

STATEMENT FROM THE MAKAH TRIBE ON THE
SRKW ESA CONSULATION UPDATE

The Makah Tribe does not currently support establishing a low abundance threshold for Chinook to trigger additional management action in North of Falcon ocean salmon fisheries, for the following reasons:

- There is no technical basis we can use to define a Chinook low abundance threshold. Even after a year of detailed analysis by the PFMC SRKW Workgroup, the data do not show a compelling link between Chinook abundance and southern resident killer whale (SRKW) demographics. There is one relationship with Chinook abundance (out of 126 statistical models examined) that meets the criterion for statistical significance, but that one relationship does not lend itself to defining a hard cut-off point in Chinook abundance, where we can say “above this point, things are OK, but below this point, things would get bad.”
- Overall, North of Falcon ocean salmon fisheries have a very small impact on NOF Chinook abundance. “Removals” by the fisheries average 4.5% over the 25-year period examined (1992-2016), with a trend that has been declining, and which averages only 3.3% over the most recent 10 years. This is clearly illustrated in Figure 4.5.a. in the SRKW Workgroup *Risk Assessment* report (May, 2020) as well as in the numbers presented in Appendix E, Table 2 in that report.
- The impact of the fisheries on SRKW, if there really is one, is less than the impact on Chinook. Since SRKW spend only part of the year in NOF coastal waters, and they presumably do not eat every Chinook in sight when they are there, the 3.3% impact on Chinook would translate into an impact on SRKW that is considerably smaller than 3.3%. But this impact on SRKW can’t be quantified with information that anyone has now.
- Tribal fishery impacts on SRKW prey are small. All the Chinook caught by all the tribal fisheries in western Washington, from the ocean in through Puget Sound and up the rivers, are enough to feed the entire SRKW population for only 12 days a year – and that’s in the unlikely event that the tribes could hand-feed the Chinook to the killer whales. If the Chinook were just left swimming around in the ocean, the killer whales would not find them all, so they would not even be enough to feed the killer whales for 12 days.

- Why should we be discussing what level of Chinook abundance should be a trigger for some management action when we haven't even defined what the management action would be, and what benefit we could expect from it?
 - If a low abundance threshold should be adopted for any of the ocean salmon fisheries, there has not been any clear proposal for how conservation actions in the fishery would be defined, or how they would be implemented.
 - The data and analyses also do not allow us to define a specific response we could expect on the part of the SRKW population to a management action that we might take on ocean quotas.

- The history of PFMC-approved Chinook quotas shows that the process of adopting quotas is already sensitive to Chinook abundance. The PFMC process already incorporates conservation measures to protect Chinook, with lower quotas at lower abundance, and higher quotas at higher abundance. Those low quotas in low abundance years have gone to near-zero for the tribes and all the way to zero for non-treaty fisheries. In that light, what additional conservation measures to benefit SRKW's can anybody seriously propose?

- If we (co-managers and NMFS) give in to the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, then we will be allowing two private groups, accountable to nobody, with no trust responsibility to the tribes, to use this process to gain inroads into tribal sovereignty and to undermine treaty rights.