

STATEMENT FROM THE QUINAULT INDIAN NATION ON THE
SRKW ESA CONSULATION UPDATE

As a signatory to the Treaty of Olympia (1856), the Quinault Indian Nation (QIN) reserved the right to take fish, at its usual and accustomed (U&A) fishing grounds and stations and its status as a co-manager of shared resources. As recognized by federal court decrees and Secretarial Order #3206, restrictions on QIN's ability to exercise its treaty protected rights must satisfy conservation necessity standards.

As a co-manager, QIN evaluates potential regulatory restrictions from the perspective of sound science and participates in collaborative efforts such as the PFMC's Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW) Ad Hoc Workgroup (Workgroup) to assess the effects of ocean salmon fisheries on SRKW. At the outset, the Workgroup decided to limit the scope of the assignment to investigation of relationships between SRKW demographics and a primary prey species, Chinook salmon. The Workgroup's report recognizes that a wide variety of environmental factors besides fishing affect SRKW. SRKW's have a diverse diet, particularly in the winter/early spring seasons on the outer coast and in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Based on the availability of new data and modeling efforts, the Workgroup focused on developing improved tools for understanding relationships between Chinook salmon abundance and SRKW demographics for consideration by the Council.

The Workgroup must conduct a risk assessment and carefully scrutinize scientific evidence to determine if incorporation of additional conservation measures or management tool(s) into the Council's Framework Management Plan for ocean salmon fisheries is warranted.

The Workgroup developed models to investigate relationships between SRKW demographic indices and time and area-specific Chinook salmon abundances utilizing post-season estimates of FRAM stock abundance based on the results of Shelton et al (2019). However, in the end, the Workgroup was unable to develop a robust model that can predict or characterize these Chinook abundance-SRKW relationships. The Workgroup concluded that "true" relationships between SRKW demographic indices and prey abundance are likely masked by cumulative effects of multiple stressors including prey availability, high levels of contaminants, and disturbance from vessels and noise. The Workgroup's analysis is limited to a relatively short period of record where SRKW demographics and relatively low Chinook abundance data overlap. This period of record is characterized by very low abundance due to widespread habitat degradation, dam building and historical over-exploitation along the west-coast. There are substantial uncertainties regarding the relative significance of biological, genetic and behavioral characteristics that are affecting SRKWs.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has proposed a low abundance threshold for Chinook salmon in ocean management areas from Cape Falcon, OR to the US-Canada border (NoF) based on the average of the lowest four years from 1992-2016. WDFW has also proposed a linear model to set a mechanistic cap on Chinook salmon harvest when total pre-season forecasts of Chinook abundance in NoF timestep one is below the proposed four-year low abundance threshold.

At this time, Quinault does not support the development of a Chinook low abundance threshold, automatic imposition of harvest caps, or other management tools that would impose new restrictions on PFMC fisheries. The data and analysis presented in the risk assessment does not support the conclusion that further reductions to Chinook exploitation rates in NoF areas during low abundance time periods will recover SRKWs. The PFMC Salmon FMP for NoF is already very responsive to low abundance of Chinook and annual guidelines established under the Endangered Species Act and Individual Stock Based Management regimes adopted by the Pacific Salmon Commission provide additional protections for naturally produced populations. The conservation necessity standards required before placing additional management measures in Council area fisheries on treaty-protected fisheries have not been satisfied. The Council may elect to adopt additional restrictions on non-treaty ocean fisheries for Chinook salmon, but may not impose those restrictions on treaty protected fisheries absent demonstration of a conservation necessity.

QIN understands societal concerns regarding SRKW and has a long history of stewardship and respect for all things that share the environment. However, the imposition of additional control rules for Chinook salmon fisheries is not the answer. There are other, more promising measures that should be pursued. Chinook habitat recovery and hatchery production, while not the main focus of the Workgroup, should also be a primary focus of any recovery effort for SRKWs. The Workgroup should fully explore and recommend alternative actions including:

- 1) Priority habitat recovery actions that provide the most immediate increases to the abundance and productivity of Chinook salmon from the Columbia River, Washington coast, and Puget Sound.
- 2) Prioritize increases in hatchery production to provide targeted additional foraging opportunity based on the current understanding of SRKW seasonal distribution patterns.
- 3) Support Chinook salmon and SRKW research aimed at filling data gaps and addressing uncertainties identified in the risk assessment, including understanding of cultural and genetic bottlenecks as well as predator-prey relationships.