

**Year-Round Coastwide Midwater Trawl Gear EFP:
*Monitoring and Minimizing Salmon Bycatch When Targeting Rockfish in the
Shorebased IFQ Fishery***

2021-2022 Final Trawl Gear EFP Report

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Summary

The 2021-2022 exempted fishing permit (EFP/Trawl Gear EFP) allowed for year-round targeting of midwater rockfish and built on successes from previous years' EFPs, offering much-needed fishing opportunities for West Coast groundfish trawl vessels. Since its inception in 2017, this EFP has increased flexibility in terms of the use (in time and space) of trawl gear for participants in the groundfish trawl catch share (Individual Fishing Quota, IFQ) program. It has provided an opportunity for vessels to use midwater gear to target pelagic rockfish coastwide on a year-round basis while ensuring that conservation objectives for the groundfish fishery continue to be met. It has also provided a mechanism to collect data to support full implementation of the Pacific Fishery Management Council's [2016 Trawl Gear Package](#).

The 2021-2022 Trawl Gear EFP collected data to determine the nature and extent of bycatch of Chinook salmon and other species of concern while conducting a rockfish fishery targeting widow, yellowtail, chilipepper and other rockfish species without existing gear/time/area restrictions. It allowed the groundfish trawl fleet to continue developing approaches for effectively targeting rockfish while minimizing salmon bycatch to the extent practicable. Similar to prior years, the 2021-2022 EFP utilized the individual vessel accountability inherent in the trawl IFQ program while providing for more fishing opportunities through flexible gear/area/time provisions that allows fishermen, processors, and associated communities to more fully realize the expected benefits of the IFQ program. The 2021-2022 EFP enhanced overall rockfish attainment and revenues for the groundfish trawl sector.

2021-2022 Trawl Gear EFP Provisions

The 2021-2022 Trawl Gear EFP exempted non-whiting midwater trawl vessels from the prohibition on fishing prior to start of the whiting fishery season (May 15) and exempted midwater and bottom trawl vessels from any gear/area restrictions not yet fully implemented in the Council's 2016 Trawl Gear Package (i.e., restrictions while fishing between 42 N. lat. and 40° 10' N. lat. and shoreward of the 100 fathom boundary line).

The 2021-2022 Trawl Gear EFP maintained a number of additional provisions to avoid Chinook salmon and minimize bycatch, including:

- A Chinook salmon harvest guideline and/or gear-based salmon bycatch caps to keep impacts aligned with NMFS' conclusions regarding the 2018-2019 EFPs and NMFS' Salmon Biological Opinion;

- The EFP required an annual bycatch limit of 1,000 Chinook salmon for all fish taken under EFP activity in waters north of 42° N. latitude and an annual bycatch limit of 100 Chinook salmon for all fish taken under EFP activity in waters south of 42° N. latitude;
- Sorting and retention requirements for salmon bycatch;
- Area closures to minimize salmon bycatch around the Columbia and Klamath Rivers;
- An industry-based salmon bycatch monitoring/avoidance program, including :
 - *Move-Along Rule When Salmon Bycatch is Encountered*: Thresholds for high bycatch trips and high bycatch tows (10 Chinook salmon);
 - A vessel that experiences a high bycatch tow was required to report the tow as quickly as possible (a bycatch reporting form was provided to EFP participants);
 - A vessel that experiences a high bycatch tow was required to move its fishing operation before setting out gear again during the same fishing trip. The vessel captain was required to seek alternative fishing grounds where it was reasonable to expect the vessel to encounter less Chinook salmon bycatch; and
 - *There was a three-strike rule for high bycatch trips by EFP vessels*: A vessel that landed three high bycatch trips during one month was required to declare out of the EFP for the remainder of that month and for the following month. A vessel that must declare out of the EFP due to high bycatch trips for a second time during the EFP would have its permit for this EFP permanently revoked.

Participants in the 2021-2022 Trawl Gear EFP were required to abide by the same sorting and retention requirements as previous years' EFPs:

- *Electronic Monitoring (EM) Vessels* – Participating EM vessels were authorized/required to retain salmon and eulachon on EFP trips; however, salmon and eulachon bycatch were required to be sorted by haul and kept separate until landing.
- *Observed Vessels* – Vessels on an EFP trip with human observers were required to retain and land all salmon except for salmon sampled by the onboard observer, which could be discarded after the observer's information is recorded.

EM Retention Requirement for Salmon Bycatch: Participants using Electronic Monitoring in the EFP were required to retain and land salmon bycatch on all EFP trips, consistent with current requirements for vessels participating in the shoreside Pacific whiting fishery. The Pacific whiting shorebased IFQ fishery generally retains unsorted catch, and most bycatch data on salmon are gathered on shore by catch monitors at the trip level.

Additional Provisions: Shoreside processors were requested to retain any salmon bycatch landed from EFP trips after shoreside sampling was completed until the respective State Fish and Wildlife Agency could be contacted to determine if the salmon bycatch would be collected for additional sampling (genetics, etc.). Contact information for each State Agency and “chain of custody procedures” were provided to shoreside processors several times during the year. While this was not a formal requirement of the EFP, it was supported by EFP participants as a “gentleman’s agreement.”

2021-2022 EFP Catch/Bycatch Data

The table below summarizes the catch of groundfish, Chinook salmon, other salmon, and other species of concern during the 2021-2022 Trawl Gear EFPs. In total, 41 Chinook salmon were caught on 207 trips in the 2021 EFP, and 148 Chinook salmon were caught on 177 trips in the 2022 EFP. The EFP generated groundfish catch valued at about \$4 million annually. Aside from Chinook salmon, the only noteworthy bycatch species of concern in the EFP was eulachon (264 fish in the 2022 EFP north of 42).

During the 2021 and 2022 Trawl Gear EFPs, none of the EFP bycatch thresholds were reached, and none of the additional EFP provisions or the industry-based bycatch monitoring/avoidance measures (bycatch reports, move-along rules) were triggered.

Summary of 2021 and 2022 Trawl Gear EFP Catch and Bycatch

EFP Region	Vessels	Trips	Chinook	Unidentified Salmon	Coho	Green Sturgeon	Eulachon	Groundfish Pounds	Groundfish Revenues (\$)
2021 Trawl Gear EFP									
North of 42	C*	C*	40	0	4	0	11	23,621,462	\$4,367,263.54
South of 42	C*	C*	1	0	0	0	0	186,413	\$56,463.46
TOTAL 2021 EFP	18	207	41	0	4	0	11	23,807,875	\$4,4323,727
2022 Trawl Gear EFP									
North of 42	20	114	137	0	1	0	264	10,179,391	\$2,910,227.93
South of 42	5	63	11	0	0	0	0	2,070,334	\$1,006,107.13
TOTAL 2022 EFP	25	177	148	0	1	0	264	12,249,725	\$3,916,335.06

*C – Cannot report the number of vessels/trips by area for confidentiality reasons.

Conclusions/Recommendations

The 2021 and 2022 Trawl Gear EFPs collected catch and bycatch data which demonstrate the groundfish trawl fleet can effectively target pelagic rockfish while minimizing salmon bycatch to the extent practicable. The Trawl Gear EFP began in 2017 and has experienced many successful years of targeting rockfish with very little Chinook or other salmon bycatch. Since its inception, this EFP has represented a significant step toward regaining access to rockfish markets, which is critical to ensure the long-term economic success of the West Coast groundfish fishery.

The 2023 Trawl Gear EFP (Year 7) is currently underway and is producing catch/bycatch data that are consistent with the previous EFP years.

Based on the data collected through the Trawl Gear EFP, the Council should initiate action to implement the regulatory changes necessary to remove bottom trawl restrictions remaining from the Council's [2016 Trawl Gear Package](#) and to allow the midwater trawl fishery to target rockfish

on a year-round basis. This EFP has allowed NMFS, through cooperation with the industry, to collect information that will better inform the implementation process for recent and future groundfish management actions (ex., year-round non-whiting midwater fishery) as well as address/mitigate any bycatch concerns, if necessary, prior to full implementation.

Upon full implementation of the Council's Trawl Gear Package and year-round non-whiting midwater fishery, if markets can continue to be redeveloped and infrastructure preserved, the Council and NMFS will likely take a significant step towards restoring and establishing the groundfish trawl fishery as it was envisioned with implementation of the IFQ program.