and San Francisco areas) will be open from mid-June through October. The area from Pigeon Point to the U.S./Mexico border (Monterey area) is open now through early July.

For details on all seasons, please see the season descriptions on the Council website at <http://www.pcouncil.org>.

Management Process

The Council developed three management alternatives in early March for public review and further analysis. The review process included input from Federal, state, and tribal 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 at its April Council meeting before taking final action. The decision will be forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service for their review of consistency with the Endangered Species Act and other applicable law, and promulgation of federal regulations.

In addition, the coastal states will take independent actions through state processes that will include adoption of fishery regulations under state authority that are compatible to the Council's actions and include state water fisheries.



*Fishing on the Snohomish River, Washington, 2009.
Photo: Joe Mabel,
Wikimedia Commons.*

FIVE SALMON STOCKS MEET “OVERFISHED” CRITERIA

Two Chinook stocks (Sacramento River Fall Chinook and Klamath River Fall Chinook), and three coho stocks (Queets River natural coho, Strait of Juan de Fuca natural coho, and Snohomish River natural coho) meet the criteria for “overfished” status based on information in the [Review of 2017 Ocean Salmon Fisheries](#). The Council recommended that National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS) consider changes to stock status designation for these species.

Under the salmon fishery management plan, a stock is considered “overfished” if the three-year geometric mean of spawner abundance falls below the minimum stock size threshold set for

that stock.

The Salmon Technical Team is required to develop a rebuilding plan for each of these five stocks. The plans must be implemented within two years after formal notification of the stock status from NMFS to the Council; however, the Council is scheduled to approve the plans prior to the 2019 season.

In March, the Council also adopted the stock abundances, acceptable biological catches and overfishing limits for the upcoming 2018 season, as presented in [Preseason Report I](#).

Halibut

INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT MEETING HELD IN PORTLAND

The annual meeting of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) was held in Portland, Oregon in January. The meeting included reports on recent survey results and current stock status, probabilities of risks and benefits involved with specific harvest choices, and policies and methods for distributing coastwide yield to regulatory areas.

The IPHC did not agree on 2018 Pacific halibut catch limits during the meeting, so Canada and the United States proceeded to work through a domestic regulatory process to develop 2018 catch limits that would be less than those used in 2017.

The U. S. Commissioners to the IPHC recommended a 2018 catch limit (fishery constant exploitation yield) of 1.19 million pounds of Pacific halibut for Area 2A, which is 10.5 percent

SALMON METHODOLOGY REVIEW

Each year, the Scientific and Statistical Committee reviews the methodology used to estimate impacts of the Council’s salmon management. In April, the Council confirmed advisory body recommendations to complete documentation of the new Chinook Fishery Regulation Assessment Model (FRAM) base period, evaluate post-season metrics of model performance for FRAM; and conduct the technical analysis needed to inform a change of the salmon management boundary line from latitude 40°05’ (Horse Mt.) five miles north to latitude 40°10’. The Council is scheduled to adopt the final list of topics in September, and any final changes in November.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ROCKFISH CONSERVATION AREA CHANGES

Q: WHEN COMPLETED, WHICH FISHERIES WILL THIS APPLY TO?

Amendment 28 applies mainly to the Federal groundfish bottom trawl sector. However, both new and existing essential fish habitat conservation areas are closed to all bottom trawl fishing, including pink shrimp, California halibut, sea cucumber, and ridgeback prawns.

Q: WILL THIS AFFECT THE MIDWATER TRAWL ROCKFISH CONSERVATION AREA?

No. This amendment is intended to apply only to bottom trawling.

Q: IS THE TRAWL RCA REALLY GOING AWAY?

The Council voted to remove the groundfish bottom trawl rockfish conservation area (RCA) off the coasts of California and Oregon, and to keep it in place off the coast of Washington. There are several areas within the trawl RCA that will remain closed to bottom trawling, even after the RCA is removed, to protect important sea floor habitat.

Q: WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

The Council will review the fishery management plan amendment language and the proposed regulations in September. NMFS will issue a draft environmental impact statement (EIS), and a proposed and final rule, each with a public review and comment period. The final step is approval by the Secretary of Commerce.

Q: WHEN WILL THESE CHANGES BE FINAL?

The full process, including public review, issuance of the EIS, rulemaking, and Secretarial approval, could take a year or more.

Q: HOW CAN I GET MORE INFO?

Keep an eye on the Council's website (www.pcouncil.org) or call or email Kerry Griffin (Kerry.griffin@noaa.gov, 503-820-2409) or Gretchen Hanshew (Gretchen.hanshew@noaa.gov or 503-526-6147) for more information.

less than the 2017 limit of 1.33 million pounds. This catch limit was set by NMFS on March 24. Detailed descriptions of the Area 2A allocations can be found in the [April 2018 briefing book](#), Agenda Item G.1.a.

INCIDENTAL PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH REGULATIONS SET FOR 2018

In April, the Council adopted final incidental landing restrictions for halibut in the salmon troll fishery for May 1, 2018 through the end of the salmon troll season, and then from April 1-30, 2019, as follows: license holders may land no more than one Pacific halibut per two Chinook, except one Pacific halibut may be landed without meeting the ratio requirement, and no more than 25 halibut landed per trip. Limits may be modified by inseason action.

Fixed Gear Sablefish Fisheries: In March, the Council recommended the 2018 incidental halibut catch restrictions in the fixed gear fishery north of Point Chehalis from April 1 through October 31, be set at 160 pounds of dressed weight halibut for every 1,000 pounds dressed weight of sablefish, plus 2 additional halibut in excess of the ratio.

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Groundfish

NEW PROTECTIONS ADDED FOR DEEP SEA CORALS, OTHER AREAS REOPENED TO FISHING

At its April meeting, the Council added new protections for deep sea coral areas, modified areas that protect priority bottom habitat areas for groundfish, and reopened fishing in some areas that have been closed to groundfish fishing for up to 16 years.

Specifically, it reopened the groundfish trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) in Oregon and California to bottom trawling, and modified the current configuration of numerous essential fish habitat conservation areas (EFHCAs) where groundfish bottom trawl gear is prohibited coastwide. This includes a new EFHCA prohibiting groundfish bottom trawl gear in most of the Southern California Bight. The Council also voted to prohibit use of all groundfish bottom contact gear in waters off California deeper than 3,500 meters.

The action did not affect non-trawl RCAs, the trawl RCA off Washington, the use of mid-water trawl gear within any of the trawl RCAs, or any of the EFHCAs in the tribal usual and accustomed fishing areas off the Washington coast.

The Council is required by Federal law to identify and protect important fish habitat, while balancing the needs of coastal communities and the fishing industry.

The actions span the Federal waters off the west coast. They establish



Paul Kujala uses a donut to explain the limits of trawl footrope gear. Photo: Mike Burner.

protection for over 136,000 square miles of corals, rocky reefs and undersea canyons important to over 100 groundfish species such as rockfish, flatfish, and sablefish. The new protections include 135,000 square miles of deep water habitat to protect corals off the coast of California, in depths too great for most bottom fishing activities. The actions also reopen over 3,000 square miles of historical fishing grounds that were established to reduce harvest on overfished rockfish stocks. Nearly all of those stocks have subsequently been rebuilt to sustainable population levels, and the remaining stocks are rebuilding quickly. The combination of new closures and reopenings ensures important habitat protections while allowing added fishing opportunity for the bottom trawl fleet.

“This decision demonstrates the Council’s commitment to protecting important fish habitats including rocky reefs, corals, and sponges. The decision was informed by sound science and further informed by the fishing industry and environmental community who are to be commended for their important contribution to the Council’s decision. The result provides an increase in habitat protection while providing greater opportunity for our trawl fleet to more efficiently harvest target stocks,” said Council Chair Phil Anderson. “The West Coast trawl fishery has been reduced in size and transformed into a sustainable fishery including full accountability that provides the public with high quality fish products.”



A chalice sponge in Quinalt Canyon in the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary. Photo: Ocean Exploration Trust (E/V Nautilus)

The changes were made as part of a review which the Council and NOAA Fisheries initiated seven years ago. Many of the selected changes originated in a unique collaboration of fishing industry members and environmental advocates working together.

Seth Atkinson, a collaborative group member representing the Natural Resources Defense Council, said, “By listening to each other and building trust, we worked together to improve fishing opportunity and increase protection for sensitive habitat areas. We built on fishermen’s deep knowledge of the seafloor, cross-referencing it with the latest scientific data, and pulled together a package of changes that would achieve both goals. This was possible only because of fishermen’s willingness to sit down and share their knowledge.”

The decision also considered input from Federal, Tribal and State agencies, and the general public. It included extensive analysis of the biological, social, and economic effects of the actions.

The Council’s recommended actions and amendments to its groundfish fishery management plan will be transmitted to the NMFS for development of enacting regulations.

BIENNIAL SPECIFICATIONS, PRELIMINARY MANAGEMENT

ALTERNATIVES FOR 2019-2020 GROUNDFISH FISHERIES ADOPTED

Specifications: In April, the Council finalized biennial specifications and management measures for 2019-2020 groundfish fisheries.

The [final preferred harvest specifications](#) for all stocks and stock complexes, except for lingcod north and south of 40°10’ N. latitude, California scorpionfish south of 34°27’ N. latitude, and yelloweye rockfish, are provided in Table 1 at the link; final preferred harvest specifications for



NOAA: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service

lingcod, California scorpionfish, and the preliminary preferred harvest specifications for yelloweye rockfish are listed under Alternative 1 in Table 2 of the same document. The Council is scheduled to set final harvest specifications for yelloweye rockfish and consider a change to the yelloweye rebuilding plan at its June meeting.

Management Measures: The Council also selected preliminary preferred management measures, including allocations for all 2019 and 2020 groundfish fisheries, for public review. These include:

- Status quo allocation proportions to determine fishery harvest guidelines;
- 2017 trip limits for commercial non-trawl fisheries except those for sablefish, canary rockfish, darkblotched rockfish and other slope rockfish, and thornyheads north [as recommended by the Groundfish Management Team](#) (GMT), as well as those for lingcod [recommended by the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel](#);
- Treaty management measures as [recommended by the treaty tribes](#);
- Washington recreational management measures as [recommended by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife](#) and the [GMT](#);
- Status quo Oregon recreational management measures described in Federal regulations as of April 10, 2018, except allow all-depth fishing in April and September;
- California recreational management measures corresponding to Option 2 as [recommended by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife](#);
- New salmon mitigation measures for groundfish fisheries;
- New stock complexes for Washington and Oregon stocks (Proposal 1 and Proposal 2, Option 3 [as described by the GMT](#);
- Elimination of the daily vessel limits for all species in the limited entry trawl individual fishing quota (IFQ) fishery;
- Implementation of survival credits for lingcod and sablefish in the IFQ fishery;
- Continuation of the Adaptive Management passthrough in the IFQ fishery;
- Removal of automatic authority established by Amendment 16-3 of the groundfish fishery management plan for darkblotched rockfish and Pacific ocean perch in the at-sea whiting fishery;
- Allowing commercial non-trawl and recreational fishing inside of 40 fathoms in the Western Cowcod Conservation Area; and
- An analysis of allowing an incidental lingcod to Chinook salmon retention in the salmon troll fishery up to 1 lingcod per 5 Chinook retained while maintaining a 10 lingcod trip limit and within the open access monthly limit.

Final action on management measures for 2019-2020 groundfish fisheries is scheduled for the June 2018 Council meeting. Comments on these proposed measures should be submitted by the briefing book deadline (see front page).



*At the April 2018
Council meeting.
Photo: Mike Burner.*

COUNCIL SETS INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS, INCLUDING SHORE-BASED CARRYOVER AND EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS

In March, the Council made the following inseason adjustments to groundfish fisheries:

For the Washington recreational fishery, the Council recommended an increase in the canary rockfish sub-limit from one to two fish in all marine areas and added a separate flatfish limit of three fish per day that would not be subject to the daily aggregate bag limit of nine. The Council

also recommended an increase in the canary rockfish sub-limit from one to two fish for the California recreational fishery.

The Council recommended that NMFS issue surplus carryover pounds from 2017 to 2018 for all non-whiting individual fishing quota species where the annual catch limit is less than the acceptable biological catch (ABC). Since the ABC and overfishing limit for sablefish, which are specified coastwide, were not exceeded, the Council also

recommended that NMFS issue carryover for sablefish north of 36° N. latitude to eligible vessel accounts despite exceeding the sablefish north ACL in 2017.

The Council also recommended that NMFS reopen the 2018 trawl exempted fishing permit enrollment process to new applicants.

FINAL RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES FOR CATCH SHARE FOLLOW-ON ACTIONS APPROVED

In November 2017, the Council completed the five-year review of the trawl catch share program and provided initial guidance on the alternatives for follow-on actions. This March, the Council moved forward with follow-on action alternatives on management of bycatch species for the at-sea fishery; annual vessel quota pound limits for blackgill rockfish south of 40° 10' N. latitude; shorebased individual fishing quota (IFQ) harvest complex needs; catcher-processor accumulation limits; and new data collections for catcher-processors and quota share owners.

The next Council action on these issues is scheduled for September, when preliminary preferred alternatives will be selected.

With respect to shorebased IFQ sector harvest complex needs, in September the Council will address allowing post-season trading of quota shares, post-season relief from annual quota pound limits, and elimination of the September 1st deadline for transferring quota pounds from quota share accounts to vessel accounts. The Council removed an alternative that would have allowed NMFS to sell surplus quota pounds to those with deficits after then end of the fishing year.

The following trawl catch share program related issues will be addressed as part of the groundfish management measures for 2019-2020: elimination of the daily vessel quota pound limits for all species in the limited entry trawl IFQ fishery; implementation of survival credits for



*Newport, Oregon
fishing vessels. Photo:
Jennifer Gilden.*

**NEXT
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IN
SEPTEMBER**

NEXT
ACTION
IN
NOVEMBER

lingcod and sablefish in the IFQ fishery; and continuation of the Adaptive Management passthrough in the IFQ fishery.

Issues related to gear switching and trawl allocation attainment will be addressed as part of a separate process (see article below).

NEW COMMITTEE FOCUSES ON TRAWL ALLOCATION ATTAINMENT, GEAR SWITCHING, OTHER ISSUES

In April, the Council created a new ad hoc Sablefish Management and Trawl Allocation Attainment Committee (SaMTAAC), comprised of Council members and advised by members of the public, that will focus on attainment of the trawl allocation and related issues such as gear switching and trawl sablefish area management (see article, page 16, for committee appointees).

The SaMTAAC was charged with “identifying obstacles to achieving the goals and objectives of the catch share plan related to under attainment of non-sablefish trawl allocations and unharvested sablefish quota pounds (QP) south of 36° N. latitude. As appropriate to overcome identified obstacles, the committee will discuss and develop options, including but not limited to, actions that may modify rules for gear switching by trawl permit holders and QP leasing to vessels using fixed gear, as well as options that may encourage increased utilization of sablefish QPs south of 36° N. latitude.”

GROUNDFISH COST RECOVERY REPORT

NMFS is working to address industry and constituent requests for additional information on trawl catch share program costs and cost recovery determinations. The annual report, originally scheduled for the April meeting, will instead be presented in November in order to provide time to respond to those requests.

Low attainment of allocations for some trawl sector species, and conflicts between gear-switching vessels and local fleets in the area south of 36° N. latitude, were identified as concerns during the fishing community hearings held during the catch share review.

Trawlers take sablefish as part of a multispecies complex; however, sablefish is the main species taken by fixed-gear vessels in the trawl catch share program. Limiting gear switching might increase attainment of the trawl allocation of other species, if that attainment is being limited by sablefish. Limiting gear switching might also reduce or prevent a worsening of conflict between local fleets and fixed gear vessels traveling south of 36° N. latitude.

Eliminating the trawl sablefish area management line at 36° N. latitude would increase the amount of sablefish available for the northern fishery (potentially increasing trawl sector attainment of its non-sablefish allocations, to the degree that sablefish is limiting harvest) and would eliminate the need for fixed-gear vessels to travel south to harvest southern sablefish. The stock is assessed on a coastwide basis, and the 36° N. latitude line is primarily used for allocation. Since 2013, close to a million pounds or more of trawl-sector sablefish has been left unharvested south of 36° N. latitude.

The SaMTAAC is expected to meet twice between the April meeting and the time this issue next appears on the Council agenda (November 2018). A September 15, 2017 control date on gear switching has been published and might be used to grandfather existing participants if the Council decides to limit gear switching in the future.

ASSESSMENT FINDS PACIFIC WHITING STOCK HEALTHY

A 2018 Pacific whiting assessment has indicated the stock is healthy at 66.7 percent of its unfished spawning biomass—slightly lower than estimated last year but well above its B_{MSY} target of 40%. The stock has remained at a relatively high abundance since 2013 due to the

**FINAL
ACTION
IN
JUNE**

strength of large 2010 and 2014 cohorts. The 2018 coastwide total allowable catch of 597,500 mt is the same as in 2017, resulting in an allocation of 441, 433 mt for U.S. fisheries. The stock assessment was reviewed and recommended for decision-making in the international whiting treaty process.

STOCK ASSESSMENT PRIORITIES ADOPTED FOR REVIEW

In March, the Council adopted priorities for groundfish stock assessments to be conducted in the 2019 and 2021 assessment cycle as a preliminary proposal for public review. Recommended full assessments for 2019 include sablefish, cowcod, cabezon (Oregon and California), longnose skate, big skate, gopher rockfish (may be gopher and black-and yellow rockfish as a complex), and Dover sole. Updated assessments were recommended for Petrale sole and widow rockfish.

For 2021, full assessments were recommended for vermilion rockfish (may be vermilion and sunset rockfish as a complex south of Pt. Conception and as a separate area model north of Pt. Conception), brown rockfish, copper rockfish, quillback rockfish, bank rockfish, black rockfish, and Pacific cod.

The Council also adopted the Scientific and Statistical Committee's recommendations for changes to three terms of reference (those defining the processes for conducting and reviewing stock assessments, rebuilding analyses, and new proposed methodologies).

The Council will take final action on 2019 stock assessment priorities and the three terms of reference, adopt a schedule of 2019 stock assessment review panels, and refine their 2021 stock assessment priorities at their June 2018 meeting in Spokane, Washington.



*Representatives of the Columbia River Treaty Tribes testify during a salmon agenda item.
Photo: Mike Burner.*

COUNCIL ADOPTS ALTERNATIVES TO ADDRESS TAKE OF LISTED SALMON IN THE GROUND FISH FISHERY

In April the Council adopted a range of alternatives to address the groundfish fishery's take of salmon listed under the Endangered Species Act as required by a December 2017 NMFS biological opinion. The measures are available for public review, and the Council will take final action in June.

The Council and its Groundfish Management Team provided analytical support, as requested by NMFS, on the likely take of listed salmonids in the groundfish fishery over five years. While NMFS found that continued operation of the groundfish fishery will not "jeopardize the continued existence" of listed salmonids, it did identify several "reasonable and prudent measures" that must be addressed to monitor, and limit, salmon bycatch. In the short term, several of these measures must be implemented as part of the 2019-2020 biennial harvest specifications and management measures process. (Implementation of other required measures is on a longer timeline.)

As part of the biennial process, the Council will evaluate existing depth-based closures used to

**FINAL
ACTION
IN
JUNE**

NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service

reduce salmon bycatch and consider additional measures along these lines that would be more effective. The biological opinion also specifies fishery-specific threshold levels for Chinook salmon bycatch and a reserve amount above these thresholds that would serve as a backstop when a fishery experiences a “lightning strike” of high bycatch despite the best efforts of fishery participants and managers. A fishery would close completely if bycatch goes over its threshold amount plus this reserve. Regulations governing such a closure will be developed and implemented through the biennial process.

If trawl fisheries exceeded the threshold and reserve levels, other non-trawl fisheries would also close even though they generally take small amounts of salmon. Therefore, the Council wants to

consider rules to “hold harmless” these non-trawl fisheries in situations where high bycatch in trawl fisheries threatens a complete fishery closure.



*One of a billion pyrosomes.
Photo: Christopher Tait,
NOAA Teacher at Sea.*

Ecosystem and Habitat

NMFS REPORTS ON CALIFORNIA CURRENT ECOSYSTEM

In March, Drs. Chris Harvey and Toby Garfield reported on the [2018 Annual State of the California Current Ecosystem Report](#), which synthesizes data on environmental, biological, and socioeconomic indicators.

The report stated that climate, oceanographic, and streamflow indicators suggest that the physical system is transitioning toward average or La Niña conditions, following the marine heat wave (“Blob”) and major El

Niño event of 2014-2016. Several ecological indicators in 2017 also pointed toward more average conditions; for example, the copepod community off Newport saw an increase in cool-water, lipid-rich species that are better for production of salmon. Some important forage species increased in the central and southern area, and sea lion pup growth at San Miguel Island was normal. In addition, there were no mass seabird mortality events.

However, there was lingering evidence of unfavorable conditions in 2017. Persistent deep warm water remains in the northern portion of the system, and pyrosomes (warm-water salps or “pickles”) were extremely abundant in the northern and central area. Juvenile salmon catches were poor, and other indicators suggest that Chinook and coho salmon returns to the Columbia Basin will be below average in 2018. In addition, a major hypoxic event occurred on the shelf of the northern California Current Ecosystem in August-September 2017.

Reports of whale entanglements in 2017 were well above the historical average for the fourth straight year, although down from the numbers reported in 2015 and 2016. In cases where entanglements could be traced to a particular type of fishing gear, most reports involved crab gear, but at least one in each year involved sablefish gear. Humpback whales accounted for most of the observed entanglements. This increase in entanglements may be related to unusual oceanographic conditions associated with the marine heat wave and El Niño; humpbacks appear to have switched from their usual prey—krill—to sardines, and moved inshore where this prey was more abundant. Also, an unprecedentedly large harmful algal bloom caused a toxin, domoic acid, to concentrate in Dungeness crab, which—along with low meat content—delayed the opening of the season by five months in 2016. As a result, fishing activity was higher

J-SCOPE: University of Washington Joint Institute for the Study of the Atmosphere and Ocean Seasonal Coastal Ocean Prediction of the Ecosystem NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service

at the time of the year when the whales were congregated close to shore.

For the first time, the report includes highly migratory species indicators related to biomass, recruitment, and management of protected species bycatch. In addition, the report now plots social vulnerability against measurements of the dependence of coastal communities on commercial fishing and on recreational fishing.

Over the past several years the Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) Ecosystem Subcommittee has been reviewing ecosystem science topics annually, particularly ecosystem status indicators used in the annual State of the California Current Ecosystem Report. In 2017 the SSC recommended a more formal process for review topic selection, affording the Council and interested advisory bodies an opportunity to weigh in. Accordingly, in March the SSC considered potential research topics, which would be reviewed in September, and recommended the following: Using the J-SCOPE*

approach for short-term forecasts of ocean conditions and species distribution; developing effective indicators of shifts in groundfish distributions; developing a new forage community composition indicator; and community-level recreational fishery engagement and reliance indices. The Council concurred with this recommendation.

FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN TO FOCUS ON CLIMATE AND COMMUNITIES

Under the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan, the Council is currently focusing on a "Climate and Communities Initiative" with an emphasis on the wellbeing of dependent fishing communities. The Council is

encouraging its advisory bodies to participate in a May 15-16 Nature Conservancy workshop to gather stakeholder input on the initiative.

In January and February, the Council sponsored a series of four webinars on the effects of climate change on the California Current ecosystem. [Recordings are available on the Council's website.](#)

In addition, the 20 member tribes of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission in western Washington submitted [a report on the effects of climate change](#) on tribal rights and resources.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION ON SABLEFISH INDICATORS INITIATED

In March, Dr. Melissa Haltuch from the NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center presented findings from a management strategy evaluation (MSE) of [ecosystem indicators of sablefish recruitment and productivity](#). An MSE is a process that uses multiple models to simulate the effects of a fisheries system on a fishery resource and allows scientists and managers to test whether potential harvest strategies or management procedures can achieve certain objectives. The draft sablefish MSE evaluated sea surface height as a potential indicator of sablefish recruitment and productivity in an effort to predict the future status of West Coast sablefish

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES REPORT

In March, Bill Douros, Regional Director of the West Coast Regional Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, and Dr. Lisa Wooninck, of the same office, [reported to the Council on Sanctuary activities](#), including the sanctuary nomination process, management plan reviews, seafloor mapping, and efforts aimed at reducing whale entanglements and ship strikes.



Sablefish, formerly known as black cod (circa 1916). Photo: NOAA.

under a changing climate.

The Council recommended further development of the MSE and plans to schedule a session at a future Council meeting to begin stakeholder engagement. The process will explore stock dynamics, environmental drivers of sablefish productivity, and fishery management strategies throughout the stock's range in the northeast Pacific.



*Spill at Bonneville Dam.
Photo: Salmon and
Steelhead Journal.*

*BOEM: Bureau of Ocean
Energy Management*

HABITAT NEWS: COUNCIL SENDS LETTER ON OIL AND GAS DRILLING; KLAMATH DAM REMOVAL PROGRESS

In March, the Council approved and [submitted a comment letter](#) to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and the Secretary of the Interior, Ryan Zinke, voicing the Council's opposition to offshore oil and gas leasing off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California and asking to be excluded from further consideration of Outer Continental Shelf lease development.

A presidential Executive Order directed BOEM to initiate a process to develop a new National Outer Continental Shelf

Program for 2019-2024. The Governors of Washington, Oregon, and California and multiple state natural resource agencies have sent letters to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and BOEM opposing the proposed oil and gas leasing off the Pacific coast. The letters state the importance of marine ecosystems and the coastal community jobs that rely on them, and urge the removal of this area from the leasing program because of the increased risk that offshore oil production poses.

Klamath Dam Removal: Progress continues toward removing the four lower Klamath Dams in 2020. The current focus is on completing regulatory requirements. Removing the dams will provide access to more than 400 miles of historic anadromous salmonid habitat, ameliorate poor water quality and fish disease conditions in the river, and increase life history diversity, abundance, and spatial distribution of salmonids in the Klamath Basin.

The Yurok Tribe, Hoopa Valley Tribe, and Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations continue litigation with the Bureau of Reclamation on juvenile salmon disease issues and release of additional water flows to minimize disease issues. Juvenile disease associated with low water flows contributed to the recent collapse of Klamath Fall Chinook.

Offshore Aquaculture: Rose Canyon Fisheries plans to formally withdraw their current permit application for offshore aquaculture and submit a revised permit application for a different location. This is due to Navy concerns about the original proposed site.

Columbia River Salmon: On April 2, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed a lower court decision to increase spill over hydroelectric dams in the Federal Columbia River Power System to increase juvenile salmon and steelhead survival. The additional spill was injunctive relief requested by the plaintiffs in an ongoing litigation which primarily concerns the application of the Endangered Species Act to the management of the project.

Sacramento River Salmon: In October 2017, the Council sent [a letter developed by the HC](#) regarding the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's relicensing of Oroville dam and its impacts on essential fish habitat for fall-run Chinook salmon. The letter was sent to both the California Department of Water Resources and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

California Offshore Renewable Energy Taskforce: Trident Winds has proposed an offshore wind facility near Morro Bay. The Department of Defense released a report in fall of 2017 stating that areas off southern and central California (roughly from Monterey to San Diego) are not compatible with military operations without further project definition. Therefore, the focus for offshore wind has shifted to the area off Humboldt Bay. BOEM is expecting an unsolicited lease request for a site off Humboldt Bay in the near future; current understanding is that this lease request may be for a site 22 miles offshore of Humboldt Bay.

2018 EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS

In April, the Council recommended National Marine Fisheries Service approve two exempted fishing permit proposals for the 2018-2019 CPS fishery, both designed for nearshore CPS abundance estimates. The California Wetfish Producers Association proposes to do aerial survey work in California waters. The West Coast Pelagic Conservation Group proposal is primarily for biological sampling in the Pacific Northwest.

Coastal Pelagic Species

SARDINE FISHERY TO BE CLOSED FOR FOURTH YEAR IN A ROW

The 2018-2019 directed sardine fishery will be closed for the 4th year in a row based on a Council decision in April to adopt the 2018 sardine stock assessment, which shows a biomass below the 150,000 metric ton cutoff (threshold) value.

The Council adopted a biomass estimate of 52,065 metric tons, an overfishing limit of 11,324 metric tons, a P* (uncertainty) buffer of 0.4, an acceptable biological catch of 9,436 metric tons, and an annual catch limit

of 7,000 metric tons. The annual catch limit accounts for incidental and tribal harvest, research, small-scale fishing, and other minor sources of mortality.

The Council also 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 2,500 mt of Pacific sardine are landed; when 2,500 mt have been landed, the incidental per landing allowance will be reduced to 20 percent for the remainder of the 2018-2019 fishing year. Additionally, incidental catch up to 2 mt per landing is allowed in non-CPS fisheries. The Council also directed the CPS Management Team to evaluate the live bait fishery allowance in the context of an overfished stock condition, and to develop a purpose and need statement for a potential amendment to the fishery management plan starting in June 2018.

ACOUSTIC TRAWL SURVEY METHODOLOGY REVIEW APPROVED

In April, the Council approved the [acoustic trawl survey methodology](#) for use in future integrated CPS stock assessments. The methodology was reviewed by the Scientific and Statistical Committee and by an independent review panel. The Council recommended continuing efforts to better account for nearshore information. The acoustic trawl methodology survey has been used in Pacific sardine stock assessments for several years, but has not been reviewed since 2011. In addition to sardines, the survey methodology is now approved for generating relative indices of abundance for northern anchovy, Pacific mackerel, and jack mackerel.

NEXT
ACTION
IN
NOVEMBER

SSC, NMFS FOCUS ON NORTHERN ANCHOVY STOCK SIZE ESTIMATE

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will work with the NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center on a method to estimate the nearshore portion of the central subpopulation of northern anchovy stock, which is not accounted for in the Acoustic Trawl Method survey. The SSC will identify a process for establishing an overfishing limit for the stock, and to evaluate the merits of more frequent overfishing limit updates.

The SSC and CPS advisory bodies were also directed to describe how scientific information is used in determining “monitored” versus “active management” categories, to assess the workload associated with amending the fishery management plan to better reflect these categories, and to develop recommendations and a mechanism to revise these categories. They will report back to the Council in November 2018.

Finally, the Council asked the Southwest Fisheries Science Center to work with the SSC and coastal pelagic species advisory bodies to develop a stock assessment prioritization process for CPS stocks, similar to that used for groundfish stocks.

Highly Migratory Species

NEXT
ACTION
IN
JUNE

FINAL RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES CHOSEN FOR DEEP-SET BUOY GEAR AUTHORIZATION

Since March 2016, the Council has been developing management measures for a fishery using deep-set buoy gear (DSBG). DSBG is used to catch swordfish and is designed to avoid bycatch by setting hooks relatively deep during the daytime, away from where sensitive species such as sea turtles and marine mammals more commonly occur. Active tending is an important feature of the gear; if a strike is detected the gear may be retrieved quickly, so that if an unwanted animal is on the line it can be released with a good chance of survival.

As part of this effort, the Council has been reviewing and making recommendations on applications for exempted fishing permits to test the gear; see article below.

The Council adopted a range of alternatives for managing deep-set buoy gear in March, based on the preliminary range adopted last September. The Council has identified preferred management measures covering most aspects of a future fishery. The specifics of a limited entry permitting system for vessels wishing to fish south of Point Conception (where conditions are most favorable for using this gear) are still to be determined. The Council is scheduled to take final action on the package of management measures in March 2019.

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team is analyzing alternatives for the number of limited entry permits that may be issued and will report to the Council in June. In September, the Council will consider how past experience in swordfish fisheries will be used to help determine who would get one of the limited entry permits.

NEXT
ACTION
IN
JUNE

DEEP-SET BUOY GEAR EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS FORWARDED

In March, the Council reviewed 13 deep-set buoy gear exempted fishing permit (EFP) applications and referred 10 of them to NMFS for permit issuance. It asked the remaining three applicants to resubmit updated applications for review in June.

The Council also decided to suspend the current practice of accepting EFP applications at every meeting at which highly migratory species items are on the agenda. To date, the Council has reviewed almost 60 EFP applications and referred most of these to NMFS for permit issuance. So far just three EFPs have been issued, and most of the fishing with deep-set buoy gear has been done by boats sponsored by the Pflieger Institute of Environmental Research. NMFS has been processing applications referred by the Council throughout 2017 in one batch with the intent of issuing all the permits in time for the fishery to start in early summer of 2018.

The Council will next consider new deep-set buoy gear EFP applications in June 2019.

Administrative and Other Business



The SCS meeting in San Diego. Photo: Mike Burner.

COUNCIL HOSTS SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

In January, the Council hosted the Sixth National Scientific Coordination Subcommittee meeting, where the leadership of the eight regional fishery management councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees met to discuss science issues relevant to Council decision-making. This year's theme was "The Use of Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) to Inform Management Decisions Made by the Regional Fishery Management Councils." Four invited speakers presented material supporting three subthemes: the use of MSEs in evaluating and modifying harvest control rules, estimating and accommodating uncertainty, and adjusting harvest control rules in changing environments/non-static maximum sustainable yield. There were extensive discussions by participants; a proceedings document will be published later this year.

COUNCIL COMMENTS ON MAGNUSON-STEVENS ACT REAUTHORIZATION, SALMON LEGISLATION

The Council has sent several letters related to Federal legislation over the last few months.

On February 2, the Council [sent a letter](#) to Senator Maria Cantwell in response to her request for Council comments on HR 200, the Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act, and other Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) reauthorization bills. A similar letter was sent to Representative Kurt Schrader in response to his request.

On November 30, the Council sent [letters](#) to Representative Ken Calvert and to Representative Jimmy Panetta commenting on HR 3916, the Federally Integrated Species Health (FISH) Act, which would transfer jurisdiction over anadromous species from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Council also sent [letters](#) to Representatives Jared Huffman and Mike Thompson on HR 23, the Gaining Responsibility on Water Act, in response to their requests.

In April, the Council approved updated positions on MSA reauthorization issues for use in future comments and discussions of MSA reauthorization. The Council discussion focused on four issues: The rebuilding standard (the requirement that rebuilding be "as short as possible"), and the implications of replacing "possible" with "practicable;" the rebuilding timeframe (and the implications of changing the current 10-year rebuilding requirement to $T_{min} + \text{one mean generation}$); the effects of alternative management measures for recreational fisheries; and the definition of ecosystem component species and the resulting extent of exemptions from annual catch limits.



Cape Kiwanda dory boat. Photo: Jennifer Gilden.

STAFF CHANGES AND ADVISORY BODY APPOINTMENTS

Former Council staffer **Kelly Ames** has left the Council, but remains a member of the Council family in her new role as Division Manager for the West Coast Regional Office for NMFS. Kelly spent eight years as one of our groundfish staff officers where she established a reputation for insight, efficiency, and productivity. Her primary duties involved staffing the Groundfish Management Team and leading the biennial groundfish management process. Kelly started with NMFS March 4, and will be involved in various administrative and management issues, and is a Council designee for Barry Thom, the Regional Administrator.



NOAA's retiring Senior Policy Advisor for salmon, Peter Dygert, accepts a drawing from Butch Smith of the Salmon Advisory Subpanel. Photo: Mike Burner.

Todd Phillips has been hired to replace Kelly as the new Council Groundfish Staff Officer. Todd comes to us from the Federal Emergency Management Agency office in Austin, Texas, where he is an Environmental and Historic Preservation Specialist, and was, among other things, the subject matter expert for essential fish habitat related to disaster recovery projects. He has also worked for the Ocean Conservancy in the Gulf of Mexico region on electronic fishery monitoring issues and with Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission on recreational fishery monitoring, primarily in California. Todd came on board May 1, so please welcome him to the Council family when you get a chance.

In March and April, the Council reviewed and approved the following advisory body appointments:

Carl Nish was appointed to the Processor North of Cape Mendocino seat on the Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel formerly held by **Pierre Marchand**.

Darus Peake was appointed to the Oregon Troll seat on the Salmon Advisory Subpanel formerly held by **Paul Heikkila**.

Ashton Harp was appointed to the vacant Tribal seat on Salmon Technical Team.

James Carretta was appointed to fill the NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center seat on the Highly Migratory Species Management Team formerly held by **Dr. Tim Sippel**.

NMFS also announced an update to its list of designees for the West Coast Regional Administrators Council seat held by Barry Thom: **Ryan Wulff**, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries; **Aja Szumylo**, Groundfish and Coastal Pelagic Species Branch Chief; **Kelly Ames**, Sustainable Fisheries Division Operations and Policy Branch Chief; **Frank Lockhart**, Groundfish and Coastal Pelagic Species Senior Policy Analyst; **Heidi Taylor**, Highly Migratory Species Branch Chief; **Dr. Peter Dygert**, Anadromous Harvest Management Branch Chief.

The U.S. Coast Guard notified the Council that **LCDR Scott McGrew** has replaced **LCDR Gregg Casad** as Rear Admiral Throop's first designee on the Council. **Brian Corrigan** will remain the Rear Admiral's second designee and **CDR Jason Brand** his third designee.

The National Marine Fisheries Service has appointed **Greg Busch**, the Assistant Director of the West Coast Division Office of Law Enforcement, as their primary Enforcement Consultant. Deputy Special Agent in Charge **Michael Killary** will continue to serve as an alternate.

The Council created a new ad hoc committee, the Sablefish Management and Trawl Allocation Attainment Committee. **Phil Anderson**, Chair (Council Chair); **Michele Culver** (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife); **Maggie Sommer** (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife); **Joanna Grebel** (California Department of Fish and Wildlife); **Kelly Ames** (NMFS); and **Pete Hassemer** (At Large; Idaho Department of Fish and Game) were appointed as members. (For more details, see article, page 8).

Bob Alverson, **Tyler Besecker**, **Bob Dooley**, **Kevin Dunn**, **Mike Okoniewski**, **Dan Platt**, and **Steve Scheiblaue** were appointed to a nonvoting advisory panel for the committee.

Upcoming Meetings

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM WEBINAR

Dates: May 8
Purpose: To develop materials to assist the Council in revising the Pacific sardine live bait provisions in the Council Pelagic Species Fishery Management Plan for when the Pacific sardine biomass is overfished.
Contact: Kerry Griffin (kerry.griffin@noaa.gov)
For More Info: <https://tinyurl.com/yays6swq>

SALMON TECHNICAL TEAM WEBINAR

Dates: May 17
Purpose: To discuss the schedule and workload associated with the development of five salmon rebuilding plans in 2018. Three coho stocks (Queets coho, Strait of Juan de Fuca coho, and Snohomish coho) and two Chinook stocks (Sacramento River fall Chinook and Klamath River fall Chinook) have been found to meet the criteria for being classified as overfished.
Contact: Robin Ehlke (Robin.Ehlke@noaa.gov)
For More Info: <https://tinyurl.com/yaekoztg>

ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP WEBINAR

Dates: May 22, 2018
Purpose: To discuss the Pacific Council's draft 2018 Research and Data Needs document and to discuss the Fishery Ecosystem Plan Climate and Communities Initiative.
Contact: Kit Dahl (kit.dahl@noaa.gov)
For More Info: <https://tinyurl.com/y87t5rg7>

JUNE COUNCIL MEETING

Dates: June 7-13, 2018
Location: DoubleTree by Hilton Spokane, Spokane, Washington
For More Info: <https://tinyurl.com/y6w7nbwk>

June Council Meeting Agenda (Spokane, Wa)

GROUND FISH

- ◆ New and continuing exempted fishing permit (EFP) approval for 2019-2020 (final action)
- ◆ Stock assessment plans and terms of reference for groundfish and coastal pelagic species (final action)
- ◆ Management measures for 2019-2020 fisheries (final action)
- ◆ Inseason adjustments

OTHER

- ◆ Electronic monitoring cost allocation
- ◆ Council Coordination Committee report
- ◆ Research and Data Needs document
- ◆ National Marine Fisheries Service white paper on best scientific information available
- ◆ Reducing regulation and controlling regulatory costs
- ◆ Habitat issues
- ◆ Legislative Issues

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES

- ◆ Recommendations for international management activities
- ◆ Drift gillnet performance metrics
- ◆ Update on existing deep-set buoy gear EFPs
- ◆ New non-deep-set buoy gear EFP applications; resubmission of previous deep-set buoy gear EFP applications
- ◆ Deep-set buoy gear authorization: final range of alternatives, preliminary preferred alternative
- ◆ Swordfish management project planning and observer coverage

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES

- ◆ Live bait fishery allowance amendment scoping

Photos from the April 2018 Council meeting:

Clockwise from upper left: Council member Dorothy Lowman, former Executive Director Don McIsaac (center) with Council member Buzz Brizendine; California seiners David Haworth, Nick Jurlin, Neil Guglielmo, Vince Torre, Pete Guglielmo, and Tony Russo; Jessie Doerpinghaus and Heather Reed (Groundfish Management Team) with Council member Michele Culver; Seth Atkinson (NRDC) with Corey Ridings (Ocean Conservancy and Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel), Council member Herb Pollard; Noah Oppenheim and Dave Bitts (Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations). Photos by Mike Burner.

