

PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL STAFF REPORT ON SPECIAL PROJECTS:
PROJECT PLANNING, UPDATES, AND CLARIFICATIONS – SPECIAL PROJECT 3, NEW
FISHING OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN BYCATCH ALLOWANCES

The objective of Special Project 3 (*New Fishing Opportunities within Bycatch Allowances*) is to support the development of climate-ready, adaptive fishing methods that minimize bycatch, with an initial focus on the U.S. West Coast Highly Migratory Species (HMS) fishery. The project consists of two primary components: (1) Further development of the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s (Council) HMS Roadmap – a document that serves as both a strategic plan and a workload prioritization tool for the future of the West Coast HMS fishery – with a particular focus on improving the Council’s Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) process as a way to accelerate the development of climate-ready fishing methods and practices while minimizing bycatch; and (2) Exploration of forward-looking tools, such as dynamic ocean management (DOM), that can facilitate more adaptive management strategies and fishing methods by using information and observations about changing ocean conditions. Special Project 3 envisions coupling these two pieces to allow the Council to better support the development of new or modified fishing systems that are climate-informed and effective at targeting HMS while minimizing bycatch.

To advance the first component of the project, the Council formed the Ad Hoc HMS Roadmap - Fisheries Innovation Workgroup (FIW) in November 2024. The FIW was tasked at that time with “developing and refining Council procedures which help facilitate the more rapid creation of new HMS gears and achieve the goals of the HMS Roadmap.” The work of the FIW is brought forward to the Council under HMS agenda items.

During the initial scoping phase of the second component of Special Project 3 at the March 2026 Council meeting, DOM Workshop Planning was brought forward to the Council under an Ecosystem agenda item. Going forward, it will be considered under an HMS agenda item due to its focus on West Coast HMS fisheries.

Special Project 3 Updates

HMS Roadmap/FIW Work

After meeting regularly since its formation in November 2024, the FIW is now in the process of developing final recommendations to the Council for consideration at the November 2026 meeting. These recommendations will build on earlier Council-endorsed proposals from the FIW regarding bycatch benchmarks and metrics and EFP guidance and materials, and will be incorporated into a new EFP evaluation framework that the Council will also consider in November. To complete its work prior to November, the FIW held a two-part webinar on August 24 and 27 and will meet for a final work session in late October.

Another of the FIW’s tasks was to update Council Operating Procedure (COP) 20 regarding HMS EFPs. The Council endorsed the FIW’s proposed edits to COP 20 at the March 2026 meeting and adopted them in June 2026, except for proposed changes to Section D regarding EFP applicant

eligibility. Council staff is currently working with the Enforcement Consultants (EC) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to revise this section, for Council consideration, to reflect current practices and to assess whether the eligibility review can occur earlier in the process, prior to the Council making recommendations to NMFS on EFPs. Because Section D also appears in COPs 19, 23, and 24 and applies across all Council-managed Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) with EFPs (including the Fishery Ecosystem Plan), revised eligibility language in Section D will be brought forward at a future meeting under a Cross-FMP agenda item. That effort will also consider whether to include the revised Section D language in COP 18, *Protocol for Industry-Sponsored Salmon Test Fishery Proposals*. Council staff is now soliciting input from all Council FMP-specific Advisory Bodies (ABs) on revised Section D language for Council consideration at a future meeting.

DOM Workshop

At the March 2026 meeting, the Council affirmed its support for a workshop focused on DOM tools, with an emphasis on how these tools can best be operationalized in the environmental, regulatory, and fisheries context of the California Current Ecosystem to improve management. Based on Council guidance, tentative goals for the DOM workshop include:

- Establish a shared understanding of the current suite of DOM tools and their application.
- Provide an opportunity for fishermen, scientists, and managers to collaboratively co-develop, validate, and refine DOM tools that allow for more effective targeting of healthy stocks while minimizing or avoiding bycatch.
- Determine how DOM tools can best be aligned with the operational needs of West Coast fishermen.
- Identify how these tools can inform management that's more adaptive and responsive to rapid changes and real-time ocean conditions.
- Maintain a dual focus on expanding or improving fishing opportunity and minimizing/avoiding bycatch.
- Identify opportunities for collaboration and cooperative research where appropriate and possible.

In response to this guidance, Council staff issued a [Request for Proposals](#) (RFP) in late July for a contractor to design, plan, and facilitate a two-day, in-person DOM workshop. The RFP remained open until August 31 and also solicited proposals for facilitation of a separate workshop focused on Local Knowledge (LK) integration (for more details on the LK component of the RFP, please see Attachment 1 under this agenda item). As described in the RFP, the timeframe for a DOM workshop would be mid-late January 2027, with a workshop summary report tentatively scheduled for the Council's March 2027 meeting.

Appendix A Special Project 3: New Fishing Opportunities Within Bycatch Allowances – Project Summary and Overview (September 2026)

Project Description

This project's objective is to support the development of climate-ready, adaptive fishing methods that minimize bycatch, with an initial focus on the U.S. West Coast HMS fishery. The project consists of two primary components: (1) Further development of the Council's HMS Roadmap –

a document that serves as both a strategic plan and a workload prioritization tool for the future of the West Coast HMS fishery – with a particular focus on improving the Council’s EFP process as a way to accelerate the development of climate-ready fishing methods and practices while minimizing bycatch; and (2) Exploration of forward-looking tools, such as DOM, that can facilitate more adaptive management strategies and fishing methods by using information and observations about changing ocean conditions. Special Project 3 envisions coupling these two pieces to allow the Council to better support the development of new or modified fishing systems that are climate-informed and effective at targeting HMS while minimizing bycatch.

To advance the first component of the project, the Council formed the Ad Hoc HMS Roadmap - FIW in November 2024. The FIW was tasked at that time with “developing and refining Council procedures which help facilitate the more rapid creation of new HMS gears and achieve the goals of the HMS Roadmap.”

Progress Updates

- The Council last discussed Special Project 3 at its March 2026 meeting, where it endorsed the FIW’s recommendations on bycatch benchmarks and metrics and EFP guidance and materials, as well as proposed edits to COP 20 regarding HMS EFPs.
- Also at the March 2026 meeting, the Council affirmed its support for a workshop where fishermen, scientists, and managers can co-develop, validate, and further refine DOM tools that allow for more effective targeting of healthy stocks while avoiding bycatch of protected species.
- The FIW is continuing its work to develop an overall bycatch benchmark and individual species/species group bycatch benchmarks as part of a new HMS EFP framework; it anticipates bringing final recommendations back to the Council in November 2026.
- The Council issued an RFP for a DOM workshop facilitator in August, and Council staff will select a contractor by early September.

Project Timeline

2024

- Sept – Council provides guidance on initial project planning
- Nov – Council forms Ad Hoc FIW
- Dec – Kick-off webinar held with Council Advisory Bodies

2025

- Feb – FIW holds first meeting and begins developing work plan
- June – Council adopts FIW workplan, prioritizing EFP application template and guidance, and tasks FIW with developing metrics (including bycatch and economic metrics) to evaluate EFP performance
- Aug-Oct – FIW continues to develop bycatch and economic metrics and COP 20 edits
- Nov – Council provides guidance to FIW to finalize proposed economic viability and bycatch benchmarks and performance metrics for HMS EFPs

2026

- Jan/Feb – FIW refines recommendations for economic and bycatch metrics and benchmarks, identifies suite of EFP process improvements, and finalizes proposed COP 20 edits
- March – Council endorses FIW’s recommendations on bycatch benchmarks and metrics and EFP guidance and materials, as well as proposed edits to COP 20; identifies November meeting for final FIW recommendations; affirms support for DOM workshop in early 2027
- June – Council adopts revisions to COP 20
- June-Oct. – FIW finalizes recommendations on economic and bycatch metrics; develops proposed EFP evaluation framework for Council consideration
- August – Council staff issues RFP for DOM workshop facilitator
- Sept – Council staff reviews proposals and selects contractor for DOM workshop
- Nov – Council takes final action on EFP benchmarks, metrics, and evaluation framework

2027

- Jan – DOM workshop held
- March – DOM workshop report/recommendations delivered to Council
- June/Sept – Council considers next steps re: use of DOM tools and related frameworks [tentative]

PFMC

08/31/26