

# Groundfish Endangered Species Workgroup Report

Pacific Fishery Management Council Meeting

Agenda Item H.6  
June 2023

# Workgroup's Objectives

1. Was the incidental take amount exceeded?
2. Does new information reveal effects not previously considered?
3. Make recommendations for future reports to improve bycatch estimates
4. Propose conservation and management measures to minimize bycatch of listed species

# General Findings and Comments

- None of the incidental take amounts were exceeded
- Several suggestions for future reports or biological opinions
- Continued support for fishing industry representative
- Non-trawl logbook data from 2023 available for 2025 meeting

# Fishing Effort Report



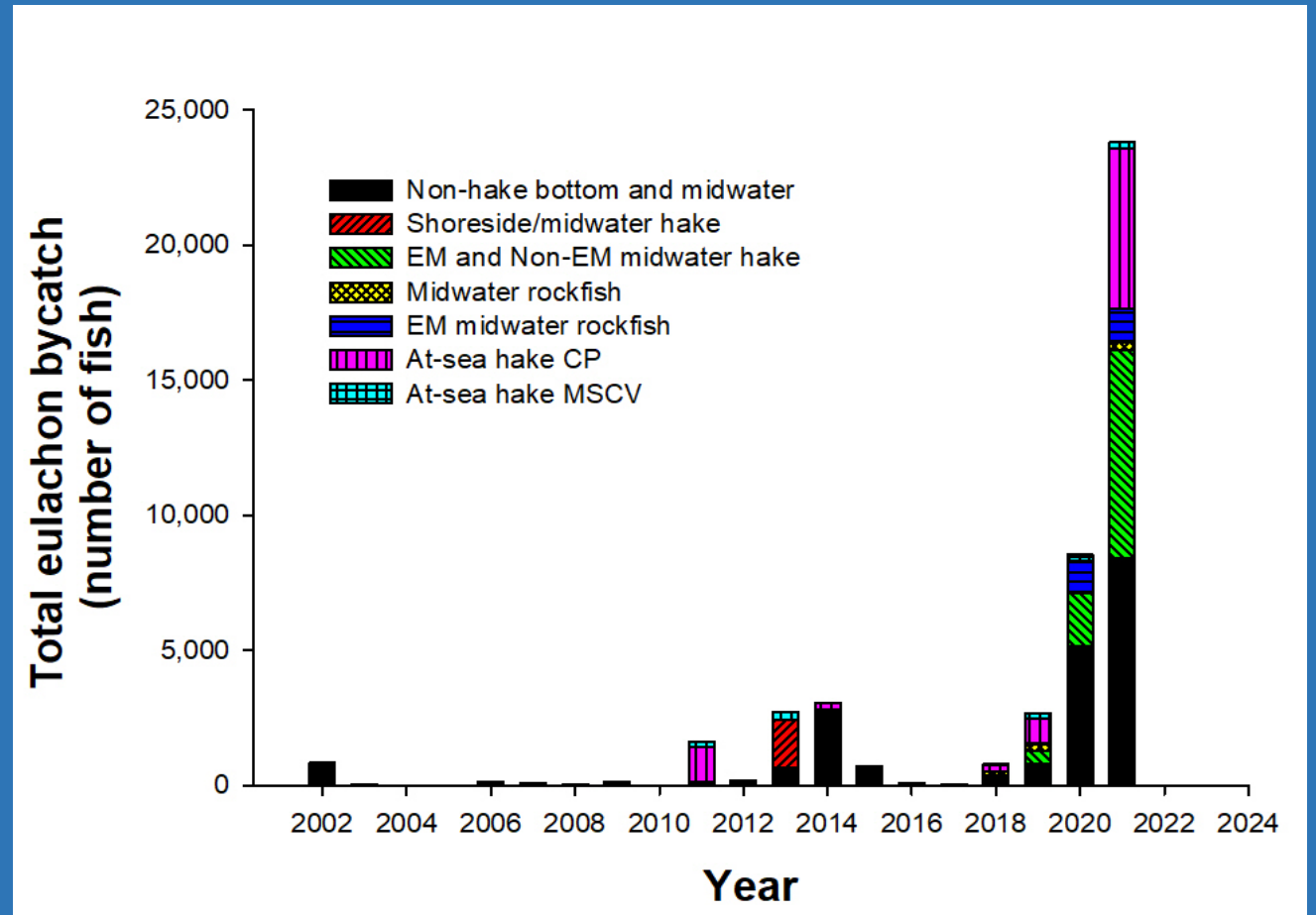
- Midwater rockfish trawl fleet's landings similar from 2017 to 2021
- Fleet-wide pot use decreased from 2019 to 2021
- Changes notable but do not warrant a new look at the BiOps

# Eulachon

- Increase in bycatch, but under precautionary and reinitiation thresholds for 2020 and 2021
- Potential reasons
  - Eulachon abundance increase
  - Minimum mesh size changes



Estimated Bycatch of Eulachon in U.S. West Coast Groundfish Fisheries 2002-2021



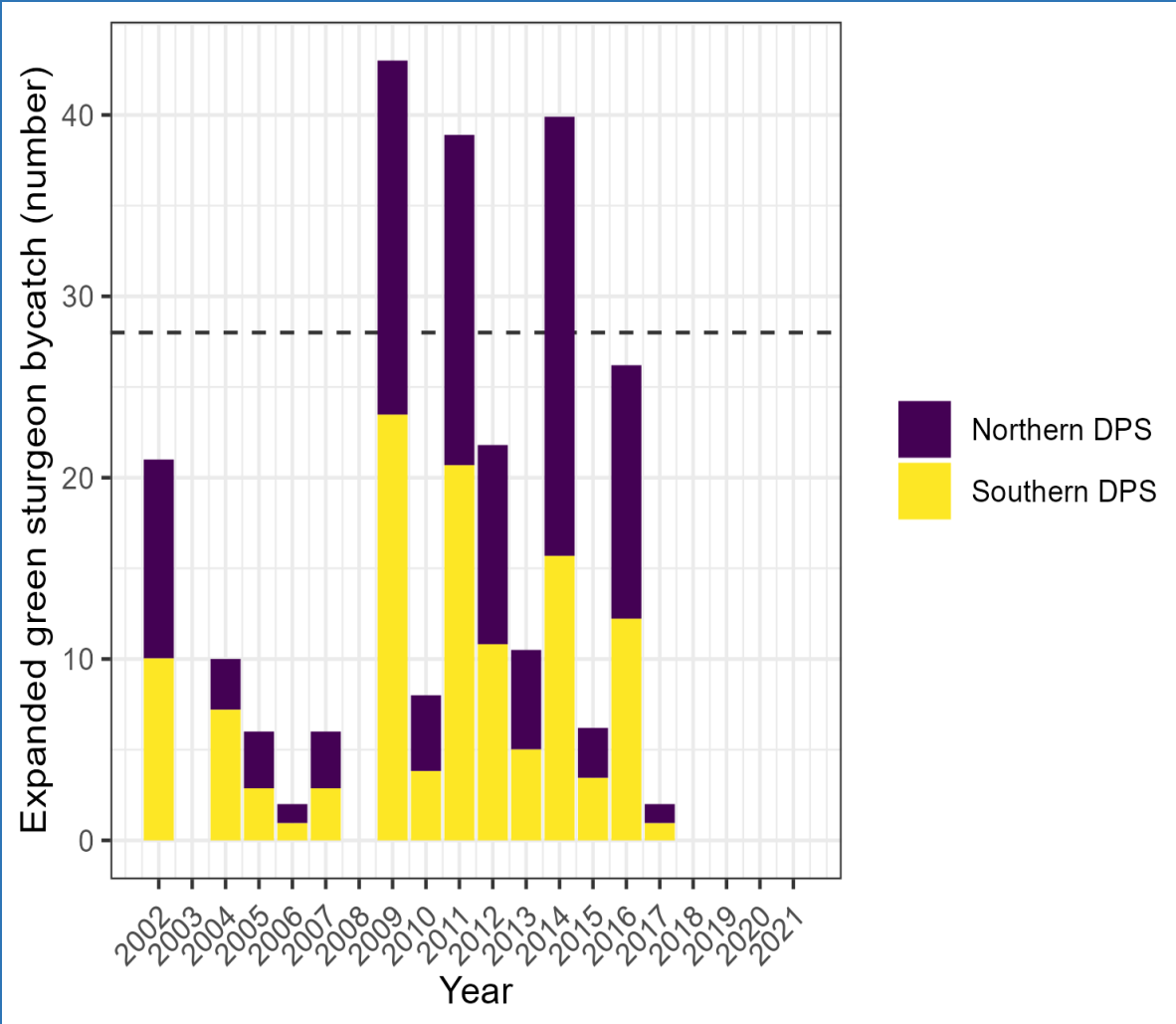
# Eulachon



- Precautionary threshold may be crossed in 2022
  - No conservation and management measures to minimize bycatch of eulachon proposed by Workgroup
  - NMFS monitors eulachon bycatch levels every year and will keep the Workgroup and Council apprised of new data on abundance and bycatch.
- Evaluate eulachon bycatch and the need for bycatch minimization measures through in the 2025 report, or as directed by the Council.
- Five-year geometric mean based framework should be evaluated if consultation is reinitiated in future.

# Green Sturgeon

- Southern DPS
  - No observed bycatch (2020-2021)
  - Estimate 1 fish caught (2017-2021)
- **No Workgroup recommendations**

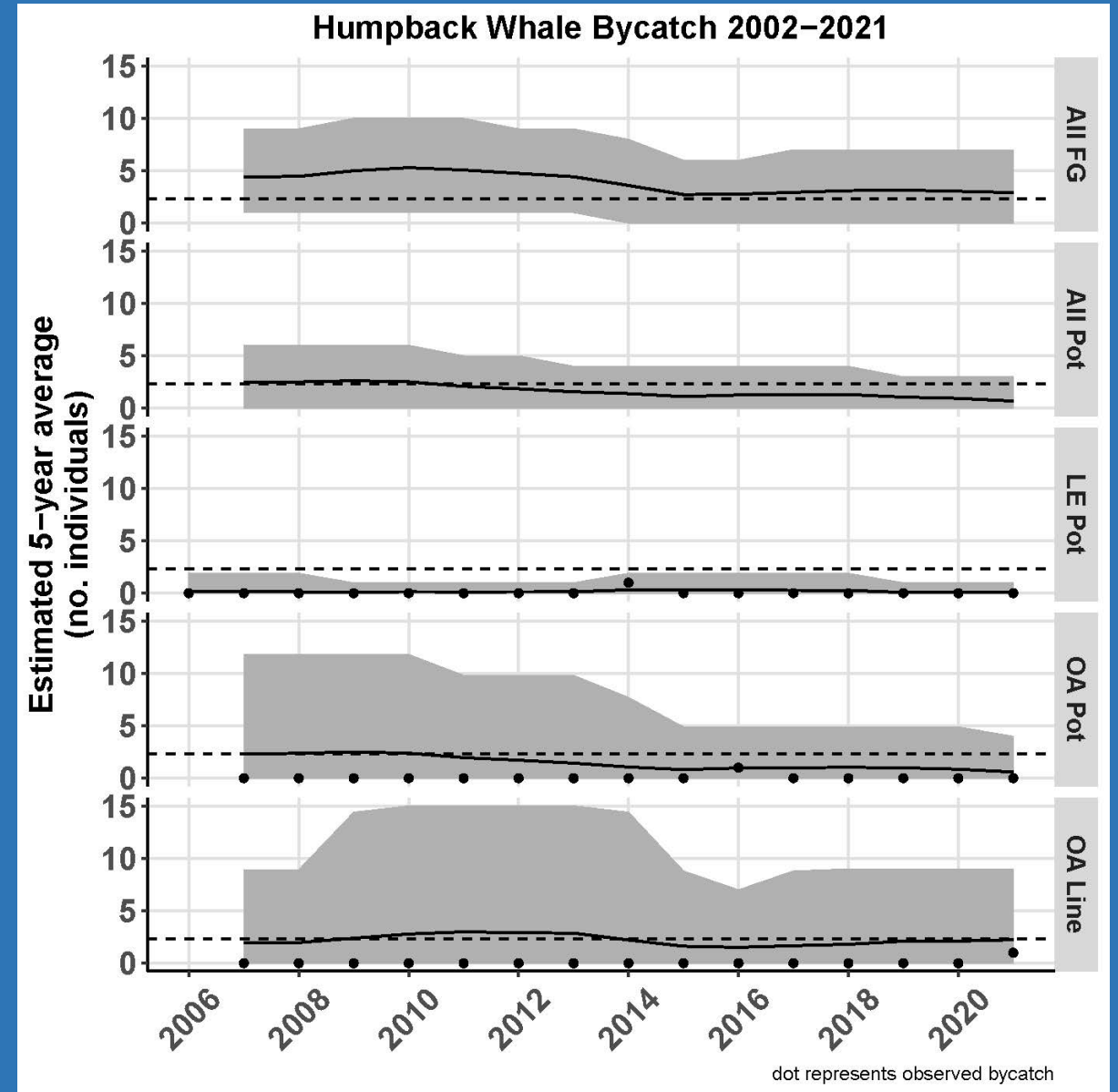


**DPS bycatch in federal fisheries 2002–2021**

horizontal dashed line = annual ITS threshold (28 Southern DPS individuals)

# Humpback Whales

- Estimate: 5-year average of 0.68 whale/year (2017-2021) in pot fisheries
- Take in new sector of fishery, Open Access hook and line (2021)





# Humpback Whales



- Details of Open Access Hook and Line Take
  - When – summer 2021
  - Where – off California
  - Target – slope rockfish
  - Gear – vertical hook and line (not attached to boat)
  - Not part of an EFP
- May represent new information related to effects of the fishery that were not previously considered in the BiOp.
  - NMFS is evaluating this new information for potential BiOp reinitiation.

# Humpback Whales

- Ongoing research related to stock structure
- BiOp assumption on sablefish pot fishing effort distribution off CA/OR vs. WA still reasonable
- Effects from the sablefish primary tier season extension
- Tools that could reduce real-time geographic overlap of humpback whales and the pot fishery
- Fixed-gear marking improvements

# Humpback Whales

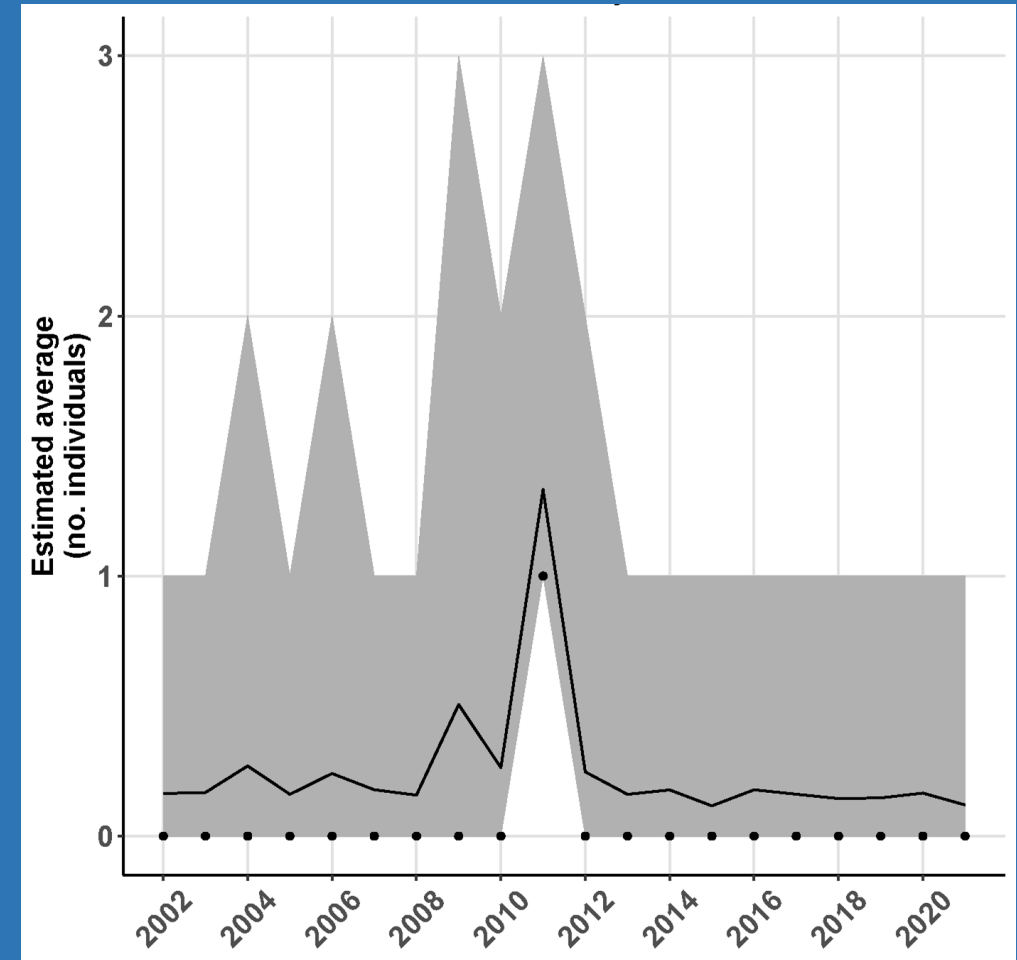
- No specific conservation measure recommendations on potential ways to minimize impacts from Open Access hook and line gear
  - Suggestions and input from industry may be beneficial
- Recommend the Council consider how it would like to receive updated information from NMFS regarding humpback whale issues such as litigation, take/reinitiation, and stock structure changes
- Encourage the Council to support the development of tools that could reduce real-time geographic overlap of humpback whales and the pot fishery



# Short-tailed albatross



- No STAL takes documented in 2020-2021
- Estimates of mean bycatch in 2020-2021 both  $< 1.0$  STAL/year

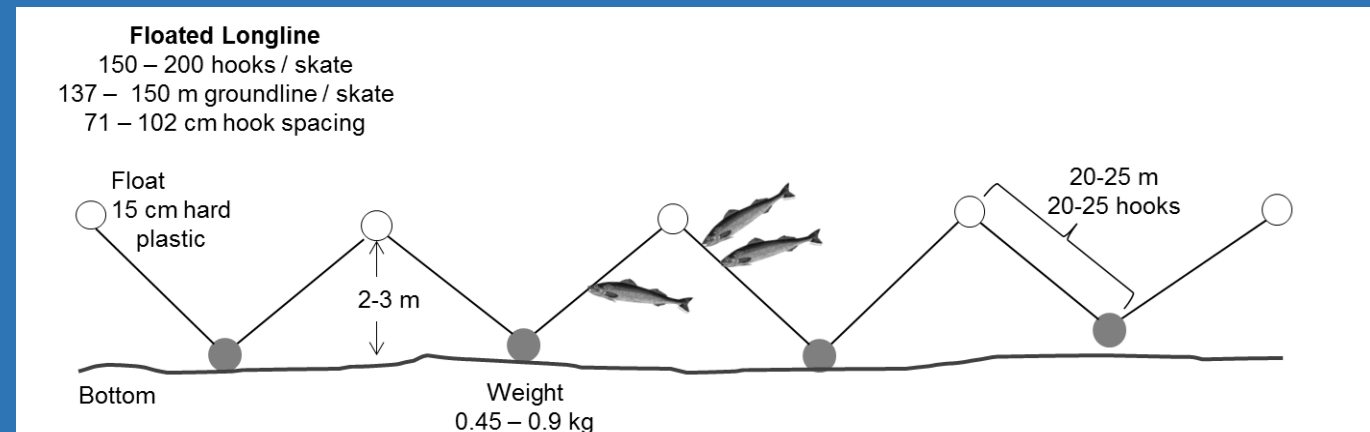


- Dots = observed STAL bycatch
- Black line = estimated mean
- Grey area = 95% confidence interval

# Short-tailed albatross

## Cooperative Research Update

- NMFS Cooperative Research Program provided funds to NWFSC, Oregon SeaGrant and industry collaborators to study mitigation strategies for floating gear configurations.
- After some delays, research will get underway in 2023.
- Goal is recommending operationally feasible options to protect longlines with floats from bird attacks & to minimize seabird bycatch



# Short-tailed albatross

## Telemetry and observer data

- No sightings south of 36° N. latitude in U.S. waters since 2011.
- No new observations or telemetry data south of 36° N. latitude.
- Workgroup plans to continue to review and summarize STAL telemetry and observer data south of 36° N. latitude in future reports



# Short-tailed albatross

## Workgroup recommends:

- Council support efforts that explore ways to improve streamer lines or gear configuration for the purpose of mitigating seabird interactions.
- Council continue to encourage industry participation in cooperative research to test alternative mitigation measures for floated longline gear that are designed to further reduce bycatch of seabirds



# Leatherback Sea Turtles

- No observed bycatch from 2017-2021
- Concern for declining trend in population



- Workgroup recommends the Council explore ways to support recovery at RFMO





# Questions

