

Pacific Whiting Conservation Cooperative  
Amendment 20 Catcher/Processor Cooperative

Annual Report 2023

Submitted to NOAA Fisheries

March 2024

Pacific Whiting Conservation Cooperative  
Final Annual Report for 2023

**Introduction**

In 1997, the owners of the catcher/processor (C/P) vessels operating in the Pacific whiting fishery formed the Pacific Whiting Conservation Cooperative (PWCC) to coordinate their collective harvest and research efforts. A private contract dictates PWCC activities and a harvest agreement guides efficient management and accurate accounting for PWCC member company harvest.

In 2011, NOAA Fisheries rationalized the Pacific coast groundfish trawl fishery in Amendments 20 and 21 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. NOAA Fisheries summarized the significant effects of Amendment 20 on the shoreside groundfish trawl fishery, mothership whiting fishery, and C/P whiting fishery in the September 2, 2011, proposed rule for the Program Improvement and Enhancement Rule (76 FR 54888):

*“In January 2011, NMFS and the Pacific Fishery Management Council set up a new management program called the trawl rationalization program. This program significantly changes how two of these groups work. Shore trawlers now fish under their own set of individual species quotas by vessel.... [T]he mothership fishery works as a coop where catcher-vessels and motherships work together collectively. The catcher-processor fleet continues as a single coop.”*

Trawl rationalization regulations require cooperative managers to submit an annual report of the prior year’s fishery to NOAA Fisheries and the Pacific Fishery Management Council in March the following year.

**Purpose of Report**

This report discloses all information required through Federal Regulations at 50 CFR 660.113(d) (3). The table at the end of this report provides the C/P cooperative's total catch (retained and discarded) of whiting, salmon, Pacific halibut, rockfish, groundfish, and other species on a vessel-by-vessel basis. The catch data in this report was provided by Sea State, Inc. (a private, third-party catch monitoring firm), and was collected by the NOAA Fisheries At-Sea Hake Observer Program.

Prior to trawl rationalization, NOAA Fisheries provided a similar report, but with catch information summarized at the sector level rather than individual vessel information. NOAA Fisheries has access to catch information at the C/P vessel level. Therefore, PWCC production of this more detailed report should reduce NOAA Fisheries workload and cost burden.

## Reporting Requirements

Federal regulations (50CFR660.113 (d) (3)) detail the report requirements:

*“(3) Annual coop report. The designated coop manager for the C/P coop must submit an annual report to NMFS and the Council by March 31 each year, before a coop permit is issued for that year. The annual coop report will contain information about the previous year's fishery, including:*

- (i) The C/P sector's annual allocation of Pacific whiting;*
- (ii) The C/P coop's actual retained and discarded catch of Pacific whiting, salmon, Pacific halibut, rockfish, groundfish, and other species on a vessel-by-vessel basis;*
- (iii) A description of the method used by the C/P coop to monitor performance of cooperative vessels that participated in the fishery;*
- (iv) A description of any actions taken by the C/P coop in response to any vessels that exceed their allowed catch and bycatch; and*
- (v) Plans for the current year's C/P coop fishery, including the companies participating in the cooperative, the harvest agreement, and catch monitoring and reporting requirements.”*

### A. C/P Sector's Annual Allocation of Pacific Whiting

In April 2023, NOAA Fisheries issued the C/P cooperative permit, which was effective on May 1, 2023.

As specified at 50 CFR 660.160(c)(2) *“The C/P Coop Program allocation of Pacific whiting is equal to the catcher/processor sector allocation. Only a single coop may be formed in the catcher/processor sector with the one permitted coop receiving the catcher/processor sector allocation.”*

For 2023, the proposed initial C/P sector amount of Pacific whiting (NOAA Fisheries, Initial Administrative Determination and Notice of Right to Appeal, April 18, 2023) is:

C/P sector whiting allocation	mt	pounds
Pacific whiting	129,226	284,982,747

NOAA Fisheries finalized the allocation in the 2023 whiting fishery final rule, published on May 31, 2023 (88 FR 34783).

In September 2023, NOAA Fisheries implemented a 45,000 mt reapportionment of tribal whiting to the non-tribal sectors (September 27, 2023; 88 FR 75238). The revised allocations were Tribal 35,806 mt; C/P 155,566 mt; mothership 102,047 mt; shoreside 178,581 mt.

## **B. C/P Cooperative's Actual Retained and Discarded Catch of Pacific Whiting, Salmon, Pacific Halibut, Rockfish, Groundfish, and Other Species on a Vessel-by-Vessel Basis**

Table 1 provides 2023 catch data. Species are grouped based on NOAA Fisheries guidance.

## **C. Description of the Method Used by the C/P Cooperative to Monitor Performance of Cooperative Vessels that Participated in the Fishery**

Each vessel in the C/P Cooperative carries two NOAA Fisheries-certified observers to monitor and account for the catch of Pacific whiting, non-target fish species, and prohibited species. Observers report each vessel's catch on a daily basis to both the NOAA Fisheries Observer Program in Seattle and to Sea State, Inc.

For 2023, the C/P Cooperative contracted with Sea State, Inc., to process the observer program catch data and to provide in-season management support. Sea State and the C/P Cooperative manager provide catch reports to each C/P vessel, the C/P fleet, and the C/P Cooperative. These reports may include cumulative fleet-wide and vessel-level catch data as well as tow-by-tow summaries. Fleet managers can reconcile the tow-by-tow catch information provided by Sea State against their own catch records to identify possible data errors and ensure accurate catch accounting throughout the fishing season. Sea State reports also help vessels to identify and avoid fishing areas where incidental catch of species of concern is occurring. Generally, this information can also be shared with the other whiting sectors to ensure fishery-wide transparency.

Catch aboard C/P vessels is weighed using flow scales and motion-compensated platform scales. The vessel operators test the flow scale daily to ensure the accuracy of the data collected by the NOAA Fisheries-certified observer. Regulations at 50 CFR 660.15 state that vessel owners, operators, and managers are jointly and severally responsible for their vessel's compliance with the requirements specified in this section. In addition to regulatory requirements for the vessel operator, NOAA Fisheries-certified observers are instructed to test the motion-compensated platform scale during their shift and to be present during testing of the flow scale. The observer determines the species composition of the catch. The number of C/P hauls sampled is high, at or near 100 percent, because there are two observers.

C/P vessels try to provide conditions that allow observers to take large samples of individual hauls. The use of two observers, flow and platform scales, and high rates of sampling leads to very accurate catch accounting for Pacific whiting, non-whiting groundfish, and prohibited species. The C/P Cooperative acknowledges and agrees that minimizing incidental catch of species of concern to the extent practicable is one of its primary objectives. In general, incidental catch of non-whiting species in the C/P sector is

relatively low. For 2023, each C/P Cooperative member agreed to employ bycatch avoidance techniques recommended by the PWCC Board of Directors and Sea State, Inc.

#### **D. Description of Any Actions Taken by the C/P Cooperative in Response to Any Vessels that Exceed Their Allowed Catch and Bycatch**

In 2023, none of the vessels in the C/P Cooperative exceeded their allowed whiting catch. Year-end catch of darkblotched rockfish was 89.96 mt, which exceeded at-sea set-aside amount of 76.4 mt. Total C/P sablefish catch was 130.23 mt, compared to the at-sea set-aside of 100 mt. Total C/P shortspine thornyhead catch was 73.8 mt, compared to the at-sea set aside of 70 mt. The overall Chinook cap of 11,000 fish established for the whiting sector was not exceeded. The C/P bycatch was 3,354 Chinook salmon, and total Chinook salmon bycatch by all whiting sectors was 5,998 Chinook. Higher C/P Chinook and set-aside bycatch predominantly occurred during the spring season.

As a result, vessels in the C/P sector implemented several provisions in the spring and fall seasons to limit additional incidental catch of rockfish set-aside species and Chinook salmon. The additional measures included:

- Additional information about test tows and bycatch avoidance measures in C/P daily reports;
- Test tows when entering new areas;
- Closures in high bycatch areas and night fishing restrictions;
- Additional movement rules when encountering high rates or numbers of Chinook salmon or constraining rockfish species;
- Additional communication within and between whiting sectors.

These additional measures limited additional bycatch and ensured that higher spring bycatch did not negatively impact other sectors participation in the whiting fishery or other West Coast groundfish fisheries. Although bycatch of set-aside species and Chinook was higher this year due to unprecedented conditions on the fishing grounds, particularly in the spring, Chinook salmon bycatch for all whiting sectors ended slightly above the 2011-2023 average bycatch of 5,660 Chinook. Although several at-sea set asides were exceeded, total attainment for these species was below the annual catch limits (ACLs) established for these species.

#### **E. Plans for the 2024 C/P Cooperative Fishery, Including the Companies Participating in the Cooperative, the Harvest Agreement, and Catch Monitoring and Reporting Requirements**

For 2024, companies participating in the C/P Cooperative include:  
AMERICAN SEAFOODS COMPANY LLC; GLACIER FISH COMPANY LLC; TRIDENT SEAFOODS CORPORATION

2024 C/P Cooperative Pacific Whiting Harvest Schedule:

Member	Percentage of Annual Member Catcher Processor Allocation
American Seafoods Company LLC	49.4%
Trident Seafoods Corporation	29.6%
Glacier Fish Company LLC	21.0%

2024 C/P Cooperative Catch Monitoring and Reporting Requirements:

Each member of the C/P Cooperative carries two NOAA Fisheries-certified observers aboard each of its vessels to monitor and account for total catch, including catch of prohibited species. Observers report each vessel's daily catch to the NOAA Fisheries Observer Program in Seattle and to Sea State.

For 2024, the C/P Cooperative will contract with Sea State, Inc. to process observer program catch data and provide in-season management support. Sea State regularly provides catch reports to each C/P vessel, the C/P fleet, and the C/P Cooperative. These reports may include cumulative fleet-wide and vessel-level catch data as well as tow-by-tow summaries.

As noted above, catch is weighed using flow scales and motion-compensated platform scales that are tested daily. Observers determine the species composition of the catch. Because there are two observers, the number of hauls sampled is at or near 100 percent. Moreover, C/P vessels try to provide conditions that allow observers to take large samples of individual hauls. The use of two observers, flow and platform scales, and high rates of sampling results in accurate catch accounting for whiting, non-whiting groundfish, and prohibited species.

For the 2024 season, the C/P sector will implement enhanced communication to other sectors in the event of high bycatch occurrences. In addition, the C/P sector will implement and adjust bycatch avoidance measures using catch and bycatch information from both the C/P and mothership whiting sectors. We also expect that we may need to make minor adjustments to the harvest schedule to accommodate member vessels inseason needs. For example, one member company may choose to provide some percentage of their annual catcher processor allocation to another member company if the former company has completed operations for the year and the latter is still active in the fishery.

###

Table 1. 2023 Catcher-Processor Catch Data (individual vessel catch data other than whiting is removed below for confidentiality)

Report Group	C/P Total Catch	At-Sea % Attainment	Alaska Ocean	American Dynasty	American Triumph	Arctic Fjord 2	Island Enterprise	Northern Eagle	Northern Jaeger	Ocean Rover	Seattle Enterprise	Starbound
<b>ROUNDFISH (mt)</b>												
Pacific Whiting	107,052.81	-	5,388	6,930	18,959	749	9,204	15,329	13,641	18,867	9,144	8,908
Pacific Cod	0.04	-										
Lingcod	0.72	14.59										
Pollock												
Sablefish	130.23	100.00										
Roundfish Unidentified												
<b>FLATFISH (mt)</b>												
Arrowtooth Flounder	40.07	75.78										
Dover Sole	1.04	16.25										
English Sole	0.69	-										
Petrale Sole	*	0.00										
Starry Flounder												
Other Flatfish	19.54	69.27										
<b>ROCKFISH (mt)</b>												
Pacific Ocean Perch	75.77	27.93										
Shortbelly Rockfish	4.43	-										
Widow Rockfish	184.01	43.33										
Canary Rockfish	19.61	55.95										
Yellowtail Rockfish	236.11	83.20										
Thornyhead Rockfish Unidentified	*	-										
Shortspine Thornyhead	73.80	100.00										
Longspine Thornyhead Rockfish	0.01	-										
Darkblotched Rockfish	89.86	100.00										
Yelloweye Rockfish	*	-										
Rockfish Unidentified	*	-										
Blackgill Rockfish	0.04	-										

Report Group	C/P Total Catch	At-Sea % Attainment	Alaska Ocean	American Dynasty	American Triumph	Arctic Fjord 2	Island Enterprise	Northern Eagle	Northern Jaeger	Ocean Rover	Seattle Enterprise	Starbound
Rougheye Rockfish	29.96	-										
Minor Shelf Rockfish North	5.44	17.60										
Minor Slope Rockfish North	72.78	30.87										
<b>REMAINING GROUND FISH (mt)</b>												
Spiny Dogfish Shark	121.38	-										
Longnose Skate	1.88	57.56										
Other Groundfish	0.30	-										
<b>PROHIBITED and PROTECTED SPECIES</b>												
Chinook Salmon (count)	3,354	-										
Chum Salmon (count)	0	-										
Coho Salmon (count)	*	-										
Pink Salmon (count)	18	-										
Sockeye Salmon (count)												
Steelhead Salmon (count)												
Pacific Halibut (mt)	0.19	1.89										
Eulachon	2,000	-										
<b>NONGROUND FISH SPECIES (mt)</b>												
American Shad	12.09	-										
Pacific Herring	0.38	-										
Humboldt Squid												
Squid Unidentified	143.93	-										
Jack Mackerel	75.32	-										
KING-OF-THE-SALMON	18.95	-										
Pacific Mackerel	29.67	-										
Pacific Sardine	0.12	-										
All Other Non-Groundfish	63.08	-										



## Appendix

### 2023 Post-season C/P Cooperative Salmon Mitigation (SMP) Report

#### 1. Name of the SMP and SMP identification number.

Salmon Mitigation Plan for the C/P Cooperative. SMP identification number is: SMP-2023-03.

#### 2. A comprehensive description of Chinook salmon bycatch avoidance measures used in the fishing year in which the SMP was approved, including but not limited to, information sharing, area closures, movement rules, salmon excluder use, and internal bycatch guidelines.

The C/P Cooperative implemented Bycatch Avoidance Measures (BAMs) to ensure the sector avoids Chinook salmon at all times, in all areas, and at all levels of whiting. These BAMs are considered best practices for the C/P sector and will be implemented to minimize Chinook bycatch coastwide as a standard operating procedure. C/P Cooperative members and the Cooperative manager receive daily catch and bycatch reports from the C/P vessels. There is regular communication about fishery performance between members and the manager. As warranted, the C/P Cooperative and Cooperative manager adjust bycatch management protocols in response to fishery performance with the objective of minimizing overall Chinook salmon bycatch that occurs during the entirety of the C/P fishing season while seeking to fully utilize the C/P sector whiting allocation. The items listed below are specific tools and protocols used by the C/P Cooperative, Cooperative manager, and C/P vessels to minimize Chinook salmon bycatch.

- **Chinook Guideline Limit.** PWCC members will take all reasonable measures to limit Chinook bycatch Coastwide during the spring and fall whiting fisheries. Each company will manage its Chinook salmon bycatch to a threshold based on the company's whiting shares, less a buffer. If a company approaches its threshold, the members will meet to discuss whether further restrictions might be necessary or advisable to maintain Chinook salmon bycatch below these thresholds, while also working to harvest their whiting allocations.
- **Sea State Management.** Sea State has full access to C/P whiting catch, bycatch, and location information. The members direct Sea State to issue in-season hotspot guidance about areas for specific C/P vessels and/or all C/P vessels to avoid. Applicable C/P vessels will avoid fishing in hotspot areas for the duration of the hotspot notice.
- **Salmon Excluders.** Salmon excluders are used regularly by C/P vessels to minimize salmon bycatch, particularly when fishing inside 200 fathoms.
- **Information Exchange.** When an amount OR rate of Chinook are caught in a tow that jeopardizes the sectors ability to achieve its whiting allocation, C/P vessels are required to send a real-time report (via email) to the other PWCC members and

vessels of tow location, depth, duration, time of day, whiting catch, Chinook amount, and any other relevant information.

- **Mandatory Movement.** If the number AND rate of Chinook caught in a single haul puts the sector at risk of not achieving its allocation, the vessel will move fishing locations in good faith far enough to not encounter the same fishing conditions, and perform the Information Exchange required in the preceding bullet. The specific thresholds that trigger movement are determined annually and may be adjusted by cooperative members inseason based on factors such as remaining whiting allocation, CPUE, date, Chinook bycatch, and participation level.

As detailed in Section D of the 2023 PWCC Annual report, the C/P sector encountered a high rate of Chinook salmon bycatch during the spring season, and implemented additional, enhanced communication and avoidance measures to avoid Chinook bycatch during the fall season.

*3. An evaluation of the effectiveness of these avoidance measures in minimizing Chinook salmon bycatch.*

The C/P Cooperative's total 2023 Chinook salmon bycatch (3,354 fish) was higher relative to the average since 2011 (2,352 Chinook). Approximately 65 percent of the 3,354 Chinook and 37 percent of the C/P sectors total whiting were taken in the spring season. During the particularly challenging spring season the C/P sector implemented area closures, night fishing restrictions, test tow requirements and move along rules. These rules were also implemented during the fall season. Following implementation of the enhanced bycatch avoidance measures, the C/P sector caught 35 percent of the total Chinook and 63 percent of the whiting in the fall season. Overall, the whiting sector Chinook salmon catch was at 53 percent of the 11,000 fish allowed in the 2017 Salmon Biological Opinion. While the number of Chinook was higher than the recent average, catch was still below the amount allowed in the Biological Opinion. The improved performance between the spring and fall seasons demonstrates that the avoidance measures used by the C/P Cooperative in 2023 were effective in minimizing Chinook salmon bycatch.

*4. A description of any amendments to the terms of the SMP that were approved by NMFS during the fishing year in which the SMP was approved and the reasons the amendments to the SMP were made.*

There were no amendments to the terms of this SMP for 2023.

###