

Shorebased Whiting Cooperative- Inseason Report

The Shorebased Whiting Cooperative (SWC) provides the following report on the 2023 shoreside whiting fishery.

The SWC was formed in 2012, following implementation of the IFQ program in the shorebased trawl fishery. IFQ whiting participants voluntarily formed the cooperative out of the need to minimize non-whiting species catch. The membership pooled their individual quota allocations for the most constraining species and developed fishing rules to access the pooled quota, as they recognized how lightning strikes were rare, but detrimental when they occurred. SWC members willingly take on the costs to retain a cooperative manager and monitoring agent in addition to the cost recovery fees they already pay for the IFQ program. The Cooperative's purpose is to help its members minimize incidental catch while attaining their whiting quota.

Currently the SWC has 20 member catcher vessels who deliver whiting to processing plants in Newport, Astoria, Warrenton and Westport. Mr. Robert Smith serves as the cooperative's president, Ms. Kristin McQuaw is contracted as the cooperative's manager and Sea State, Inc. is retained as the monitor. 100% of the vessels are monitored either under EM or by a human observer. Additionally, 100% of the shoreside offloads are observed by a dockside monitor, where an electronic fish ticket is promptly submitted. WMC members provide confidentiality waivers to Sea State, Inc. to access their IFQ vessel accounts and location data from VMS providers in real time. Sea State, Inc. uses the data to send out daily catch reports and VMS bycatch alerts to the membership.

The SWC operates under an internal membership agreement, by which the catcher vessels agree to follow all fishing rules implemented by the Board of Directors. The Cooperative also functions under an approved Salmon Mitigation Plan, our commitment with NMFS and the Council to minimize Chinook encounters to the extent practicable. To uphold the responsibilities under the SMP, the Cooperative adopts several pre-season tools and practices to reduce the likelihood of intercepting Chinook. All members are required to use salmon excluders. The SWC implements pre-season area closures and provides the coop manager and monitor automatic hot spot closure authority to close high bycatch areas without first consulting the Board. The Cooperative also uses restrictions on night fishing to reduce the likelihood of fishing activity during periods when whiting and Chinook may be more likely to interact. The SWC prioritizes timely and effective communication among the fleet when Chinook are seen on the grounds to prevent other boats from towing in the same location. The manager in turn helps facilitate communication by sending out alerts to ensure all members coastwide are notified of elevated or high bycatch events.

As of August 19, SWC members have caught 50,403.3mt of whiting, 742 chinook and 42 coho (table 1), corresponding to a chinook bycatch rate of 0.0147 fish per mt of whiting. The fishery started out strong as 12 members were able to fish between May 1 and May 14. During this early period, member vessels intercepted 25 Chinook and 0 Coho. CPUE slowed dramatically in June and July and has increased back to normal levels in the month of August.

Table 1. SWC catch from 5/1/23 through 5/19/23.

	SWC
Whiting (mt)	50,403.3
Coho (#)	42
Chinook (#)	742
Chinook bycatch rate (#/mt)	0.0147
% of the 11k caught	6.7%

On June 29, the SWC experienced its largest Chinook lightning strike to date. One catcher vessel was looking for fish and towed along the US/Canadian border where he caught 413 Chinook alongside roughly 65,000lbs of pollock. The captain alerted the fleet; there were no other vessels in the area. Upon offloading, the boat and fish plant called the Manager with the total count and relayed all pertinent information. The Manager utilized the hot spot closure authority provided under the membership agreement and closed 127.9 sq nautical miles, shown in figure 1 below. This area has remained closed since June 29. The Manager also notified the other whiting sectors and NMFS of the lightning strike and the actions taken by the Cooperative. Since the lightning strike, SWC members have caught 154 Chinook on 28,661 mt of whiting, a bycatch rate of 0.005 fish per mt, as they remain on high alert.

The Cooperative expects fishing to continue through the fall, during which it will continue to utilize the mitigation tools described above to minimize interactions with Chinook and Coho. The SWC will adopt additional tools, such as the automatic closures, as needed to promptly respond to high bycatch events. The Cooperative remains committed to upholding its Salmon Mitigation Plan and responsibly managing its fishing activity.

Figure 1. SWC hot spot closure for Chinook, implemented on 6/29/23.

