

**Year-Round Coastwide Midwater Rockfish EFP:
*Monitoring and Minimizing Salmon Bycatch When Targeting Rockfish in the
Shorebased IFQ Fishery***

2019-2020 Rockfish EFP Report

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Summary

The 2019-2020 exempted fishing permit (EFP) allowed for year-round targeting of midwater rockfish and built on successes from the 2017 and 2018 Year-Round Rockfish EFPs, offering much-needed fishing opportunities for West Coast groundfish trawl vessels. Since its inception in 2017, this EFP has increased flexibility in terms of the use (in time and space) of trawl gear for participants in the groundfish trawl catch share (Individual Fishing Quota, IFQ) program. It has provided an opportunity for vessels to use midwater gear to target pelagic rockfish coastwide on a year-round basis while ensuring that conservation objectives for the groundfish fishery continue to be met. It has also provided a mechanism to collect data to support full implementation of the Pacific Fishery Management Council's [2016 Trawl Gear Package](#).

The 2019-2020 Rockfish EFP collected data to determine the nature and extent of bycatch of Chinook salmon and other species of concern while conducting a rockfish fishery targeting widow, yellowtail, chilipepper and other rockfish species without existing gear/time/area restrictions. It allowed the groundfish trawl fleet to continue developing approaches for effectively targeting rockfish while minimizing salmon bycatch to the extent practicable. Similar to prior years, the 2019-2020 Rockfish EFP utilized the individual vessel accountability inherent in the trawl IFQ program while providing for more fishing opportunities through flexible gear/area/time provisions that allows fishermen, processors, and associated communities to more fully realize the expected benefits of the IFQ program. The 2019-2020 EFP enhanced overall rockfish attainment and revenues for the groundfish trawl sector.

2019-2020 EFP Provisions

The 2019-2020 Midwater Rockfish EFP exempted non-whiting midwater trawl vessels from the prohibition on fishing prior to May 15 and exempted bottom trawl vessels from any measures not fully implemented in the Council's 2016 Trawl Gear Package.

The EFP also required a number of additional provisions to avoid Chinook salmon and minimize bycatch, including:

- A Chinook salmon harvest guideline and/or gear-based salmon bycatch caps to keep impacts aligned with NMFS' conclusions regarding the 2018-2019 EFPs and the recent salmon Biological Opinion;
 - In 2019 and 2020, the EFP required an annual bycatch limit of 1,000 Chinook salmon for all fish taken under EFP activity in waters north of 42° N. latitude and an annual bycatch limit of 100 Chinook salmon for all fish taken under EFP activity in waters south of 42° N. latitude;

- Sorting and retention requirements for salmon bycatch;
- Area closures to minimize salmon bycatch around the Columbia and Klamath Rivers;
- An industry-based salmon bycatch monitoring/avoidance program consistent with the 2018-2019 Trawl Gear EFPs, including :
 - *Move-Along Rule When Salmon Bycatch is Encountered*: Thresholds for high bycatch trips and high bycatch tows (10 Chinook salmon) were established by the EFP program manager;
 - A vessel that experiences a high bycatch tow was required to report the tow as quickly as possible (a bycatch reporting form was provided to EFP participants);
 - A vessel that experiences a high bycatch tow was also required to move its fishing operation before setting out gear again during the same fishing trip. The vessel captain was required to seek alternative fishing grounds where it was reasonable to expect the vessel to encounter less Chinook salmon bycatch; and
 - *There was a three-strike rule for high bycatch trips by EFP vessels*: A vessel that landed three high bycatch trips during one month was required to declare out of the EFP for the remainder of that month and for the following month. A vessel that must declare out of the EFP due to high bycatch trips for a second time during the EFP would have its permit for this EFP permanently revoked.

Participants in the 2019-2020 EFP were required to abide by the same sorting and retention requirements as the 2018 Rockfish EFP:

- *Electronic Monitoring (EM) Vessels* – Participating EM vessels were authorized/required to retain salmon and eulachon on EFP trips; however, salmon and eulachon bycatch were required to be sorted by haul and kept separate until landing.
- *Observed Vessels* – Vessels on an EFP trip with human observers were required to retain and land all salmon except for salmon sampled by the onboard observer, which could be discarded after the observer’s information is recorded.

EM Retention Requirement for Salmon Bycatch: Participants using Electronic Monitoring in the 2019-2020 Rockfish EFP were required to retain and land salmon bycatch on all EFP trips, consistent with current requirements for vessels participating in the shoreside Pacific whiting fishery. The Pacific whiting shorebased IFQ fishery generally retains unsorted catch, and most bycatch data on salmon are gathered on shore by catch monitors at the trip level.

Additional Provisions for 2019-2020 EFP: In the 2019 and 2020 EFPs, shoreside processors were requested to retain any salmon bycatch landed from EFP trips after shoreside sampling was completed until the respective State Fish and Wildlife Agency could be contacted to determine if the salmon bycatch would be collected for additional sampling (genetics, etc.). Contact information for each State Agency and “chain of custody procedures” were provided to shoreside processors several times during the 2019-2020 EFP. While this was not a formal requirement of the EFP, it was supported by EFP participants as a “gentleman’s agreement.”

2019-2020 EFP Catch/Bycatch Data

The table below summarizes the catch of groundfish, Chinook salmon, other salmon, and other species of concern during the 2019-2020 Rockfish EFPs. In total, 114 Chinook salmon were caught on 231 trips in the 2019 EFP, and 41 Chinook salmon were caught on 205 trips in the 2020 EFP. While overall fishing effort in the EFP was lower in 2020 compared to 2019, the EFP still generated upwards of 12 million pounds of groundfish catch, valued at more than \$4 million in 2020. Aside from Chinook salmon, the only noteworthy bycatch species of concern in the 2020 EFP was eulachon (3,618 fish). The majority of eulachon bycatch occurred during the second half of 2020 (July – November).

During the 2019 and 2020 EFPs, salmon bycatch remained at minimal levels on EFP trips, totaling 114 Chinook in 2019 and 41 Chinook in 2020. None of the EFP bycatch thresholds were reached in either 2019 or 2020, and none of the additional EFP provisions or the industry-based bycatch monitoring/avoidance measures (bycatch reports, move-along rules) were triggered. In 2020, only three Chinook salmon were caught in the EFP south of 42° N. latitude. It is unclear from the available data how much of the salmon bycatch was caught on EFP trips using EM versus EFP trips carrying an observer (any salmon bycatch caught on trips with human observers would have been discarded at-sea after sampling).

Summary of 2019 and 2020 Rockfish EFP Catch and Bycatch

EFP Region	Vessels	Trips	Chinook	Unidentified Salmon	Coho	Green Sturgeon	Eulachon	Groundfish Pounds	Groundfish Revenues (\$)
2019 Rockfish EFP									
North of 42	22	200	83	0	0	0	0	15,585,286	\$5,047,464.47
South of 42	4	31	31	0	0	0	0	915,939	\$532,837.83
TOTAL 2019 EFP	26	231	114	0	0	0	0	16,501,225	\$5,580,302.30
2020 Rockfish EFP									
North of 42	20	191	38	0	1	0	3,618	12,172,235	\$3,813,862.48
South of 42	4	14	3	0	0	0	0	481,023	\$192,014.82
TOTAL 2020 EFP	24	205	41	0	1	0	3,618	12,653,258	\$4,005,877.30

**Information provided for 2019 is from the December 16, 2019 EFP Catch Report.*

Conclusions/Recommendations

The 2019 and 2020 Rockfish EFPs collected catch and bycatch data which demonstrate the groundfish trawl fleet can effectively target pelagic rockfish while minimizing salmon bycatch to the extent practicable. The Rockfish EFP began in 2017 and has experienced four successful years of targeting rockfish with very little Chinook or other salmon bycatch. Since its inception, this EFP has represented a significant step toward regaining access to rockfish markets, which is critical to ensure the long-term economic success of the West Coast groundfish fishery.

The 2021 Rockfish EFP (Year 5) is currently underway and is producing catch/bycatch data that are consistent with the four previous EFP years. The 2022 Rockfish EFP was previously approved by the Council in early 2020, and it will provide a sixth years' worth of catch/bycatch data for this sector of the groundfish fishery.

Based on the data collected through this EFP, the Council should initiate action to implement the regulatory changes necessary to remove bottom trawl restrictions remaining from the Council's [2016 Trawl Gear Package](#) and to allow the midwater trawl fishery to target rockfish on a year-round basis. This EFP has allowed NMFS, through cooperation with the industry, to collect information that will better inform the implementation process for recent and future groundfish management actions (ex., year-round non-whiting midwater fishery) as well as address/mitigate any bycatch concerns, if necessary, prior to full implementation.

Upon full implementation of the Council's Trawl Gear Package and year-round non-whiting midwater fishery, if markets can continue to be redeveloped and infrastructure preserved, the Council and NMFS will likely take a significant step towards restoring and establishing the groundfish trawl fishery as it was envisioned with implementation of the IFQ program.