CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SACRAMENTO RIVER FALL CHINOOK FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT PROCESS

CDFW is submitting this supplemental report under Agenda Item G.4.b. The Sacramento River Fall Chinook (SRFC) stock is showing signs of improvement. Despite positive signs in recovery of the SRFC stock following closed commercial salmon fisheries and extremely limited recreational salmon fisheries off the California coast in 2023-2025, concern remains regarding the status of SRFC and California's Chinook salmon populations more broadly. New information has been developed by the Sacramento River Fall Chinook Workgroup (SRWG) on the harvest management framework for SRFC and new management tools have been made available, and some implemented, for in-season management. In recognition of the interconnected nature of the various pieces of the biological reference points and harvest management framework and to gain a better understanding of how updates to the framework would work in concert with new harvest management tools, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) offers recommendations to the Council on the planned Fishery Management Plan (FMP) amendment and the associated process.

CDFW wishes to acknowledge the hard work and progress the SRWG has made in working towards the Terms of Reference and Council priorities. Despite the Council's decision to not move the SRWG's methods for determining S_{MSY} and the conservation objective on to methodology review during September methodology review topic selection, CDFW recognizes the significance of the work that went into developing these items, including the method deriving a natural-area S_{MSY} value. The new spawner recruit relationship developed by the SRWG represents new information for the stock and important information to consider and incorporate in management of SRFC. CDFW recommends reviewing and incorporating SRWG products, including science and proposed approaches, into the FMP amendment process and ultimately, into management of SRFC.

The thorough analysis conducted by the SRWG underscores the importance of accounting for flow in spawner-recruit relationships and incorporating data that are representative of a wide range of environmental conditions and escapements. Not only does this work represent new science for managing SRFC it highlights the issue that our current management framework decreases the likelihood and frequency of achieving high adult escapement, which are not only possible, but critical for appropriately assessing biological reference points. CDFW is supportive of pursuing an FMP amendment process to update reference points, the conservation objective, and harvest control rule for SRFC, and urges the Council to hold new science for managing SRFC in equal consideration with economic tradeoffs and long-term policy implications. Given the significance of the SRFC stock in West Coast fisheries, CDFW also urges the Council to consider ways in

which to expedite the FMP amendment process, with caution employed during the management period while the amendment process is ongoing. The informational report developed for the Council and provided at the September 2025 Council meeting indicated that a new SRFC management framework resulting from an FMP amendment could be available by the 2028 ocean salmon management season. This is a significant amount of time to be relying on existing approaches and CDFW encourages the Council to complete the FMP amendment process in a shorter timeline. Additionally, thought should be given to the type and volume of work assigned to the SRWG during, and as a part of this FMP amendment process. Consideration should also be given to whether the SRWG is well positioned to address any of the fiscal and policy aspects of an amendment. CDFW appreciates the work of the SRWG and looks forward to working collaboratively on the FMP amendment.