

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2023 PACIFIC WHITING FISHERY UNDER THE
U.S./CANADA AGREEMENT

The Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) was recently alerted to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Bulletin that references a plan to consolidate the CPS and Whiting Surveys onto a single research vessel and is asking for suggestions from the public for a [Request for Information \(RFI\)](#).

“This request for information (RFI) seeks input on: (1) the design of a single trawl net capable of fishing both in the midwater and at the surface, either as a modification of an existing design or an entirely new design including the net, rigging, and doors; (2) potential charter vessels to support sampling efforts in the integrated survey, in coordination with a NOAA Fisheries Survey Vessel (FSV); and (3) integrated survey design considerations and sampling protocols.”

Two members of the CPSAS attended the recent Whiting Joint Management Commission/Advisory Panel (JMC/AP) meeting where this bulletin was discussed, and concerns raised about the sudden announcement, short response timeline, and the shift in direction of their successful whiting survey. This also was of concern to the Canadian members of the JMC and AP. It is our understanding that both the US and Canadian JMC members were going to write letters to NOAA Fisheries and/or the Council expressing their concerns. Additionally, we were told the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel would be submitting a statement.

The rest of the CPSAS was alerted to this bulletin and the JMC reactions at their brief CPSAS webinar meeting on March 3rd. As this survey affects the CPS fisheries, including stock assessments and harvest specifications, the CPSAS wished to make a brief statement to the Council.

CPSAS members from California and the Pacific Northwest (NW) have worked seven years in collaborative surveys with the Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) survey team led by Dr. David Demer. This has been a transparent and productive process, and our fishermen and onshore survey teams have always been treated respectfully. We have spent time on the NOAA ship and have been asked for our advice on potential improvements. It is a model working relationship.

We understand the concerns the whiting industry has expressed. Perhaps the initial actions were off-key, but with a few caveats we believe it is possible to have a positive outcome.

1. The first goal must be to not compromise the integrity of either survey. Both surveys are run professionally and are continually improving. There is too much at stake to lose that momentum.
2. Before advancing further, NOAA Fisheries should hold a hybrid workshop bringing in expertise from the science community, and the whiting and CPS fisheries. This should establish dialogue baselines for development. Sudden action RFI’s may have a place for actual bids but we first need to construct the plan of what we want to protect and achieve.

This type of plan needs to be formed in person-to-person communication and then structured from the ideas presented. A working committee may be one viable outcome.

3. The RFI calls for ideas how to use one set of trawl doors and one net. This may work as there is advanced technology available, but we need to first have input from all connected scientists and experienced representatives of industry. Moreover, we should not commit to a one net-one-set of doors process until this construct has been tested in sea trials and actively tested for both midwater and surface trawling. Experienced CPS and whiting fishermen should be involved in these at sea trials.
4. We know whiting is a foundational fishery for the NW and CPS directed fishing (including squid and live bait for recreational fishing) are foundational in California. In a report to Congress on the 2017 California recreational fishery, it was stated that the total economic impact of the California Recreational Fishery was \$4.6 billion driven by 2.795 million anglers.¹ Live bait contributes heavily to these numbers.
5. CPS is a staple of whales, sea birds, other marine mammals, and higher trophic predators such as salmon. Each of these categories has endangered species act or protected species that rely on CPS.
6. CPS surveys must continue to be conducted on an annual basis. We strongly recommend that if we move to an integrated survey that we continue to do annual surveys for CPS and move the whiting survey to an annual basis. Given the changes in recruitment for CPS and whiting, rapid changes in location, and the changes brought by climate change, it is an insurance policy on our management policy.

We have expressed these thoughts so that we can work together with NOAA Fisheries to solve a problem while ensuring we protect our successful surveys.

PFMC
03/05/23

¹ 2017 update of Economic Contributions of Recreational Fishing: U.S. Congressional Districts: [Report: Recreational fishing has \\$4.6 billion impact on California economy – FishRapNews](#)