



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
West Coast Region  
1201 NE Lloyd Boulevard, Suite 1100  
PORTLAND, OREGON 97232

June 14, 2021

Via Electronic Mail

Mr. Marc Gorelnik, Chair  
Pacific Fishery Management Council  
7700 NE Ambassador Place  
Portland, OR 97220  
gorelnik@gmail.com

Dear Mr. Gorelnick:

On behalf of the Secretary of Commerce, I have approved Amendment 18 to the Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). We published a Notice of Availability for Amendment 18 in the Federal Register on March 16, 2021, ([86 FR 14401](#)). We have submitted a Federal Register Notice for publication announcing our approval of Amendment 18, including a response to public comments.

Amendment 18 establishes a rebuilding plan for the northern subpopulation of Pacific sardine (Pacific sardine). During the 2019-2020 fishing year, the estimated biomass of sardine dropped below its 50,000-metric ton (mt) overfished threshold. NMFS accordingly declared the stock overfished on June 26, 2019, and notified the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) on July 9, 2019. Since then, NMFS has worked with the Council to develop a rebuilding plan for Pacific sardine. After considering a range of management alternatives at the June and September 2020 Council meetings, the Council recommended, and NMFS approved, the implicit rebuilding management framework set forth in the CPS FMP as the preferred management strategy for rebuilding Pacific sardine. This management approach would maintain the current FMP provisions and annual Council process associated with those provisions for Pacific sardine. Under this management approach, annual harvest levels and reference points for Pacific sardine would be set in accordance with the harvest control rules for Pacific sardine in the CPS FMP, and the mandatory limitations on the fishery would remain in place. In particular, the primary directed fishery would remain closed until the biomass exceeds the 150,000-mt CUTOFF parameter (*i.e.*, the target rebuilding level) in the Pacific sardine harvest control rule, and incidental landings in other CPS fisheries would not exceed 20 percent by weight of Pacific sardine per landing until the biomass reaches or exceeds the 50,000-mt overfished threshold. Other management measures (*e.g.*, an annual catch target and/or incidental landing limits for non-CPS fisheries) would be determined during the Council's annual harvest specifications process.

The Council selected this alternative after taking into account the needs of fishing communities, the conservative measures already implemented via the CPS FMP to reduce fishing mortality, past and expected future mortality of Pacific sardine under this management regime, the current



population dynamics of the stock, and that environmental conditions are known to be the primary driver for the recent lack of sardine recruitment. NMFS agrees that the CPS FMP's management framework will not impede the resource from rebuilding when environmental conditions ultimately allow, as this management strategy is expected to constrain catches to the same very low levels as they have been over the last 5 years.

In addition, NMFS approved the Council's recommended rebuilding reference points:

- $T_{\min}$  = 12 years
- $T_{\max}$  = 24 years
- $T_{\text{target}}$  = 14 years
- Rebuilding Target: 150,000 mt age 1+ biomass

These reference points are based on a comprehensive analysis of the basic biology and life history of Pacific sardine, the results of a rebuilding modeling analysis prepared by NMFS' Southwest Fisheries Science Center, and an evaluation of the history of the Pacific sardine fishery off the U.S. West Coast.

There are no implementing regulations associated with Amendment 18; therefore, we did not publish a proposed or final rule to implement this amendment. The provisions of Amendment 18 are effective upon the date of this letter.

We appreciate the Council's collaboration on CPS management. If you have questions, please contact Ryan Wulff, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service, West Coast Region, at 916-930-3733.

Sincerely,



Barry A. Thom  
Regional Administrator