

Pacific Council News

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REPORTING ON WEST COAST FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

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A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The first half of 2023 has brought about some major decisions by the Council—in particular, the closure of salmon fishing off of California and a dramatically restricted season off of Oregon. The double-whammy of having both the Sacramento and Klamath fall chinook stocks at low levels of abundance has little precedent off our coast, and this decision alone has made this year a very consequential year for west coast fisheries. However, major policy decisions don't stop at this year's salmon fishery.

As I look forward to where the Council is headed, I'm struck by the number of big picture items that are coming our way and that may have a large impact on the future of west coast fisheries. The Council will continue to work on Sacramento and Klamath salmon matters and will potentially be establishing new harvest policies for these fall Chinook stocks. These are traditionally two of the most productive rivers on the coast, and the implications of a change in harvest policy for these rivers could be large.

The Council is also asking itself what the future holds for the west coast swordfish fishery, and is in the early days of assembling a workshop that may help define the future of this fishery. It is important to identify a pathway forward here in light of recent action by Congress to phase

out the swordfish drift gillnet fishery.

Recently National Marine Fisheries Service announced that they will grant the Councils \$20 million in funding to help advance climate readiness in fisheries, and they want to act quickly. This is a fairly large sum of money for the Councils, and may play a large role in determining the work they take on in the coming years, but of course the Council will have the final word on Council priorities.

As in many areas, we are going through a cultural and generational shift. As part of this we are working at understanding what equity and environmental justice (EEJ) means for our fisheries and how we might best incorporate it into policy decisions. We recently established an EEJ committee made up of Council members to help dive into this issue. Alongside this matter, we are working to create a more welcoming Council environment that is free from harassment, intimidation and more. We've always had a very good and open Council process, but we can undoubtedly make improvements.

Many of these issues are addressed in more detail in this issue of the Pacific Council newsletter. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us at the Council office. ➤



MAJOR CHANGES MADE TO NON-TRAWL AREA MANAGEMENT, COWCOD CONSERVATION AREAS

The Council made final recommendations on changes to the Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area and the Cowcod Conservation Areas in March. Both areas were created in the early 2000s when the Council began to close areas to the non-trawl sector in order to reduce catch of overfished groundfish species.

The Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area is a coastwide band, bounded by approximate depth contours, that stretches along the continental shelf from the California/Mexico border to the US/Canada border and applies to all commercial groundfish non-trawl fisheries. The Cowcod Conservation Area, in southern California, applies to both commercial non-trawl and recreational fisheries.

The boundaries of both areas have been changed as groundfish species have been rebuilt, and groundfish stakeholders have asked the Council to consider allowing access to healthy shelf rockfish species.

The decision makes the following changes:

- Allows non-trawl groundfish vessels to use different gear configurations with stationary vertical jig gear in the Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area between the Oregon/Washington border and the border of Mexico.

- Allows limited entry fixed gear and individual fishing quota gear-switching vessels to fish up to their limits with legal non-bottom contact hook-and-line gear.

- Moves the seaward boundary of the Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area to 75 fathoms between the Oregon/Washington border and 34° 27' N. latitude for commercial groundfish and for the non-tribal directed halibut fishery.

- Creates essential fish habitat conservation areas to protect groundfish and halibut in newly opened areas of Nehalem Bank and the Bandon High Spot, Garibaldi Reefs, and Arago Reef (all off Oregon)

- Develops a yelloweye rockfish conservation area (YRCA) near Heceta Bank (also off Oregon) and develops three new YRCAs off Oregon that could be implemented in the future.

- Repeals the Cowcod Conservation Areas for both non-trawl commercial and recreational groundfish fisheries, while retaining closures around islands and banks within the current Cowcod Conservation Area boundaries to protect groundfish in certain areas.

- Creates eight new “groundfish exclusion areas” to prohibit non-trawl groundfish activity in certain areas; allows transit under certain conditions.

- Develops block area closures for commercial non-trawl fisheries. (These are areas the Council can close temporarily to certain gears or sectors before or during the fishing season to protect groundfish or other species. Currently, they can be used only for trawl fisheries.)

The alternatives are laid out in more detail in the [March decision document](#). 🐟



Bringing in pots. Photo: NOAA.

ELECTRONIC MONITORING PROGRAM ALTERED TO ADD FLEXIBILITY, REDUCE COSTS

After years of Council and advisory body discussions, the Council has made important changes to the electronic monitoring program that go into effect on January 1, 2024.

Electronic monitoring of fishing activities creates massive amounts of video footage that need to be reviewed and reported to regulators. The video review is conducted by outside businesses or “third-party providers” paid for by industry. The timelines for reviewing and reporting on this footage have been difficult to manage, leading to lengthy discussion among the Council and its advisory bodies.

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Electronic monitoring providers will now have up to 60 days to submit their reports on a vessel's fishing operations to the vessel and to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Providers will be required to submit logbook data to NMFS within seven business days of receipt from the vessel operator.

For fixed gear vessels and trawl vessels that are allowed to discard selected species (called optimized retention), a random ten percent of hauls per trip will be reviewed. If discrepancies exist between the vessel's logbook and the video review, NMFS will determine on a case-by-case basis whether additional review is needed.

These changes are meant to make the electronic monitoring program more flexible in order to reduce costs and clarify the requirements for video review providers. ➤

COUNCIL LOOKS AT ALLOWING SLINKY POTS, FOURTH PERMIT IN LIMITED-ENTRY FIXED GEAR FISHERY

In March, after a review of the primary tier limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) program was completed, the Council prioritized some changes to the program as well as gear marking for vessels that use pot and longline gear.

In June 2023, the Council prioritized looking at changes to gear endorsements, permit stacking limits, and cost recovery in the LEFG program.

Gear endorsement: The Council is considering three alternatives related to LEFG endorsements. The first is to allow slinky

pots (collapsible pots) to be used by longline-endorsed permits to harvest their quotas (pot permits are already permitted to use the gear). Slinky pots are used in the Alaska blackcod fishery to prevent whales from eating fish off a vessel's hooks, especially for smaller vessels that don't have space to use rigid pots.



Slinky pot example. Photo: Fish Tech Inc.

The Council may consider creating a single fixed gear endorsement that would allow all LEFG permits to use longline or pot gear to catch their limits, or creating a single non-trawl endorsement that would allow all LEFG permits to use any legal non-trawl groundfish gear (similar to gear-switchers in the IFQ sector) without having to go into the open access sector.

Permit stacking limit: The Council is considering allowing a fourth permit to be registered to the primary tier vessel (the current limit is three). This would allow vessels to "stack" up to four permits as long as the owner is on board the vessel while harvesting.

Cost recovery: NMFS pro-

posed a cost recovery program for the LEFG primary tier program in June in which vessel owners would be responsible for paying the costs of the program. Based on Groundfish Advisory Subpanel recommendations, the Council also included an option in which the permit owner would pay the fee.

Additionally, the Council forwarded a few administrative actions (removal of base permit, start/end time of the tier fishery, permit price reporting) for consideration. ➤

GEAR MARKING FOR POT AND LONGLINE VESSELS DISCUSSED

The Council has been discussing gear marking for pot and longline vessels targeting groundfish in response to the 2020 humpback biological opinion. Gear marking would allow NMFS to better understand humpback whale entanglements in the fixed gear fishery and help identify changes to fixed gear regulations that could reduce entanglements.

The Council recommended developing gear marking requirements for all fixed gear groundfish sectors, taking into account efforts and marking styles being used in other fisheries (e.g., Dungeness crab); a review of other surface gear marking requirements; and a regulatory clarification that escape panels not be allowed on the bottom of pot gears, as currently allowed. (Biodegradable escape panels that rest on the seafloor are ineffective and do not operate as intended by the Council.)

The Council plans to discuss these issues next in September 2023. ➤

Groundfish news continued on page 11

CALIFORNIA COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL OCEAN SALMON SEASONS CLOSED THIS YEAR

In April the Council unanimously recommended a full closure of California's commercial and recreational ocean salmon season following projections showing that Chinook salmon abundance off California was at historic lows. A majority of the Oregon commercial and recreational ocean salmon seasons were also affected by poor returns of Chinook salmon to California spawning grounds, with very limited opportunity for Chinook fishing south of Cape Falcon, Oregon.

The California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife noted that "Prolonged and historic drought, severe wildfires and associated impacts to spawning and rearing habitat, harmful algal blooms, and ocean forage shifts have combined to result in some of the lowest stock abundance forecasts on record for Sacramento River fall Chinook and Klamath River fall Chinook... In part, the low returns and abundance forecasts are due to difficult environmental factors faced by these salmon on their initial journey out to the ocean three years ago."

The 2023 commercial and recreational ocean salmon seasons off the coasts of Washington and northern Oregon are similar to last year, with salmon quotas generally the same or a little higher than 2022.

California and Oregon requested Federal fishery disaster declarations as a result of the closure. For more information, see NOAA's



Copco-2 dam removal. Credit: Shane Anderson, Swiftwater Films

webpage on [Fishery Disaster Assistance](#). ➡

KLAMATH DAM REMOVAL OFFICIALLY BEGINS

Klamath dam removal officially began on March 10 when the Klamath River Renewal Corporation broke ground, setting off the largest dam removal project in the history of the United States and the largest salmon restoration project ever.

Copco #2, the smallest dam in the complex, has already been removed ([see external article](#)). Drawdown of the reservoirs is scheduled to begin in January 2024 and the remaining three dams are expected to be removed by the end of 2024. In addition, Iron Gate hatchery, which sits at the base of Iron Gate Dam and raises salmonids, will be demolished. Its operations will be replaced by the reopening Fall Creek

Hatchery, which is a little further upstream.

Habitat restoration activities are planned and will go into full swing once the dams are removed. State agencies have been discussing potential changes to fisheries monitoring and data collection activities.

In April, the National Marine Fisheries Service gave a presentation on Klamath dam removal to the Council, explaining the dam removal timeline and the impact it will have on aquatic species in the Klamath River basin, including Klamath River fall Chinook. ➡

COUNCIL DISCUSSES CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR CALIFORNIA CHINOOK STOCKS

One of the major goals of salmon management is to ensure that enough adult salmon return to

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spawn every year to maintain a healthy population for future generations. The number of spawning salmon needed is unique to each stock, and is referred to as the conservation objective or conservation goal. These goals are reviewed periodically as conditions change.

With the imminent removal of four dams on the Klamath River, the conservation goals for Klamath River fall Chinook will need to respond to a changing river environment. Also, with the poor forecast for Sacramento River fall Chinook this year and likely the next, the Council wants to ensure that management decisions will sustain, if not increase, the population size.

In June, the Council agreed to form two ad-hoc technical workgroups to evaluate the conservation objective and other ocean fishery management tools used for Sacramento River fall Chinook and Klamath River fall Chinook. The workgroups will meet in the summer and fall. A report from the Klamath River workgroup is expected in November, and the Sacramento Workgroup is expected to provide a report in the spring of 2024. ➡

CALIFORNIA DROUGHT MOSTLY OVER, FOR NOW

Anyone paying attention to the news (or living in California) knows that California got a huge amount of water this year. In October 2022, 99 percent of California was in a drought; as of July 2023, drought only affected 6 percent of the state. The large snowpack from this past winter is expected to benefit salmon returning three years from now. (See [story from](#)



Flood in Sacramento. Photo: Public Policy Institute of California.

[Jefferson Public Radio](#) on how salmon benefited from all the water in the Yolo Bypass near Sacramento). ➡

RECONSIDERING SACRAMENTO RIVER WATER TEMPERATURE STANDARDS

In September [the Council wrote to Federal and state agencies](#) asking them to reconsider the 30-year-old water temperature standards in the Sacramento River. Under current standards, winter-run Chinook suffered very low survival rates in the Sacramento River (2.6 percent) in 2021, and winter-run Chinook also hit an alarming low of 1.9 percent in 2022. By comparison, the average survival rate (measured as egg-to-fry) was 23.4 percent between 2002 and 2020. ➡

PESTICIDES IMPACT ENDANGERED SPECIES

In March National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) pub-

lished a draft biological opinion for two widely used pesticides ([See related story from Oregon Public Broadcasting](#)). NMFS concluded that continued use of insecticides containing carbaryl or methomyl are likely to jeopardize the continued existence of 30 listed species, including Chinook salmon, coho salmon, sockeye salmon, and steelhead. These pesticides are also likely to destroy or adversely modify their critical habitats. Carbaryl and methomyl are commonly used on field vegetables and orchard crops across the Willamette Valley, the Columbia River Gorge, and southeastern Washington.

Twenty-one other registered agricultural pesticides have received a jeopardy determination from NMFS in the past, possibly contributing to cumulative impacts on salmonids. The result is a reduction in fitness that can lead to increased vulnerability to disease and predation, pre-spawning mortality, and reduced homing

Salmon continued on next page

Salmon, continued

ability. In discussing this issue, the Habitat Committee expressed concerns that the conservation measures outlined by NMFS might not be enough to prevent harm to fish, fish habitat, or to humans who consume large amounts of salmon. ➤

UPPER COLUMBIA UNITED TRIBES WORK TOWARD SALMON PASSAGE AT CHIEF JOSEPH DAM

In April, Casey Baldwin of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation briefed the Habitat Committee on efforts to reintroduce salmon above Chief Joseph Dam on the Columbia River. The Upper Columbia United Tribes have completed the first phase of the project (modeling and studies) and are now conducting pilot projects, designing and testing reintroduction strategies, and evaluating fish passage facilities. The tribes have released more than 1,500 adults and 16,000 juveniles in areas that had not seen salmon in 70-110 years. The state of Washington's biennial budget includes \$3 million over the next two years for funding to support the tribes' project. ➤



Spokane elder Pat Moses releases salmon into the Little Spokane River. Photo: Inland Northwest Land Conservancy

Ecosystem News

CALIFORNIA CURRENT ECOSYSTEM ANNUAL REPORT REFLECTS MIXED CONDITIONS IN 2022

The 2022-2023 Annual Ecosystem Status Report was presented in March (see [report](#) and [presentation](#) here).

The report noted that a negative Pacific Decadal Oscillation and La Niña in 2022 foretold a year of above-average productivity for many species, and that strong upwelling led to favorable springtime indicators for zooplankton, forage, and predators. On land, 2021/22 winter storms supplied good early snowpack. However, as the year went on, a marine heatwave in the north negatively affected ocean conditions. Nevertheless, 2022 saw many instances of good productivity, especially of anchovy in the central and

southern California Current Ecosystem. There were encouraging signals for Chinook salmon returns to the Columbia Basin, sablefish, and forage fish.

The authors were concerned about emerging challenges for fishing communities, including declines in fishing diversification and potential conflicts with new sectors like offshore wind energy.

The report notes that “the threat of climate change must be noted again as we conclude the warmest year on record for the Northeast Pacific Ocean.” This highlights the importance of improving climate prediction skills, and better understanding of how and why different species are likely to respond to novel conditions.

On land, late December and early January saw a series of “atmospheric rivers” deliver large amounts of

precipitation to much of the West, with many regions receiving intense snows that subsequently provided some drought relief. The authors also noted that carryovers from recent years, like the enormous population of anchovy, were still influencing species and fishery dynamics. ➤

ECOSYSTEM AND CLIMATE INFORMATION INITIATIVE PROGRESSES

The new Ecosystem and Climate Information Initiative is moving ahead. As part of the project, the Fishery Ecosystem Workgroup is working on a framework that helps the Council incorporate ecosystem and climate factors into its decisions, as well as helping the Council choose which stocks should be the focus of future risk assessments. In Septem-

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ber, the Workgroup will present an assessment for petrale sole and sablefish to demonstrate the methodology.

COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT OFFSHORE WIND CONTINUE BETWEEN COUNCIL AND BOEM

Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Pacific Region Director Doug Boren spoke to the Council in June, emphasizing BOEM's commitment to engaging with the Council.

The Council sent four letters to BOEM in April and is sending a letter to offshore wind lessees in July.

In a March 24 letter to BOEM, the Council commented on the pro-

posed Renewable Energy Modernization Rule and provided feedback on decommissioning meteorological buoys, a renewable energy leasing schedule, auctions, and bidding credits.

In a [letter sent to Oregon Governor Tina Kotek and BOEM](#) on April 6, the Council asked BOEM to restart its process for identifying Call Areas (areas identified as likely suitable for wind energy development), to consider areas outside 1300m depth, and to exclude offshore banks and seamounts. The letter requested a development process that adequately considers multiple ocean uses and sites offshore wind energy facilities in ways that are compatible with these multiple uses, noting that the areas being considered for offshore wind energy development off Oregon may not be compatible with

fisheries.

An [April 12 letter](#) provided recommendations for improving the modeling that BOEM uses to support decision-making on Wind Energy Areas off the Oregon coast.

A [May 11 letter to BOEM](#) emphasized the importance of analyzing the cumulative impacts of wind energy development on the entire U.S. West Coast. In it, the Council urged BOEM to develop a programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the five California wind energy leases.

In July, the Council plans to send a letter to the five California offshore wind lessees requesting that the lessees communicate with the Council and reminding them of the Council's concerns about the hazards that survey equipment can represent to fishing. ➤

Council operations

COUNCIL ADDRESSES EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE STRATEGY

In April the Council formed a new ad hoc committee to focus on equity and environmental justice (EEJ) issues.

The action came in response to NMFS's new Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy, which defines equity as "the fair treatment of all individuals, taking into account that not everyone has been treated fairly," and environmental justice as "equity applied to environmental laws, policies, and practices."

NMFS will be developing regional implementation plans for its Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy and incorporating related goals and objectives into regional versions of its broader strategic planning document (its National Strategic Plan for 2022-2025).

The Council's EEJ committee will help the Council work with NMFS on the regional implementation plan and regional strategic plan documents. The Council will address this topic again in September. ➤

COUNCIL AND STAFF DISCUSS IMPROVEMENTS TO MEETINGS, MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Recently the Council and Council staff have been thinking about ways to improve the Council meeting process. The COVID epidemic increased the Council's ability to have online meetings, with all of their benefits and drawbacks, and the resumption of in-person meetings seemed like a good time to review how advisory body meetings and Council meetings could be improved. At the same time, the Council would like to reach more audiences who are not able to attend

Council meetings in person.

In April the Council staff presented a [white paper](#) to the Council that reviewed the pros and cons of four types of meetings: 100 percent in-person, 100 percent remote, hybrid (a mixture of both), and live broadcast (streaming an in-person meeting online). The Council was particularly interested in hybrid meetings, which offer many of the benefits of both in-person and remote meetings but also come at a cost of technological complexity and financial investment.

Ten advisory bodies commented on the discussion with detailed recommendations on how to improve the Council and advisory body process. In June the Council discussed merging this process with the Council's grant renewal process. A special meeting will be held on this topic in early 2024. ➤

HARASSMENT POLICY ADOPTED

In June the Council adopted staff recommendations for promoting a respectful and harassment-free meeting environment. Revisions to the Council Operating Procedures will allow the Council to remove

advisory body members who fail to show respect to Council participants and abide by proper decorum. The Council Operating Procedures will make it clear that the Council does not tolerate harassment or retaliation against those who report harassment. An anonymous reporting system will be in place, along with ground rules to govern advisory

body meetings. Advisory bodies are asked to prepare their own guidelines. The Council asked for more information including examples of types of harassment, a code of conduct, and a statement of intent on protections for vulnerable individuals. The Council intends to require related training for members of the Council family. ➤

Coastal Pelagic Species News

ASSESSMENT, MANAGEMENT MEASURES ADOPTED FOR PACIFIC MACKEREL

In June the Council adopted Pacific mackerel biomass estimates for 2023 and 2024, as well as management and harvest specifications for the fishery.

A full assessment conducted by the Southwest Fisheries Science Center was recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee in June as the best available science. The assessment shows that the stock biomass is trending upward since the 2019 assessment, but there is a large degree of uncertainty com-

pared to the prior assessment. Accounting for this uncertainty, the harvest specifications for 2023-24 and 2024-2025 are greater than those in 2022-2023. ➤

SARDINE HARVEST SPEX AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES SET FOR 2023-2024

In April the Council adopted harvest specifications and management measures for the 2023-2024 Pacific sardine season. The overfishing limit was set at 5,506 metric tons (mt); the acceptable biological catch and annual catch limit were both set at 3,953 mt, and the annual catch

target was set at 3,600 mt.

No assessment was done in 2023 for Pacific sardine for administrative reasons, so the 2022 assessment was used as the basis for management. This resulted in the harvest specifications being lower than the previous fishing year, as greater uncertainty was included in the recommendation.

The Council also approved two exempted fishing permit (EFP) proposals for Pacific sardine. Both proposals were submitted by the California Wetfish Producers Association and are designed to support

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Upcoming Council meetings	City	Dates	Location	First public comment deadline
September 2023	Spokane, WA	Subcommittees start September 7th Advisory bodies start September 8th Council session begins September 9th	DoubleTree by Hilton Spokane City Center	August 17, 5pm PST
November 2023	Garden Grove, CA	Subcommittees may start November 1st Advisory bodies start November 2nd Council session begins November 3rd	Hyatt Regency Orange County	October 12, 5pm PST
March 2024	Fresno, CA	Tentative: Advisory bodies start March 5 Council session starts March 6	Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Fresno Convention Center	Not yet available
April 2024	Seattle, WA	Tentative: Advisory bodies start April 5 Council session starts April 6	Westin Hotel Seattle	Not yet available

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ongoing stock assessments for Pacific sardine.

The first proposal renews an existing EFP to conduct point sets to validate biomass estimates made in the Coastal Pelagic Species Nearshore Cooperative Survey. The Survey helps estimate biomass in shallow waters that are inaccessible to NOAA ships.

The second proposal continues a time series of fishery-dependent data (data that is derived from fisheries) for use in stock assessments. The project will also collect biological data from two fishing areas to study the stock structure and dynamics of the northern and southern subpopulations of Pacific sardine

under a Saltonstall-Kennedy grant.

Both EFPs would harvest up to 670 mt of sardines for nearshore aerial surveys and directed biological sampling.

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT AMENDMENT APPROVED

The Council approved a final essential fish habitat (EFH) package for coastal pelagic species in June. The package will become an amendment to the fishery management plan.

The Council began reviewing EFH for coastal pelagic species in 2020. The project was divided into two phases. Phase 1 consisted of compiling new information and data,

soliciting input from the public, and determining whether new information warrants consideration of EFH modifications. Phase 2 consisted of developing proposed modifications to EFH for Council consideration.

As discussions progressed, the Council endorsed the Habitat Committee's recommendation to include U.S. waters of the Salish Sea as EFH for market squid and krill, and the section covering habitat for market squid was dropped.

The new EFH Appendix includes updated EFH identification and description, life history summaries, fishing and non-fishing impacts, research and information needs, new maps, and more. ➤

Highly Migratory Species News

COUNCIL CHOOSES NOT TO PROCEED WITH DRIFT GILLNET HARD CAPS

The Council has decided not to proceed with further action to implement hard caps (strict bycatch limits) on the take of high-priority protected species in the California large-mesh drift gillnet fishery because a Federal law now prohibits the use of large mesh gillnet gear after December 2027.

Council originally adopted the proposal to apply hard caps in September 2015, but it was not implemented at that time. The Council began reconsidering the proposal in 2021 and adopted a range of alternatives. The Council planned to choose a final preferred alternative this June, but in light of the passage of the Driftnet Modernization and Bycatch Reduction Act, which amends the

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to prohibit the use of large mesh gillnet gear, they decided not to proceed. Instead, the Council decided its time would be better spent consulting with NMFS on the fishery transition program mandated by the Driftnet Act. ➤

EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS FORWARDED

The Council received five applications for exempted fishing permits (EFPs) for highly migratory species in June. In recent years most EFP applications have been related to testing deep-set buoy gear, which is now allowed under the fishery management plan. This means individuals wishing to use the gear as defined in regulations do not need to get an EFP.

However, the Council received applications in 2022 and 2023 to test putting more than the allowed 10 pieces of deep-set buoy gear in the water at the same time, which would require an EFP. The Council decided to hold off on making recommendations on such gear variations until the legal fishery has been in operation for two seasons, but did recommend extending a current EFP testing fishing with the gear at night for another two years and issuing an EFP to another fishery participant for that purpose.

Finally, the Council approved a 2022 application from the Pleger Institute of Marine Science that would test another variation on buoy gear better suited for larger vessels fishing in offshore waters. ➤

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SWORDFISH MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT PLAN TO BE REPLACED

In June the Council recommended that the current (but aging) Swordfish Monitoring and Management Plan be replaced with a new one that includes the range of species, in addition to swordfish, that have been economically important in the large mesh drift gillnet fishery. Because this fishery is slated to close, new fishing opportunities must be explored, most likely through exempted fishing permits. Outlining research priorities in the plan would be helpful for exempted fishing permit applicants.

To further these objectives, the highly migratory species advisory bodies will hold a joint session at the September Council meeting in order to plan a future workshop. ➤



Fisherman with swordfish. Photo: Harold Fernando Delgado Resendiz/iNaturalist via California Sea Grant

Halibut News

COUNCIL TO ADOPT HALIBUT REGULATIONS IN SEPTEMBER

In June of this year the Council explored potential changes to non-tribal commercial halibut regulations and the Pacific halibut Catch Sharing Plan, and adopted a list of items that warranted further review. The main points were how to provide better access to the harvestable Pacific halibut available to West Coast fisheries, and how to provide more quota for the sport fishery in California. The Council agreed to look at scenarios that would shift part of the non-tribal halibut quota from Oregon and Washington sport fisheries to the California sport fishery, and to look at ways to add more flexibility to the Catch Sharing Plan so that quota can be moved more easily between sectors and states, when needed. Work on these items will occur over the summer and the Council will discuss them again in September.

In September, as part of the annual management cycle, the Council will discuss changes to the season structures for the non-tribal fisheries and any additional changes that may be proposed, along with those items from the June meeting. The Council will adopt for public review potential changes to the Catch Sharing Plan and non-tribal commercial regulations. Final action will occur in November on items that can be put in place for the 2024 season. Items that won't be ready for the 2024 season because more time is needed for analysis, public input, etc. will be put on the Council's agenda in the summer/fall of 2024 for potential implementation in 2025. ➤

Halibut explained

We asked Chat GTP to explain Pacific halibut management in the style of Shakespeare. Here's what it came up with.

Verily, in the vast expanse of the briny deep, doth dwell the Pacific halibut, a flat and wondrous creature of the sea. As the sun doth rise and set o'er the watery horizon, so doth the keepers of the ocean's bounty toil with diligence to manage this noble fish. With sagacious minds and prudent hearts, they hath set forth regulations to ensure the halibut's abundance for generations yet to come.

The fishermen, with net and line, do ply their trade with tempered restraint, for they knoweth that the halibut's numbers must not be overly taxed. The scientists, by study and observation, doth fathom the halibut's ways, and through their wisdom, maketh decisions to preserve the sanctity of its watery abode. Together, these custodians of the deep doth strive, like a troupe of players upon life's grand stage, to strike a harmony betwixt the sustenance the halibut provideth and the preservation of its species. Let us, with humble hearts, commend their noble efforts, as they endeavor to ensure the Pacific halibut doth thrive for all eternity. ➤

FINAL DECISION ON SABLE-FISH GEAR SWITCHING SET FOR MARCH 2024

The Council has been discussing limiting gear switching—the use of nontrawl gear to catch northern sablefish in the trawl individual fishing quota fishery—since 2017. This June, the Council chose dual preliminary preferred alternatives related to sablefish gear switching (“No Action” and a gear switching limitation based on gear-specific quota pounds). The action alternative will be refined in November, with final action in March 2024. If an action alternative is selected, implementation would be expected at the start of 2026. ➤

2023 PACIFIC WHITING CATCH ALLOCATION RELEASED

In March the Joint Management Committee, which makes decisions in the U.S./Canada Pacific Whiting Treaty process, recommended a 2023 coastwide (U.S. + Canada) whiting total annual catch (TAC) of 625,000 mt. For the U.S., the TAC was 461,750 mt. For comparison, the 2022 U.S. whiting TAC was 402,646 mt. ➤

GROUNDFISH STOCK DEFINITIONS ADOPTED

In June the Council adopted stock definitions for 14 priority groundfish species ([see table in decision document](#)). The changes will be included in Amendment 31 to the groundfish fishery management plan.

This action was needed because the plan does not meet the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act in defining stocks for

managed groundfish. Defining stocks is also necessary to allow NMFS to make status determinations concerning the health and abundance of West Coast groundfish. ➤

The schedule for 2025-2026 groundfish harvest spex and management measures is available [here](#).

GROUNDFISH PRIORITIES SET

In March the Council revised its list of proposed new groundfish management measures.

The Council prioritized the following items for scoping and potential development:

—A limited entry fixed gear “follow-on package” combined with considerations for fixed gear marking requirements. (See article on page 3).

—Revisions to Cordell Bank conservation areas. This measure could include considerations related to coral planting in the Greater Farallones and Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuaries.

Other issues were prioritized but haven’t yet been scheduled. The Council removed creation of Rockfish Conservation Area lines at 60-Mile Bank, and developing a conversion factor for gutted/head-on Petrale sole, from the list.

The Council added the following items for later consideration:

- Live bait useage in the recreational longleader fishery
- Updates to the electronic monitoring discard species list
- Creation of an open access

fishery vessel registration

The Council also said it wants to explore permitting the commercial sale of recreational fish waste and prohibiting directed fishing of shortbelly rockfish (a forage fish). ➤

COUNCIL DISCUSSES CATCH OF ENDANGERED SPECIES IN GROUND FISH FISHERIES

The Groundfish Endangered Species Workgroup supports the Council’s dealings with the Endangered Species Act in the groundfish fishery. The Workgroup met in April to review reports on recent incidental take of eulachon, green sturgeon, humpback whales, leatherback sea turtles, and short-tailed albatross in the groundfish fishery. The Council did not recommend any new management measures based on the Workgroup’s findings.

Groundfish fisheries generally have minimal interactions with Endangered Species Act-listed marine mammals, sea turtles, eulachon, green sturgeon, and seabirds, but the rarity of these species in the catch data makes projecting and estimating incidental take challenging. The Council recommended that NMFS continue to investigate how the take of eulachon is estimated, along with seabird streamer lines and humpback whale concerns.

Of note, the Council was informed of an observed humpback whale take in the open access fixed gear fishery in 2021. This take, however, did not exceed the take limit set in the NMFS Biological Opinion. The Council has also embarked on a process to mark floating gear (long line buoys, etc.) to identify fisheries involved in whale entanglement. ➤