Pacific Whiting Conservation Cooperative
Amendment 20 Catcher/Processor Cooperative

Annual Report 2024

Submitted to NOAA Fisheries

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Pacific Whiting Conservation Cooperative
Final Annual Report for 2024

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:*
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> *(i) The C/P sector's annual allocation of Pacific whiting;*
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> *(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;*
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> *(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 2024, NOAA Fisheries issued the C/P cooperative permit, which was effective on May 1, 2024.

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 2024, the C/P sector amount of Pacific whiting was 114,760 mt (253,002,492 lb). NOAA Fisheries finalized the allocation in the 2024 whiting fishery final rule, published on June 24, 2024 (89 FR 52398).

In September 2024, NOAA Fisheries implemented a 45,000 mt reapportionment of tribal whiting to the non-tribal sectors (October 22, 2024; 89 FR 84302). The revised allocations were Tribal: 26,755.95 mt; C/P: 130,059.53 mt; mothership: 91,806.73 mt; shoreside: 160,661.78 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 2 provides 2024 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 2024, 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 2024, 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 2024, none of the vessels in the C/P Cooperative exceeded their allowed whiting catch. Harvesting conditions were challenging in 2024. The C/P sector caught 47 percent of its post-reapportionment whiting allocation (61,909.39 mt caught of 130,060 mt).

For most at-sea set aside species, attainment was less than 60 percent of the 2024 set aside allocations (Table 1). Chinook and coho salmon catch were also well below the targets set in the 2017 Salmon Biological Opinion for the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery.

However, 2024 at-sea sector catch exceeded the set asides for sablefish north of 36° N. lat. and shortspine thornyhead north 34° 27' N. lat. by over 220 percent. Additional details for these species is included below, and in the November 2024 Groundfish Management Team Report on Inseason Adjustments (Supplemental GMT Report 1, Agenda Item I.6.a).

Table 1. 2024 Total at-sea whiting sector mortality, set aside amount, and percent attainment.

Stock	2024 At-Sea Mortality (mt)	Set aside (mt)	Percent attainment
Lingcod	0.2	15	1%
Sablefish	220.5	100	221%
Arrowtooth flounder	37.3	70	53%
Dover sole	2.3	10	23%
Petrale sole	0.0	5	0%
Canary rockfish	1.1	36	3%
Darkblotched rockfish	39.4	76.4	52%
Pacific ocean perch	16.0	300	5%
Shortspine thornyhead	154.9	70	221%
Widow rockfish	66.5	476	14%
Yellowtail rockfish	14.4	320	4.5%
Shelf rockfish north complex	1.8	35	5.14%
Slope rockfish north complex	83.2	300	28%
Longnose skate	2.2	5	44%

Sablefish North of 36°N. Lat.
Year-end sablefish north catch in the at-sea sectors was 220.5 mt, which exceeded the at-sea set-aside amount of 100 mt by 221 percent. The total C/P catch was 195.34 mt. Total

coastwide mortality from all sources in 2024 was 5,503.6 mt (71 percent of the 7,730 mt sablefish north ACL). Despite catch in excess of the set aside, the 2024 sablefish north ACL was not at risk. New information provided in the 2023 update assessment for sablefish shows multiple large year-classes in recent years (e.g., 2016, 2020, and 2021) contributing to large increases in the spawning biomass at the end of the time series. The population is projected to continue increasing as new recruits mature. The 2025 sablefish north ACL is increased by 238 percent compared to 2023 ACL. The 2025 sablefish north at-sea set aside is also increased to 429 mt, from 100 mt in 2024. This increased set-aside should accommodate sablefish catch in the whiting fishery in 2025.

Shortspine thornyhead
Year-end shortspine thornyhead catch in the at-sea sectors was 154.9 mt, which exceeded the at-sea set-aside amount of 70 mt by 221 percent. The total C/P catch was 145.99 mt. Only about 16 mt of shortspine thornyhead catch occurred during the spring season (May and June), while the remaining 90 percent of catch occurred in September and October. Despite catch in excess of the set aside, the 2024 shortspine thornyhead ACL was not at risk. Total coastwide mortality from all sources in 2024 was 590.76 mt (553.11 mt north of Point Conception – 41.6 percent of the 1,328 mt north ACL; and 37.65 mt south of Point Conception – 5 percent of the 702 mt south ACL).

Actions responding to at-sea set aside overages
Both at-sea set aside overages were primarily due to catch in the C/P sector. This is consistent with at-sea sector activity in 2024 – the C/P sector was active for more of the fishing year than the mothership sector and landed a greater proportion of its whiting allocation.

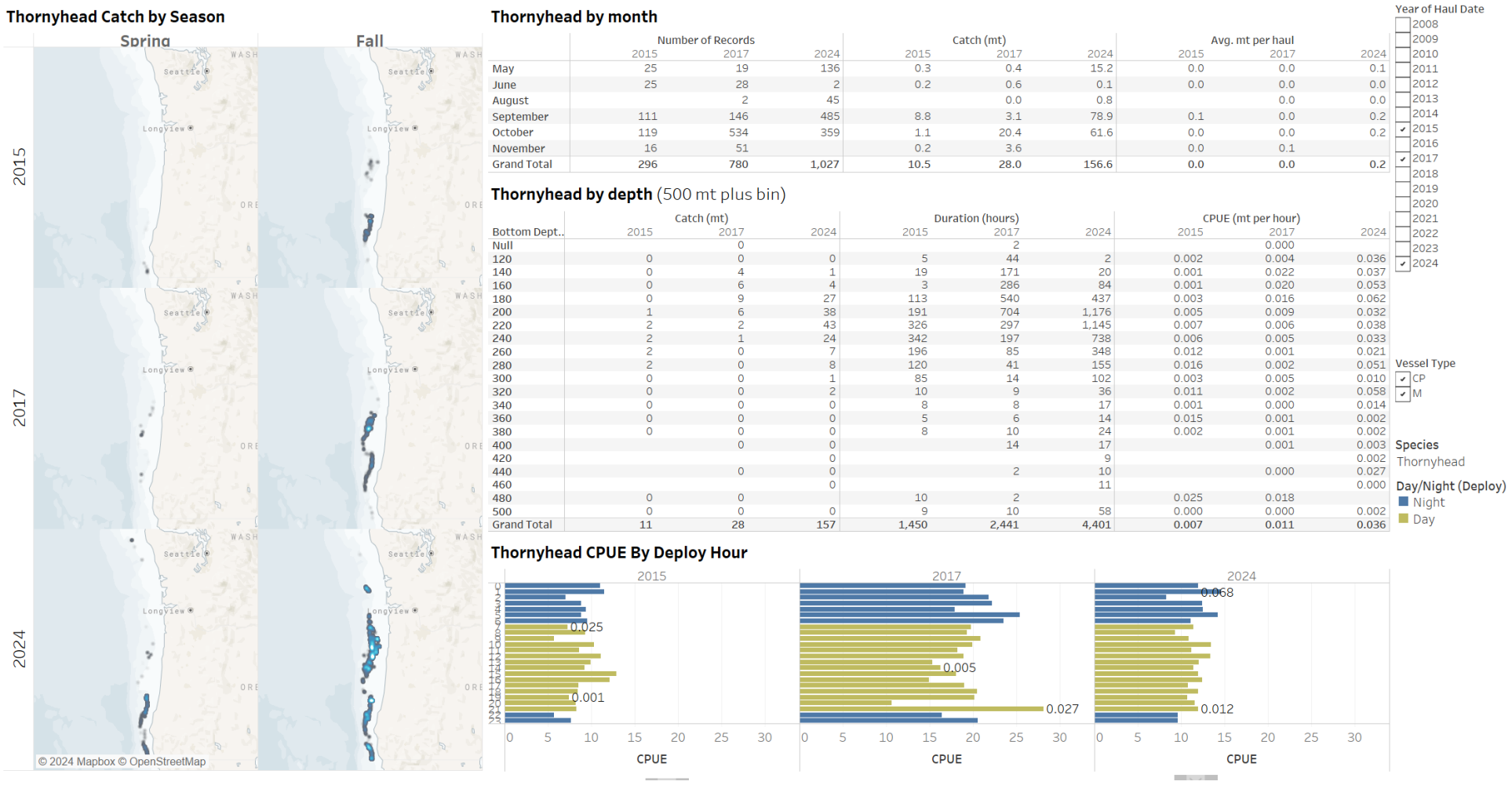
Shortspine thornyhead was one of the at-sea sector's most challenging bycatch species for 2024. The C/P sector tried to balance shortspine thornyhead avoidance with avoiding more sensitive bycatch species like Chinook salmon, and ended up successfully avoiding all bycatch species other than sablefish. However, the extremely challenging whiting harvest conditions, coupled with the unavoidable shortspine thornyhead bycatch, directly contributed to low whiting catch and high costs for our C/Ps in 2024.

Shortspine thornyhead interactions in the fall whiting fishery were pervasive, significantly higher than in 2023 (73.8 mt total), and showed no pattern in time or area. Figure 1 compares shortspine thornyhead interactions in the whiting fishery across three fishing years – 2015 (lowest whiting utilization in the past 10 years), 2017 (highest), and 2024. There were small amount of shortspine thornyhead bycatch each day and in every haul on each of our 10 platforms, across all fishing areas, depths, and haul times in September and October 2024. This contrasts with lightening strike bycatch events that were common for darkblotched and POP in past fishing years. Figure 1 shows a 2024 shortspine thornyhead catch per unit effort at least double that in either 2015 (lowest whiting utilization) or 2017 (highest) for each depth bin.

In response to the increased shortspine thornyhead bycatch during the fall fishery, we worked with Sea State to analyze encounters to determine appropriate avoidance measures we could apply to the entire fleet. Our analysis showed that there was no discernable pattern to the interactions around which we could form avoidance measures. In September 2024, as catch was approaching the set-aside, we ultimately focused on increasing reporting and communication across all whiting sectors, and applied our existing movement rule requirements for high encounter rates. Until this year, shortspine thornyhead was not included in our daily intersector reporting and had such low encounter rates that it was not necessary to apply movement rules. We notified NMFS in early October that catch exceeded the shortspine thornyhead set aside.

The 2025 shortspine thornyhead ACL is reduced compared to 2024 based on assessment information that indicates that stock size has decreased. In addition, the ACL has been restructured to be coastwide. The total shortspine thornyhead mortality in 2024 would be 72 percent of the 2025 coastwide ACL of 815 mt. In light of the upcoming changes in management structure, we're prepared to implement the same reporting and movement requirements from the start of the fishing year and will develop additional rules to limit bycatch so that C/P sector shortspine thornyhead catch does not impact other groundfish sectors.

Figure 1. Shortspine thornyhead catch in the at-sea whiting sectors by season, month, and depth, as well as CPUE by net deployment hour, for 2015 (lowest whiting utilization in the last 10 years), 2017 (highest), and 2024. Figure created by Sea State.



E. Plans for the 2025 C/P Cooperative Fishery, Including the Companies Participating in the Cooperative, the Harvest Agreement, and Catch Monitoring and Reporting Requirements

For 2025, companies participating in the C/P Cooperative include:

AMERICAN SEAFOODS COMPANY LLC; GLACIER FISH COMPANY LLC; TRIDENT SEAFOODS CORPORATION

2025 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%

2025 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 2025, 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 2025 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.

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Table 2a. 2024 Catcher-Processor Catch whiting catch by vessel.

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
Pacific Whiting	61,916	54%	14,245	4,359	4,956	2,017	4,668	8,636	6,438	6,325	6,523	3,749

Table 2b. 2024 Cather-Processor Catch by species, at the cooperative level. Individual vessel catch for species other than whting is not reported, consistent with Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act confidentiality rules.

Report Group	C/P Total Catch
ROUNDFISH (mt)	
Pacific Cod	
Lingcod	0.03
Pollock	0.00
Sablefish	195.35
Roundfish Unidentified	0.14
FLATFISH (mt)	
Arrowtooth Flounder	35.85
Dover Sole	2.14
English Sole	0.06
Petrale Sole	
Starry Flounder	
Other Flatfish	0.00
Pacific Sanddab	
Rex Sole	20.19
Rock Sole	0.00
Flathead Sole	0.00
Flatfish Unidentified	0.00

Report Group	C/P Total Catch
ROCKFISH (mt)	
Pacific Ocean Perch	15.39
Shortbelly Rockfish	0.09
Widow Rockfish	54.04
Canary Rockfish	0.25
Yellowtail Rockfish	0.11
Thornyhead Rockfish Unidentified	0.00
Shortspine Thornyhead	145.99
Longspine Thornyhead Rockfish	1.94
Darkblotched Rockfish	36.09
Yellowmouth Rockfish	0.25
Rockfish Unidentified	0.00
Blackgill Rockfish	0.12
Rougheye Rockfish	26.14
REMAINING GROUNDFISH (mt)	
Spiny Dogfish Shark	41.65
Longnose Skate	1.77
PROHIBITED and PROTECTED SPECIES	
Chinook Salmon (count)	455
Chum Salmon (count)	9
Coho Salmon (count)	0
Pink Salmon (count)	0
Sockeye Salmon (count)	0
Steelhead salmon (count)	0
Pacific Halibut	0.17

Report Group	C/P Total Catch
Eulachon	0.02
NON-GROUNDFISH SPECIES (mt)	
American Shad	0.03
Pacific Herring	0.10
Squid Unidentified	147.98
Jack Mackerel	65.75
King-of-the-Salmon	61.49
Pacific Mackerel	86.33
Pacific Sardine	0.19

Appendix

2024 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-2024-03.

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 employs Bycatch Avoidance Measures (BAMs) to ensure the sector avoids Chinook salmon at all times, in all areas, and at all levels of whiting catch. 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 the C/P Cooperative, Cooperative manager, and C/P vessels use to minimize Chinook salmon bycatch.

- **Chinook Guideline Limit.** PWCC members took all reasonable measures to limit Chinook bycatch Coastwide during the spring and fall whiting fisheries. Each company managed its Chinook salmon bycatch to a threshold based on the company's whiting shares, less a buffer. Our agreement requires that 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. Sea State did not need to issue hot spot guidance during 2024.
- **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 sent a real-time report (via email) to the other PWCC members and vessels and other

whiting sectors detailing 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 2024 PWCC Annual report, the C/P sector encountered a lower rate of Chinook salmon bycatch during the 2024 fishing year compared to 2025. The C/P sector caught 455 Chinook salmon (compared to Chinook 3,354 caught in the C/P sector 2023). The low salmon bycatch may be attributed in part due to difficult whiting fishing conditions in the spring and fall fisheries during 2024 – total whiting utilization across all sectors was 40 percent of the US allocation.

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

The C/P Cooperative's total 2024 Chinook salmon bycatch (455 Chinook in the C/P sector; 1,348 Chinook across all whiting sectors) was low relative to the average since 2020 (3,371 Chinook). Throughout the spring and fall fishing seasons, the C/P sector implemented test tow requirements and move along rules in response to high encounter rates. However, the fleet did not need to implement area closures or other time/areas restrictions because of the low overall rate of salmon encounters. Overall, the whiting sector Chinook salmon catch was at 12 percent of the 11,000 fish allowed in the 2017 Salmon Biological Opinion.

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 2024.

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