

SALMON ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
PACIFIC WHITING UTILIZATION IN THE AT-SEA SECTORS

The Salmon Advisory Subpanel (SAS) was briefed on the analysis of the proposed actions by Mr. Brett Wiedoff at our September 9 meeting and some of our members attended the Groundfish Management Team meeting where this item was discussed. Of particular interest to the SAS was the whiting season start date and the potential increases in salmon bycatch as described in Agenda Item C.3, Attachment 1.

The SAS is supportive of efforts to fully utilize whiting allocations in all sectors of that fishery; however, the SAS is concerned about salmon bycatch in general and particularly for Klamath River fall Chinook (KRFC). This stock was declared overfished following the 2017 escapement and continues to meet the criteria for overfished status in 2021. In addition, KRFC have been managed under *de minimis* fishery provisions for four of past six seasons (2016-2021) due to forecasts for low natural spawning escapement. In addition, if/when the four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River are removed in 2024, increases of adult escapement requirements may be necessary which could change how the stock is managed. Low abundance of KRFC constrains both commercial fisheries south of Cape Falcon and recreational fisheries south of Humbug Mountain which has a significant negative economic and social effect on fishing families, businesses, and coastal communities.

Additional SAS concerns include the ongoing Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation on a control rule for Southern Oregon/ Northern California Coast coho, the recent California state ESA listing of Klamath River spring Chinook, current drought conditions, and juvenile mortality of outmigrants in the Klamath basin due to poor freshwater environment.

Should the Council choose to adopt Alternative 1 to allow the whiting fishery to open on May 1, the SAS would recommend the following actions which would be intended to allow the whiting fleet to attain the allocation while providing additional protection for salmon stocks of concern:

1. Recommended that a Block Area Closure (BAC) covering the Klamath Management Zone (KMZ) be implemented for the three whiting sectors from May 1 through May 14.
 - a. The KMZ is described as the area within the Exclusive Economic Zone from Humbug Mountain, Oregon (42°40'30" N lat.) south to the 40°10' line near Cape Mendocino, California (40°10'00" N lat.)
2. Implement a BAC as described in Recommendation 1 during years when:
 - a. The KRFC stock is categorized as "overfished" or,
 - b. The KRFC stock is managed under *de minimis* fishery provisions or,
 - c. The effects of the Klamath River dam removal(s) have not been fully documented and analyzed.

Council consideration of implementing the BAC would be most appropriate at the March meeting when stock specific abundance estimates are available.

The SAS understands that the Klamath River Conservation Zone surrounding the mouth of the Klamath River (described at 50 CFR 660.111) will remain closed to the mid-water trawl sector.

Some members of the SAS would like the Salmon Technical Team to review the salmon bycatch analysis found in Appendices A and B of Attachment 1 under this agenda item if the Council deems appropriate.

The SAS remains very supportive of the industry efforts to avoid bycatch and their prompt response to any salmon encounters that do occur. We realize that even with a season expansion, the total salmon bycatch will remain well below the existing guideline of 11,000 Chinook and 494 coho salmon. We would point out that in the case of the Klamath stocks, at their current depressed population level, every spawning adult is important and even “minor” non-directed removals of juvenile salmon are, at times, critical.

PFMC
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