



## Pacific Fishery Management Council

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7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101 Portland, OR 97220-1384  
Phone 503-820-2280 | Toll free 866-806-7204 | Fax 503-820-2299 | [www.pcouncil.org](http://www.pcouncil.org)  
Brad Pettinger, Chair | Merrick J. Burden, Executive Director

### MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 13, 2024  
TO: Scientific and Statistical Committee  
FROM: Marlene A. Bellman, Staff Officer  
SUBJECT: March 2024 Council Meeting Materials

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council, PFMC) March 2024 meeting will be held in person from March 5 through March 11, 2024, in Fresno, California. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will meet **in person** with a web broadcast on Tuesday, March 5, and Wednesday, March 6, starting at 8 a.m. each day. Your meeting materials are enclosed.

Instructions for how to connect to the Council and Advisory Body meetings will be posted on the Council's [March 2024 Meeting webpage](#) prior to the first day of the meeting. Upon entering the meeting remotely, please modify your entry to reflect your full identification (full name and affiliation). This additional information helps participants identify speakers during public comment. All meetings are open to the public and at least one opportunity for public comment has been scheduled for each meeting day.

This meeting is being conducted in person with a web broadcast that provides the opportunity for remote public comment. In the event an outage occurs, or technical issues arise that impact the experience of remote attendees, we will attempt to resolve them but, ultimately, we cannot guarantee that they will be resolved satisfactorily.

#### SSC Administrative Matters

On Tuesday, March 5, the SSC meeting will be called to order by the SSC Chair and any designated alternates will be introduced. Next, the SSC will receive a briefing from the Council's Executive Director, Merrick Burden, to provide clarification on Council direction, informational updates, etc. The SSC will finalize their March 2024 meeting agenda and the November 2023 meeting minutes. Subcommittee assignments will be reviewed and updated, as necessary.

#### E. Cross Fishery Management Plan (FMP)

##### E.1 Council and SSC Discussion

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This agenda item is an opportunity for Council Members and SSC Members to clarify SSC roles and to discuss areas where questions exist concerning the SSC's role and workload in support of the Council process. This discussion is being organized around questions concerning salmon and groundfish management processes and may serve as important context for other agenda items at this meeting and other meetings throughout the year. No public comment or advisory body statements are being solicited for this item. The SSC Agenda includes time for any prior internal Committee discussion (Tuesday, March 5) to prepare for the Council agenda item, which is scheduled for the end of the day on Wednesday, March 6. The SSC hopes to have completed work assignments and statements for the March Council meeting prior to attending this item on Council floor.

## J. Council Administrative Matters

### J.2 Membership Appointments and Council Operating Procedures (SSC Closed Session)

Under Membership Appointments and Council Operating Procedures (COPs), the SSC may be asked to review any vacant management or technical team seats which come in before the March Council meeting. As of the advance briefing book, none have been submitted. Any SSC recommendations will be offered during the Council Closed Executive Session on Wednesday, March 6.

Additionally, under Closed Session, the SSC is scheduled to conduct an election for SSC Chair and Vice Chair roles. The SSC Groundfish Subcommittee (GFSC) may also wish to discuss plans for the GFSC Chair role. Results of the election and discussion will be communicated to PFMC staff and updated on relevant rosters, webpages, etc.

### J.3 Future Council Meeting Agenda and Workload Planning

The SSC will discuss future workload planning matters and report to the Council on this matter under Agenda Item J.3 scheduled for Monday, March 11. Future workload planning may include discussion with SSC subcommittees to plan for Council tasks noted in future Council meeting quick reference agendas or year-at-a-glance topics. The SSC statement regularly provides a table with important meeting dates and timelines.

Relative to the year-at-a-glance, SSC discussion is anticipated relative to updating the Council's Research and Data Needs. The SSC should further develop a proposed schedule of next steps and it would be helpful to document key planning points in SSC italicized notes for future reference.

## C. Salmon Management

### C.2 Review of 2023 Fisheries and Summary of 2024 Stock Forecasts

Each year in March, the Council reviews the Stock Assessment and Fisheries Evaluation (SAFE) document (Review of Ocean Salmon Fisheries) and stock abundance projections (Preseason Report I), scheduled under Agenda Item C.2. The SSC will review the forecasts for stocks that are required to have annual catch limits (ACLs) specified and determine if the forecasts represent the best scientific information available for use in modeling 2024 ocean salmon fisheries, specifying acceptable biological catches (ABCs), and setting ACLs. Three stocks are required to have ACLs

specified – Sacramento River fall Chinook, Klamath River fall Chinook, and Willapa Bay natural coho. Note that any advanced version of these forecasts is a draft, which will be updated shortly before the SSC convenes. The Salmon Technical Team (STT) will be available for discussion or questions. The SSC will provide any recommendations under Agenda Item C.2 on Wednesday, March 6.

#### C.4 Klamath River Fall Chinook Workgroup Report and 2024 Management Options – Final Guidance

The Ad-Hoc Klamath River fall Chinook (KRFC) Workgroup was formed to help the Council determine how and if the management measures for KRFC currently in use may need to change as the stock responds to the removal of four dams on the Klamath River.

The Workgroup will provide a report, which will include a preliminary stock analysis and an array of options for constraints mainly to the Harvest Control Rule for this stock. The SSC is being asked to review the new stock recruit data and analysis, note any issues, and consider it relative to use in Council decision-making. This agenda item will be covered over two days to allow time for contemplation, with SSC recommendations provided under the initial Agenda Item C.4 on Wednesday, March 6.

### F. Groundfish Management

#### F.2 Consideration of Additional California Quillback Rockfish Analyses and Adopt Rebuilding Analysis

In November 2023, the Council requested the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee review issues raised by two public comments provided by Dr. Mark Maunder and Dr. Ray Hilborn. The purpose of reviewing this information was to provide the Council with further guidance on using the existing 2021 California quillback rockfish assessment ([Langseth et al. 2021](#)) and corresponding 2023 rebuilding analysis ([Langseth 2023](#)). The SSC GFSC review meeting was held January 26, 2024, which followed a meeting-specific Terms of Reference, with outcomes and a post-meeting summary report to be presented to the full SSC in March 2024 (see SSC Materials section of Briefing Book). Any GFSC recommendations should be considered by the full SSC, after which the full SSC will advise the Council.

In November 2023, the SSC reviewed and endorsed the 2023 rebuilding analysis as the best scientific information available for management decision-making for fisheries in 2025 and beyond. The Council postponed adoption of the rebuilding analyses at that time and requested further review. The SSC should provide any recommendations or comments regarding the additional consideration and adoption of the rebuilding analyses under Agenda Item F.2 on Thursday, March 7.

#### F.3 Initial Stock Assessment Plan and Terms of Reference (TOR)

This agenda item covers initial planning for groundfish stock assessments which are anticipated to be completed in 2025 and 2027 to inform the harvest specifications and management measures for fisheries in 2027 and beyond. Additionally, the Council will consider draft Terms of Reference for

the stock assessment process conducted in 2025-2026. The Council is scheduled to make final decisions on groundfish stock assessment planning at their June 2024 meeting.

The Council is scheduled to adopt a preliminary list of groundfish species to be assessed in 2025 and 2027. The decision on which stocks to assess in the next two assessment cycles entails whether the assessment should be a full assessment, a data-moderate assessment, or an update assessment and whether they require peer review by a Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel or only a review by the SSC. Council policy on this subject in the past has been to schedule no more than ten full assessments in a given year, with no more than two full assessments reviewed at each STAR Panel. A maximum number of STAR Panels should be considered for next year (2025).

Drs. Jim Hastie and Chantel Wetzel, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC), will report on proposed stock assessment priorities (Attachments 1, 2, and 3). While the proposed stock assessment priorities are helpful in deciding which stocks are assessed next year, it is important to note these “priorities” are informative, not prescriptive. Lastly, NMFS plans to submit two additional items for the Supplemental Briefing Book, including a report detailing current issues in conducting assessments and the ability to conduct assessments at target assessment frequencies.

Recommendations to the full SSC on process improvements to the stock assessment process and proposed revisions to the relevant TORs are provided in an SSC GFSC report from their January 17-18, 2024 review meeting (see SSC Materials section of Briefing Book). Only the stock assessment review process and rebuilding analyses TOR documents have recommended edits for the next cycle. Preliminary draft 2025-2026 TOR documents will be provided for the Supplemental Briefing Book.

The full SSC is requested to provide recommendations on preliminary 2025 and 2027 stock assessment priorities by species, type of assessment (full, data-moderate, or update), and draft language for the TORs, under Agenda Item F.3 on Friday, March 8.

#### F.7 2025-2026 Fisheries Analysis Update and Adopt California Quillback Rockfish Harvest Specifications and Rebuilding Parameters

Under this agenda item, the Council is scheduled to provide guidance regarding the overwinter analyses to the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) and Council staff, as appropriate, and adopt California quillback rockfish harvest specifications and rebuilding parameters.

Items relative to the overwinter analyses include allocation considerations, organization of documents, clarification of November 2023 motions, consideration of correcting two scientific names in Federal Regulation, and notification of ACL technical corrections for two species. SSC review is not required on these elements unless a technical issue is noted.

Under Agenda Item F.2, the Council is scheduled to adopt the California quillback rockfish rebuilding analysis. Under Agenda Item F.7, the Council is scheduled to adopt a preliminary preferred rebuilding strategy, associated 2025-2026 harvest specifications (OFL/ABC/ACL), and refine the range of alternatives, as necessary. The rebuilding strategy specifies which alternative  $SPR_{target}$  harvest rate is used to rebuild the stock (e.g.,  $SPR_{50}$ , ABC rule, etc.) and analyzed in the

rebuilding plan. The  $SPR_{target}$  is the rate that will achieve rebuilding of probability of 50% by a target year ( $T_{target}$ ).

For reference, at the November 2023 Council meeting, the GMT recommended the alternative  $SPR_{target}$  harvest rates of  $F=0$  and the ABC rule to represent the range of rebuilding alternatives for analysis ([Agenda Item E.7.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, November 2023](#)). These two “bookends” represent the shortest time for rebuilding ( $F=0$  with  $T_{target}=2045$ ) and the highest yield harvest rate strategy within the rebuilding timeline (ABC rule with  $T_{target}=2060$ ).

In November 2023, the Council adopted a range of 2025 California quillback harvest specification alternatives for analysis. The low end of the range was based on the ABC control rule from the 2023 rebuilding analysis (OFL/ACL 1.52 mt/1.3 mt) and the high end was based on the  $SPR_{50\%}$  harvest rate MSY proxy from the 2021 data-moderate assessment, with a category 3 buffer (OFL/ACL 8.41 mt/5.06 mt) ([Agenda Item E.2.a, Supp CDFW Report 2, November 2023](#)).

The SSC will review harvest specifications in the California quillback rockfish rebuilding analyses and recommend the 2025 OFLs to inform Council decisions. The Council adoption of a rebuilding strategy is needed prior to 2026 values being identified. SSC recommendations will be provided under Agenda Item F.7 on Sunday, March 10.

## H. Ecosystem Management

### H.1 California Current Annual Ecosystem Status Report

The SSC will review the California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) State of the California Current report and provide their recommendations to the Council on the use and future content of this report. The SSC will also evaluate a list of proposed topics for review by the SSC Ecosystem Subcommittee and identify priority topics for discussion next September (e.g., fall 2024). A presentation will be made to the SSC by members of the NOAA California Current IEA Team. The SSC will provide their comments and recommendations under Agenda Item H.1 scheduled for Saturday, March 9.

Thank you all for your dedication to West Coast fishery management and the Council process.

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Enclosures include:

#### Council and SSC Administrative Matters (A and J)

1. Agenda Item A – Council Meeting Agenda and Executive Director’s Report
2. Agenda Item J.2 – Membership Appointments and Council Operating Procedures
3. Agenda Item J.3 – Future Council Meeting Agenda and Workload Planning

#### Cross Fishery Management Plan (FMP) (E)

1. Agenda Item E.1 – Council and SSC Discussion

Salmon Management (C)

1. Agenda Item C.2 – Review of 2023 Fisheries and Summary of 2024 Stock Forecasts
2. Agenda Item C.4 – Klamath River Fall Chinook Workgroup Report and 2024 Management Options – Final Action

Groundfish Management (F)

1. Agenda Item F.2 – Consideration of Additional California Quillback Rockfish Analyses and Adopt Rebuilding Analysis
2. Agenda Item F.3 – Initial Stock Assessment Plan and Terms of Reference (TOR)
3. Agenda Item F.7 – 2025-2026 Fisheries Analysis Update and Adopt California Quillback Rockfish Harvest Specifications and Rebuilding Parameters

Ecosystem Management (H)

1. Agenda Item H.1 – California Current Annual Ecosystem Status Report

SSC Agenda, Draft SSC Minutes, Closed Session, Etc.

1. March 2024 SSC Agenda
2. Draft November 2023 SSC Minutes
3. SSC Supplemental Materials
4. Closed Session
5. Informational Reports
6. General Information and Council Roster