

Pacific Council News

VOLUME 50 NO. 1, SUMMER 2025
REPORTING ON WEST COAST FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

CONTENTS

Note from the E.D.	1
General news	2
Salmon	4
Habitat	5
Ecosystem	6
Highly migratory species	8
Coastal pelagic species	9
Halibut	9
Marine planning	10
Groundfish	11
On the <i>Reuben Lasker</i> , one year later	14
Useful links	15
September Council agenda	17
Upcoming Council meetings	17

COUNCIL STAFF

LEADERSHIP

Pete Hassemer, Council Chair
Butch Smith, Vice Chair
Merrick Burden,
Executive Director
Kelly Ames, Deputy Director
Patricia Hearing,
Administrative Officer

STAFF OFFICERS

Marlene Bellman
Jessi Waller
Angela Forristall
Katrina Burnaus
Kerry Griffin
Gilly Lyons
Todd Phillips

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Kris Kleinschmidt
Hayden York

ADMINISTRATION

Kimberly Ambert
Samantha Holland
Amy L'Manian

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The first half of 2025 has come and gone, and a lot has transpired in the Council realm during this time. When we walked into the first meeting of the year, many of us were very concerned about our ability to meet the demands of Federal fisheries management. When we left the most recent meeting of the year, many of us did so with cautious optimism.

Two things are still true—many of us have concerns about our ability to meet the demands of Federal fisheries management considering the staffing cuts at National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the ongoing budgetary effects of inflation, while at the same time we are cautiously optimistic about where we are headed.

Sometimes communities pull together when facing challenges. This is what has taken place in the Council community over the last few months. I was encouraged by

conversations taking place throughout the spring. It seemed like folks were trying harder than usual to understand one another and to find constructive ways forward. By the time we left the June Council meeting we had scheduled several new agenda topics that should improve management of Pacific coast fisheries.

In this issue, you'll read about several matters that affect the Council, as well as initiatives that the Council is undertaking. As always, if you have any questions about Council activities please feel free to contact me or anyone else on Council staff. —

Merrick J. Burden, Executive
Director Pacific Fishery Management Council (503-820-2418) ●



The Council lost a longtime friend and advocate in August when Joel Kawahara was lost overboard off his beloved vessel, the F/V Karolee. Joel had decades of experience fishing for salmon and tuna and served on the Habitat Committee for over 20 years. He will be greatly missed by those who knew him.

Photo by Heather Johnson

COUNCIL COORDINATION COMMITTEE DISCUSSES CHALLENGES

The Council Coordination Committee (a group representing all fishery management Councils) met this past May in New Bedford, MA, to address critical issues impacting federal fisheries management.

These include recent Executive Orders (see related article, below); staffing and capacity challenges within NOAA; funding levels; and the need to align priorities between the Councils and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) while dealing with resource limitations.

NOAA leadership underscored that managing over 500 fish stocks under the current federal framework is unsustainable, implying that Councils might need to reduce the number of stocks in their fishery management plans, though this was not presented as the sole solution.

The conversation also explored the need for a more flexible and risk

tolerant approach to fisheries management, noting that collaboration between NOAA and the Councils would be essential in this process. A NOAA science update reinforced the theme of reduced capacity, detailing



implications for fishery management and science systems across various areas including Council research priorities, cooperative research, the Changing Ecosystems and Fisheries Initiative, and the development of the Fisheries Inte-

grated Modeling System. Challenges in the Marine Recreational Information Program and the outlook for 2025 surveys were also discussed, with a consistent message that future deadlines and transitions

depend on adequate staffing and funding.

Funding levels presented another area of concern. Emily Menashes, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations, reported on current travel and spending restrictions, reduced staff, and increased scrutiny of expenditures and grants, leading to a slower grant approval process. There is uncertainty surrounding detailed FY2025 funding

due to a continuing resolution that provided only a top-line funding level for NOAA, without specific spending directives. No information was available for FY2026 or FY2027 budgets, and Councils are

(Continued on page 16)

COUNCIL RESPONDS TO EXECUTIVE ACTIONS

The Council and its Legislative Committee have been discussing recent Executive Orders and how to respond.

NOAA role: In June the Legislative Committee discussed the Administration's plan to consolidate the Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act processes under the Department of Interior. The committee had concerns that shifting these matters from NOAA to Interior could significantly impact fisheries, primarily

due to the lack of expertise in fisheries management within the Dept. of Interior. There are currently proposals to move NOAA itself to the Department of Interior, and the proposed NOAA Organic Act could establish NOAA as its own independent department. However, the LC saw these as unlikely to happen.

Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness: On April 17, the President issued an [Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness](#). The order man-

dates that NMFS integrate advanced technologies and collaborative research into their fishery assessments in order to establish a more responsive management system that aligns with real-time ocean conditions. Furthermore, it calls for the creation of a seafood trade strategy designed to counteract unfair foreign trade practices, including illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing and the use of forced labor within seafood supply chains.

(Continued on page 17)

FUNDING UNCERTAIN

Currently, the Council's funding for 2025 is uncertain. The Council has received roughly two-thirds of its "base funding" for the year, and funding for NOAA is also unclear. This led the Council to make several decisions regarding fiscal expenditures for 2025, including leaving the current open staff officer position (formerly filled by Kit Dahl) vacant for the time being; holding a partially in-person September Council meeting (only the Council, some staff, and the Scientific and Statistical Committee will meet in person while all other committees meet remotely). The format for the 2025 November meeting will be determined as clarity regarding Council funding levels occurs.

CHUMASH HERITAGE NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY DESIGNATED

Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary off the Central California coast was officially designated on October 16, 2024. The sanctuary will cover 4,543 square miles of ocean and coastal waters, stretching up to 60 miles offshore, and will protect natural, historical, and cultural resources along 116 miles of coastline, from San Luis Obispo County to the Gaviota Coast in Santa Barbara County.

The Sanctuary is the first tribally nominated sanctuary in the U.S. Indigenous leaders will play a key role in its management.

RESEARCH AND DATA NEEDS UPDATED

The Council has updated its research and data needs, as required



A NOAA fisheries scientist examines a Pacific cod. (NOAA)

by the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The list serves as an important guide for collaborating entities such as Federal science centers, state agencies, and academic institutions.

The Council completed the task in June. The new version was guided by the Council identifying science and management challenges in broader level categories before selecting more specific research and data needs. While past efforts had resulted in over 300 different projects, the new list is pared down to priority needs. The research and data needs list is intended to help align scientific research between NOAA and the Council, while serving as a useful resource for other institutions.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORMED

The Council has created an Executive Committee to provide guidance to the Executive Director for urgent and time-sensitive mat-

ters between Council meetings. The committee is composed of one Council member from each of the four voting state agencies; the Council's tribal member; one NOAA Fisheries representative, and the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Council.

STAFF CHANGES

Robin Ehlke retired from the Council after the April Council meeting, and Angela Forristall has taken over all Staff Officer duties for salmon and Pacific halibut management. There is currently a vacant Staff Officer position open since Dr. Kit Dahl's retirement, but the Council is awaiting clarity on its fiscal status before determining whether to fill this position.

APPOINTMENTS

In June, Pete Hassemer was elected Council Chair, with Butch Smith as Council Vice-Chair, for the August 11, 2025-August 10, 2026 term. Aja Szumylo was appointed as the Council's representative to the Joint Management Committee to the Pacific Hake/Whiting Treaty.

[See the current membership roster with all advisory body updates.](#)

In November, the Council formed the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Roadmap-Fisheries Innovation Workgroup Ad Hoc Committee, which is focused on developing procedures to achieve the goals of the HMS Roadmap (see *Council Special Projects*, page 6, for more details).

In addition to creating the Executive Committee in March, the

(Continued on page 16)

KLAMATH DAM REMOVALS COMPLETED; MANAGEMENT WORKS TO ADAPT

The complete removal of the four lower Klamath Dams took place last October, marking the end of the largest dam removal project in history. Dam removal discussions began in 1982 and removal was strongly supported by the Council. The coming years will be devoted to the largest salmon habitat restoration project in history: reconnecting and restoring nearly 420 stream miles of upper Klamath River above the dams so that salmon and other anadromous species will be able to recolonize areas blocked for more than 100 years.

Less than a month after the four dams were removed, hundreds of salmon moved back into the waters they had been cut off from for decades to spawn. Dam removal is also expected to allow salmon access to cooler waters and higher flows, while lowering disease rates.

Removal of the dams was spearheaded and supported by Klamath Basin tribes. In June, as part of the Paddle Tribal Waters program, a group of [young tribal members floated the river for the first time](#)—the first descent of the river in at least 100 years. The trip launched June 12 and took about 30 days, covering 310 miles.

The Council's Klamath River Fall Chinook Work-group is tasked with developing precautionary management strategies for this overfished stock during the critical time immediately following dam removal. The workgroup has presented the Council with recommendations that reflect the uncer-



The Yurok Fisheries Department's Revegetation crew hand-sows native plant seeds between the former Iron Gate Dam and JC Boyle Reservoir. The project aims to restore 2,200 acres of land along the Klamath River. (Photo: Active_Norcal on Instagram)

tainty surrounding the evolving habitat and aims to give the Chinook population time to adapt and recover. Looking ahead, there is hope that as the environment stabilizes and monitoring tools are developed, these efforts will support a stronger population and allow for increased harvest opportunities in the coming years.

2025 SALMON SEASONS SET

The Council recommended 2025 ocean salmon fishing seasons for the West Coast at its April meeting. These seasons offer varying fishing opportunities, with more options in the north

(Washington and northern Oregon) but significant reductions and closures in the south (southern Oregon and California) to protect Chinook and coho salmon.

Several factors influenced the season decisions, including the need to conserve specific salmon stocks like Fraser River coho, Washington coastal coho, and various Chinook populations. Klamath River fall Chinook continue to meet the criteria for overfished status. No coho stocks are designated as overfished, and no Chinook or coho stocks are currently subject to overfishing. The Queets River spring/summer Chinook, previously declared overfished, is now showing signs of recovery.

North of Cape Falcon (in northern Oregon), quotas for Tribal fisheries will be higher than last year for Chinook and lower for coho. Commercial seasons will also have higher Chinook quotas and lower coho quotas than last year, while sport fishers will enjoy both higher Chinook and coho quotas this year.

South of Cape Falcon, low forecasts for Klamath River and Sacramento River fall Chinook led to reduced fishing opportunities, including a third year of commercial closures off California. Sport fishing south of Cape Falcon will have limited openings.

The Council also considered the impact of fisheries on Southern Resident killer whales, which primarily feed on Chinook salmon. The Council previously established an abundance threshold to ensure adequate prey availability for the whales. Chinook abundance esti-

(Continued on page 5)

Continued from page 4

mates for 2025 are above the threshold, so no additional management actions are triggered for this year. The Council's decisions involved collaboration with various stakeholders and public input, with the goal of balancing fishing opportunities and salmon conservation.

[See the full press release here.](#)

HABITAT RESTORATION LEADS TO INCREASED RETURNS OF CALIFORNIA COHO

Following six years of habitat restoration on the lower Ten Mile River in Mendocino County, endangered juvenile Central California coast coho salmon are using newly restored winter instream and floodplain habitat (including habitat not used for 70 years) and have returned in record numbers. More than 5,500 adult coho returned to Ten Mile River during the 2023-2024 spawning season, surpassing NOAA's recovery target of 3,700 fish for the first time.

The Nature Conservancy, a project partner, reports that juvenile fish using the restored habitat are growing much faster than fish that aren't using the habitat, which should improve their overall fitness and survival. This is encouraging news for at least one cohort; hopefully, restoration will also benefit the other two cohorts in the river system.

QUEETS SPRING/SUMMER CHINOOK REBUILDING

The Council recently finalized its rebuilding plan for Queets River spring/summer Chinook salmon, which were officially declared "overfished" in late 2023. Scientists attribute the decline to poor environmental conditions in freshwater and ocean habitats from 2014 to 2019, which likely outweighed any impacts from fishing.

Modeling showed that closing all Council-managed fisheries would have little to no effect on the Queets spring/summer Chinook population. There has been almost no freshwater fishing for twenty years, and harvest impacts

are minimal.

The Council did not make changes to current fisheries management as part of the rebuilding plan, but did make recommendations on habitat restoration, hatchery enhancement, and data improvements. Rebuilding Queets Chinook is important for maintaining biodiversity and for supporting tribal and commercial fisheries that depend on healthy salmon populations. ●

OTHER NEWS:

[Trump Ends Historic Columbia River Basin Agreement, bringing uncertainty to salmon recovery efforts](#) (Salem Statesman Journal)

[Pilot Project Returns Spring-Run Chinook to N. Yuba River](#) (CDFG)

[San Joaquin Salmon Return in Drovers in 2025](#) (San Joaquin River Restoration Program)

[First salmon in nearly 100 years found in northern California river](#) (SF Gate)

Habitat News

COUNCIL SUBMITS COMMENTS ON LOWER COLUMBIA DREDGE DECISION, CALIFORNIA CENTRAL VALLEY PROJECT WATER OPERATIONS

In Fall 2024, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released a draft Environmental Impact Statement for management of Columbia River dredge materials, aimed at identifying sites and methods for disposition of dredged materials for the next 20 years, that are generated as part of maintaining the lower Columbia River navigation channel. In-river disposal sites are nearing capacity, so the Corps proposes using intertidal and floodplain areas to create or enhance habitats. However, this could impact existing benthic habitats and popular fishing sites. The Council submitted a [comment letter](#) on this in October 2024.

The Council also submitted a Fall 2024 [comment letter](#) on the Long-Term Operation of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project. The letter, developed by the Habitat Committee, emphasizes the importance of water

(Continued on page 16)

COUNCIL SPECIAL PROJECTS MOVE FORWARD

In Fall 2024, the Council initiated three [special projects](#) with funding from the Inflation Reduction Act. Each project seeks to increase the Council's climate readiness and its flexibility and responsiveness in the face of rapid or unforeseen changes. The projects have their origins in three of the Council's [Potential Future Fishery Ecosystem Plan Initiatives](#), specifically Fishery Ecosystem Plan Initiatives 2.3, 2.6, and 2.8.

After receiving a September [update](#) from Council staff about project planning, the Council hosted all-advisory body kickoff workshops in December for each project. Participants discussed ways to implement the projects while building on them to improve existing core work. For example, the Council could leverage the projects to advance previous work on climate resilience, including priorities that were identified under the [Climate and Communities Initiative](#).

Flexible and Adaptive Management

This project's objective is to make Council decision-making processes and procedures more timely, efficient, and responsive to changing environmental conditions. By updating its procedures, the Council can improve its ability to adapt to new management challenges while speeding up the decision-making process.

Latest developments: In April the Council discussed this project and adopted a motion to guide



F/V Pacific Rose (Photo [Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust](#)).

next steps, including exploring tools for increasing the use of flexible and adaptive management in the Council's fishery management plans. Select adaptive management tools will first be developed and applied to the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. In June the Council identified five priority actions, all aimed at increasing flexibility in the setting of groundfish harvest specifications, to develop further.

Next steps: In September, Council staff will present a scoping paper on increasing flexibility and adaptive capacity across all of the Council's FMPs; this will set the stage for a framework that helps the Council better respond and adapt to changing conditions. In November the Council is scheduled to discuss a range of alternatives for implementing new flexibility measures in the groundfish harvest-setting process.

Decision Making for Stronger Fishing Communities

This project aims to enhance the Council's ability to understand the effects of its decisions on human wellbeing in West Coast fishing communities. Its goal is to develop a decision support framework that allows for fuller consideration of the socioeconomic impacts of management actions. This will better equip the Council to identify measures that increase community resilience to climate change and other drivers of uncertainty.

Latest developments: The Council has contracted with Northern Economics, Inc. (NEI) to assist with this project. NEI has already started on an assessment of Council processes and procedures, along with a gap analysis to identify where more information and resources may be needed.

Next steps: NEI will develop a

([Continued](#) on page 7)

Continued from page 6

methodology for evaluating the resilience of West Coast fishing communities. A report on this work is scheduled for discussion at the March 2026 Council meeting.

New Fishing Opportunities within Bycatch Allowances

Under this project, the Council seeks to support expanded fishing opportunity for the West Coast's Highly Migratory Species (HMS) fishery through the testing and development of new, low-bycatch gears using the exempted fishing permit (EFP) process. The project also aims to increase the Council's use of dynamic ocean management tools (through EFPs where applicable), which will improve management response to real-time ocean conditions, allowing more flexible reactions.

Latest developments: In November 2024, the Council formed a new ad hoc committee focused on accelerating the development of new HMS gears that help to achieve the goals of [the HMS Roadmap](#). The HMS Fisheries Innovation Workgroup is also tasked with improving the EFP process while developing new performance goals and metrics (including defining acceptable levels of bycatch) for HMS EFPs. This work is now underway via the [workgroup's workplan](#), adopted in June.

Next steps: In September, the Council is scheduled to discuss revisions to [Council Operating Procedure 20](#), which lays out the process for considering HMS EFPs. Recommendations for EFP performance goals and metrics will be discussed at the November Council meeting. In the coming months, Council staff, Ecosystem Workgroup members, and HMS advisory body members will discuss ways to expand the use of dynamic ocean management tools in HMS and other Council-managed fisheries.

COUNCIL EXPLORES USING RISK TABLES FOR GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT

Risk tables—a new way to bring ecosystem and climate information into Council management processes—will be developed for some stocks in the 2027-2028 groundfish harvest specifications process. They will be used parallel to the traditional Council methods in order to test the new methodology, and will be

included in assessments for yellowtail, chilipepper, California quillback, rougheye/blackspotted rockfish, and sablefish.

Risk tables provide a standardized framework to track ecosystem and climate factors that may affect stock productivity. They can also document uncertainty and other concerns arising from a stock assessment that may not be accounted for in the assessment itself.

Risk tables were first used by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, but they needed to be adapted to the Pacific Council's process. They were developed as a way to improve harvest specifications and catch advice when it isn't possible to incorporate ecosystem or climate considerations directly into a stock assessment. In 2023, the ad hoc Ecosystem Workgroup showed the Council how risk tables would apply to two groundfish species. They then worked with NMFS to refine the method. The Council discussed the matter again in September 2024 and decided to proceed with the parallel process for 2025's full stock assessments.

This fall, after reviewing the pilot risk tables developed for the current groundfish harvest specifications cycle, the Council will assess their use and decide on next steps for incorporating them into the harvest-setting process. Risk tables are also being considered for use with certain salmon stocks.

ECOSYSTEM STATUS REPORT SHOWS HIGH LEVELS OF FORAGE FISH

In March 2025, the Council received a [presentation](#) from the California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment team on its [2024-2025 California Current Ecosystem Status Report](#). Highlights from this year's report include a [new appendix](#) dedicated to near-term ecosystem forecasts; information showing high levels of prey species such as forage fish, juvenile rockfish, and larval mackerel and hake; a summary of salmon-specific indicators known as "stoplight tables;" evidence that the West Coast experienced its 6th largest marine heatwave by area and 5th longest in duration; a review of summer 2024's toxic algal blooms and their impacts; and socioeconomic metrics showing that communities with more diversified fishing portfolios and greater connectivity among and between fisheries tend to be more resilient to environmental and regulatory change. ●

BLUEFIN TUNA BOUNCE BACK

Pacific bluefin tuna, which were listed as overfished from 2012 to 2022, are no longer overfished nor subject to overfishing. The biennial harvest limit for 2025 and 2026 combined is 1,822 metric tons (mt),

Fisheries Commission Northern Committee (WCPFC) Joint Working Group have been considering the results of the MSE, which will inform management measures for the 2026-27 biennium. Discussions will continue into the fall, leading up to the December WCPFC meeting.



A Pacific bluefin tuna. Photo: [Tom Benson, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

with an annual catch limit of 1,285 mt in each year. This represents a nearly 80% increase from the previous biennial limit. The proposed rule also includes trip limits to encourage full utilization of the U.S. catch limit while allowing ample opportunity for multiple gear types.

This past winter, a management strategy evaluation (MSE) was conducted for bluefin tuna. (An MSE is a type of simulation used to understand how to manage a particular fish stock before making real-world decisions.) Since then, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Convention and Western and Central Pacific

US/CANADA ALBACORE TREATY STALLED

In recent months the Council and NMFS have continued to track negotiations and management of North Pacific albacore. Typically the U.S. and Canada negotiate a reciprocal access regime—the ability to fish in each other's waters, pick up crew, and other issues under the U.S.-Canada Albacore Treaty. However, the January 2020 Administration change put a halt to those negotiations, which have not restarted. These negotiations are critical for the U.S. albacore fleet, as they directly impact business planning. A

March 4 email from David Hogan (U.S. Department of State and Council member) stated “The Department of State, based on guidance to agencies from the Trump Administration, has paused international engagements in legally binding negotiations and other actions and fora... We do not have a sense of whether or when we might receive approval to resume negotiations with Canada.”

WESTERN AND CENTRAL PACIFIC ACTIVITIES

The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, which is responsible for managing fisheries in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, adopted measures last December including labor standards focused on ensuring safe and healthy working conditions, interim standards for electronic monitoring and, for the first time, conservation measures and catch limits for striped marlin.

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ROADMAP MOVES FORWARD

Since June 2023, the Council has been developing its Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Roadmap, which has replaced the previous Swordfish Monitoring and Management Plan. The Fisheries Innovation Workgroup has made significant progress on the Roadmap. In June, the workgroup recommended changing the timing of EFP proposals from a June-September schedule to a November-March schedule in order to more efficiently consider EFP requests and align them better with fishing sea-

(Continued on page 13)

Coastal Pelagic Species News

PACIFIC SARDINE REBUILDING PLAN ADOPTED BY COUNCIL

In November, the Council adopted a final preferred alternative to revise the rebuilding plan for the northern subpopulation of Pacific sardine.

NMFS had requested revisions to the rebuilding plan after a U.S. District Court ruled that parts of Amendment 18 were inadequate. The court found that the plan did not adequately rely on an acceptable biological catch or annual catch limits to ensure proper rebuilding of the sardine stock. As a result, the Council adopted an alternative that will set an annual catch limit based on the biomass of the stock with a target timeframe of 17 years for the rebuilding process.

The Coastal Pelagic Species Fishery Management Plan has been updated to reflect these changes; the final rule was published by NOAA on June 3.

HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES ADOPTED FOR SARDINE AND MACKEREL

The Council adopted harvest specifications and management measures for the northern subpopulation of Pacific sardine for the 2025-26 fishing year, based on a projected stock biomass of 30,158 mt.

The Council also adopted harvest specifications and management measures for Pacific mackerel for the 2025-26 and 2026-2027 fishing years based on

the 2025 catch-only stock assessment.

2025-2026 EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS FORWARDED

In April the Council recommended a [proposal](#) submitted by the California Wetfish Producers Association to allow fishing for Pacific sardine for biological samples.

COUNCIL SETS STOCK ASSESSMENT PRIORITIES FOR COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES

The Council adopted the following stock assessment and survey priorities for coastal pelagic species for 2026 and 2027: Review of the Integrated West Coast Pelagics Survey (2026), Pacific sardine benchmark assessment and Pacific mackerel update assessment (2027).

SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES SET

The Council recommended and prioritized science and management topics for coastal pelagic species management in April. The top priorities were Pacific sardine Stock Structure, Stock Assessment Frequency, and Managing Annual Opportunity, which includes more responsive harvest control rules and review of overfishing limits for other CPS.

Pacific Sardine Stock Structure will be added to a future meeting as an agenda item. ●

Halibut News

NEW RULES FOR PACIFIC HALIBUT FISHERY

Last November the Council made changes to the management of the nontribal directed commercial (DC) Pacific halibut fishery. The new measures aim to enhance enforcement, protect fish habitats, and reduce seabird bycatch.

NMFS said the rulemaking packages for the two measures would take significant time and staff resources to develop, and at the time of publication no VMS or streamline

requirements have been put in place.

Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS): All vessels in the DC halibut fishery must carry and operate a NMFS-approved VMS and transmit fishing location data while actively fishing every 15-minutes. Vessels fishing off Washington and Oregon must comply with the new requirement when fishing in Federal waters. Vessels fishing off California must comply with the new requirements in both the Federal and state waters.

Streamer lines for seabird avoidance: Vessels participating in the DC halibut fishery using bottom long-line gear must deploy streamer lines to reduce the risk of seabird bycatch occurring. Vessels fishing off Washington and Oregon must adhere to the new streamer line requirement when fishing in Federal waters. Vessels fishing off California must adhere to the new requirements when fishing in both Federal and state waters. ●

OFFSHORE WIND DEVELOPMENT STALLS

The Council has focused on the following activities in the marine planning arena since last fall:

May 2025: The Council [commented](#) on a [draft report](#) commissioned by the California Energy Commission that focuses on identifying suitable areas for wave and tidal energy projects.

March 2025: The Marine Planning Committee completed work on a framework to support a long-term, coastwide assessment of the cumulative impacts of offshore wind. The framework is intended to support and encourage Federal or state agencies or other entities to pursue this work. The Council discussed the framework in March and recognized its potential value in evaluating long-term impacts.

January 2025: The White House issued a Presidential [Memorandum](#) entitled *Temporary Withdrawal of All Areas on the Outer Continental Shelf from Offshore Wind Leasing and Review of the Federal Government's Leasing and Permitting Practices for Wind Projects*.

The Memorandum, among other stipulations, “temporarily prevents consideration of any area in the [Outer] Continental Shelf for any new or renewed wind energy leasing for the purposes of generation of electricity or any other such use derived from the use of wind.”

For existing leases, the memo requires the Secretary of the Interior to “conduct a comprehensive review of the ecological, economic, and environmental necessity of terminating or amending any existing wind energy leases, identifying any legal bases for such removal, and submit a report with recommendations to the President, through the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy.”

December 2024: The Marine Planning Committee met to discuss NOAA's Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for the Aquaculture Opportunity Areas within the Southern California Bight and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)'s Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the five lease sites in federal waters off California. The Council submitted comment letters on both the Aquaculture Opportunity Area [Draft PEIS](#) and the [BOEM Draft PEIS](#).

September 2024: BOEM delayed Oregon's offshore wind lease auction, which had been scheduled for the following month. The project stalled due to

lawsuits from tribes, opposition from the fishing industry, developer concerns, and issues raised by Governor Tina Kotek, who emphasized that the state should complete its Offshore Wind Energy Roadmap



An offshore wind farm in the United Kingdom. Photo: BOEM.

and establish related policies before BOEM moves forward with leasing.

In addition, four out of the five approved bidders withdrew from the process, thereby eliminating the possibility of a competitive process.

The delay provides more time for research into the technology's potential benefits and drawbacks for Oregon.

In Washington, Governor Jay Inslee also informed the Washington Coastal Marine Advisory Council that he would not request federal planning for offshore wind projects at this time. Instead, he emphasized the need for further research and preparation before starting a formal Federal evaluation.

OTHER OFFSHORE ENERGY NEWS

[A new study](#) co-sponsored by NOAA and BOEM explores the socioeconomic connections between West Coast fisheries and offshore wind energy development. The report examines fishing communities, related industries, and data availability, while providing methods for assessing impacts from offshore wind. Other recent research has focused on minimizing conflict between offshore wind areas and fisheries, habitat suitability, and the overlap between groundfish trawl areas and proposed offshore wind sites. ●

UPDATE ON THIS YEAR'S PACIFIC WHITING FISHERY

This March the Council discussed the amount of whiting set aside for at-sea processing, expectations for the 2025 mothership fishing season, and the need for the mothership and catcher-processor groups to improve their inseason communication. Just after the March Council meeting, the U.S and Canada reached an agreement on the 2025 total allowable catch amount for Pacific whiting.

CHANGES COMING TO LIMITED ENTRY FIXED GEAR FISHERY

In June the Council approved a change to the limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) fishery that allows LEFG permitted vessels to use any legal non-trawl groundfish gear (except entangling nets) to harvest their quota.

The Council also recommended developing a cost recovery program for the LEFG tier program in which the vessel owner, or representative, pays a cost recovery fee. The cost recovery program pays for costs related to the management, data collection, and enforcement related to and support of the LEFG tier program.

The Council started its review of the LEFG permit stacking program in 2020, focusing on gear marking and other strategies for reducing whale entanglement risks for vessels using pot and longline gear. Final action on these regulations was completed in June 2024.

CHANGES MADE TO CORDELL BANK FISHING REGULATIONS, CONSERVATION AREA REVISIONS

In March the Council recommended repealing the Cordell Bank Groundfish Conservation Area and creating a new Groundfish Exclusion Area. The new area prohibits all groundfish fishing over the Cordell Bank 50-fathom Isobath Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Area, which already restricts bottom-contact gear to protect habitats important for groundfish. The recommendation was transmitted to NMFS in mid-June for approval.

The changes to fishing restrictions around Cordell Bank were intended to remove outdated regulations and simplify rules while safeguarding sensitive habitats in the area.

The Cordell Bank Groundfish Conservation Area was established in the early 2000s to protect overfished groundfish stocks by restricting fishing. However, these stocks are now rebuilt or ahead of rebuilding schedules, and overlapping regulations with other protected areas were creating unnecessary complexity.

WORKLOAD AND NEW MANAGEMENT MEASURE PRIORITIES ADOPTED

In March the Council prioritized seven groundfish management measures, including using adaptive management methods to benefit the entire groundfish fishery; two trawl-fishery-specific measures; and a measure to consider commercial sale of recreational fish waste.



A rocky sea structure in Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary (Photo: Joe Hoyt/NOAA)

In June the Council adopted a best practices document for workload and the new groundfish priorities, which is available on a new [Council webpage](#) dedicated to this process. In the future the Council may consider rockfish sorting requirements and the season start date for the primary tier fishery.

HEARINGS HELD FOR TRAWL CATCH SHARE PROGRAM REVIEW

The Council is holding a series of hearings in 2025 as part of the upcoming the Trawl Catch Share Program Review, which will assess the program's performance with a focus on the non-whiting bottom trawl sector. The review

(Continued on page 12)

Continued from page 11

builds off the [Trawl Cost Project Report](#), which assessed costs and tradeoffs for observer coverage and economic data collection reports for the IFQ fishery. Two hearings were held in April 2025 in Astoria, Oregon and online, and three hearings were held in July in Eureka, CA, Newport, OR, and online. The Council will discuss the Trawl Catch Share Program Review in September.

2025 AND 2027 GROUND-FISH STOCK ASSESSMENT PLAN AND SCHEDULE SET

The Council has finalized its 2025 and preliminary 2027 stock assessment plan and schedule.

Redbanded rockfish will be assessed in 2027 instead of 2025, along with yellowtail rockfish south of 40° 10' N. latitude. More landings of yellowtail rockfish are expected in the future due to the reopening of rockfish conservation areas and other factors.

In 2025, benchmark assessments are scheduled for quillback rockfish off California; and for chilipepper rockfish, roughey/blackspotted rockfish, and sablefish coastwide; and for yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat.

Assessment updates are scheduled for widow rockfish and yelloweye rockfish coastwide. (If only one can be done, widow rockfish is the highest priority).

Catch-only projections are scheduled for black rockfish in Oregon; and for bocaccio, canary rockfish, darkblotched rockfish, Petrale sole, and shortspine thornyhead coastwide.

For 2027, benchmark assessments are planned for cowcod, English sole, Pacific spiny dogfish shark, Petrale sole, redbanded rockfish, certain slope rockfish species (to be determined), and yelloweye rockfish (if not done in 2025)

coastwide. Benchmark assessments are also planned for lingcod north and south of 40° 10' N. latitude and yellowtail rockfish south of 40° 10' N. latitude. Finally, an assessment (type to be determined) is planned for vermilion/sunset rockfish in multiple areas.

Amendment 35 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan defines stocks for key “priority species” with stock assessments planned in 2025 and potentially 2027. Amendment 35 included chilipepper, redbanded, roughey/blackspotted, widow, yellowtail and yelloweye rockfish, and English sole, as they had not yet been defined under the Amendment 31 stock definitions.

PHASE 2 STOCK DEFINITIONS, PLAN AMENDMENT MOVE AHEAD

The Council has been working to define (or redefine) stocks of 86 managed groundfish. This is because the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan only listed managed species and not their stocks, which was incon-



English sole by [kathleenreed](#), [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

sistent with the Magnuson Stevens Act.

The purpose of this action is to formally identify species (and their related stocks) in need of conservation and management in Federal waters, where the Council's management applies.

In March, the Council identified, in a preliminary preferred alternative, 47 species that are subject to active Council management (technically “in need of conservation and management”) and their stocks. In June the Council finalized 44 of the 47 species; 41 are defined as “coastwide” stocks and three are California-only stocks. The three not adopted will be evaluated further.

In June the Council also adopted a preliminary preferred alternative for 39 other species. These will fall under one of three alternatives: Alternative 1) those remaining as actively managed species under Council jurisdiction (seven species/stocks); Alternative 2) those to be removed from Council management (26 species); and

(Continued on page 13)

Continued from page 12

Alternative 3) those to be designated as ecosystem component species (which are not currently actively managed but play an important role in the ecosystem) (12 species). Some species/stocks fall under both Alternative 1 and Alternative 2.

Final action is set for the Council's September meeting.

COUNCIL LOOKS TO IMPROVE HARVEST FLEXIBILITY

The Council is looking at adding tools to the groundfish management framework to provide flexibility, stability, and responsiveness, and to lessen the impacts of changes from stock assessments on catch limits on the fishing industry and communities. This action was prioritized as part of the Groundfish Workload and Management Measure process in March 2025.

In April, the Council decided to apply selective adaptive management and flexibility tools to the groundfish fishery management plan, in the near term, while exploring the possible benefits of these and similar tools for other Council-managed fisheries. (See related article on adaptive management on page 6).

The Council's main priorities are carryover of unused catch limits (letting fishermen use some of the unused annual catch limit from one year in a following year); phase-in of new catch rules (gradually applying changes from new stock assessments to avoid major short-term changes to catch limits); "green light" mid-biennium adjustments (adding a process that allows increasing catch limits in the second year of a two-year cycle when new data shows a stock is doing better); and rethinking how catch limits are set aside for research, tribal fishing, and other non-groundfish fisheries, and possibly counting these deductions earlier in the process, before setting final fishing limits. In addition the Council is considering updating catch limits every year instead of every two years to respond more quickly to changes in fish populations.

The Council is tentatively scheduled to adopt a purpose and need and range of alternatives in November 2025.

INTERSECTOR ALLOCATION REVIEW ADOPTED

In June the Council adopted the [Intersector Allocation Review](#)—a retrospective look at intersector allocations, including mortality and attainments of

allocated stocks—as final.

The first intersector allocation review was done in 2017, along with the first review of the trawl catch share program. In 2024, the Council broadened the scope of this review, including stocks that are allocated biennially. This provides the Council with crucial information regarding which stocks or complexes might benefit from an allocation change, particularly through the 2027-2028 harvest specifications process.

COUNCIL PLANS FOR 2027-28 HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS

The Council is preparing a detailed plan for the 2027-2028 groundfish harvest specifications and management measures, aiming for implementation by January 1, 2027.

The Council gave guidance to staff and the Groundfish Management Team to investigate issues related to canary allocation, trip limits for individual species within the shelf rockfish stock complex north of 40° 10' N. lat, and (in the California recreational fishery) removal of the recreational Rockfish Conservation Areas in favor of management via sub-bag limits only. ●

Highly migratory species, cont'd from page 8

sons. The workgroup also recommended allowing the Council to make EFP recommendations in a single meeting, and to allow submission of EFP requests at either the November or March meeting. In September the Council will consider a revised Council Operating Procedure 20 reflecting these changes.

EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT APPLICATIONS FORWARDED TO NMFS

At the June meeting, the Council approved two new EFP requests and one request to renew an EFP, and recommended that NMFS approve and issue the EFPs. All three EFPs were for night-set deep-set buoy gear. ●

ON BOARD THE R/V REUBEN LASKER, ONE YEAR LATER

By Corey Ridings, MPH

Sailing on the NOAA Ship *Reuben Lasker* last summer was a dream come true for a fish nerd and cinephile like me. I came of age in the 90s, when movies were released in theaters and reruns of Jacques Cousteau were still found on public television in the after-school hours. *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* is one of my favorite movies; as a Bill Murray stan and devotee of Wes Anderson's films, the weird and hilarious tribute to the ocean and those who are obsessed with it is perfection. As a human living in the nonfiction world, though, the closest experience one can have to sailing with Steve Zissou is being on a NOAA white ship.

While snappy uniforms were sadly not required for science crew, I'm happy to report that the level of science was even more fantastical than imagined in the movie. The *Reuben Lasker* doesn't have trained dolphins, but it does have an acoustics lab and an impressive array of sampling and measuring equipment. NMFS' Rockfish Recruitment and Ecosystem Assessment Survey (RREAS) relies on these sophisticated sampling and observing equipment to collect data that informs a plethora of studies and science used to understand our ocean and the species that live in and around it.

The data collected about juvenile rockfish, northern anchovy, other forage species and the ecosystem were fascinating. NMFS and its scientist partners use this difficult-to-gather data to understand how species grow and mature, their life history (how different species of fish spend their days over the

course of their lives), and to inform the stock assessments used by managers to set catch limits and management measures.

There are over 70 species of rockfish in the California Current Ecosystem that borders the U.S. West Coast, and the ability to identify them at the pelagic juvenile stage

than on a research ship, I was touched by Keith's and the science crew's devotion to understanding our fish and ocean. These folks, including NOAA Corps Lieutenant J.G. Bonnie Vierra and Research Scientist Dr. Tanya Rogers, have dedicated their careers to the ocean and to science. They crucially gather data



A CTD rosette (a scientific instrument used to measure properties of seawater, primarily conductivity, temperature, and depth) on the Reuben Lasker. (Photo Corey Ridings)

is a rare skill. Chief Scientist Keith Sakuma relies on decades of experience to know what a tiny head spine, color spot, or number of fin ray counts means in determining the difference between a widow and yellowtail rockfish. Bent over the sampling table in the wet lab, his face less than two inches from the surface, I witnessed Keith identify juvenile rockfish smaller than paperclips all night.

As someone who has spent more time in management meetings

and information so those of us with smaller brains and weaker stomachs can focus on management.

Beyond rockfish data, important data about other ecosystem components (for example krill mesopelagic fishes), and oceanographic data like temperature and salinity are also being collected on the ship, and emerging tools like eDNA are being studied in collaboration with researchers from the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute. This

(Continued on page 15)

Feature, cont'd.

Reuben Lasker, cont'd from page 14

information is important for fisheries as it provides understanding about ecosystem conditions, how they are changing over time, and what this means for species we want to catch as well as the oceanic landscape we want to honor and conserve.

Above deck, the seabird and marine mammal data collection is equally important. Research Scientist Dr. Jarrod Santora collaborates with ornithologists from the Farallon Institute to record visual observations of seabirds and marine mammals along standardized transects. These data are then connected to midwater trawl sampling and oceanographic data, informing what we know about foraging conditions, ocean health and ecosystem connectivity.

The data collected during RREAS is essential for better understanding how the marine ecosystem connects and how species interact—knowledge that will be especially important for fisheries management with the growing impacts of climate change and changing human

demands on the ocean.

The last couple of years have proved challenging for fisheries, especially in my home state of California. With over half of the U.S. West Coast coastline and more people than Washington and Oregon combined, fishing opportunities in California have changed even in my short tenure as a Council member. While the impacts on coastal communities aren't fully known—we lack the social data to meaningfully understand what this means and for who—public testimony, economic valuations, and the larger suite of information about coastal areas and terrestrial conditions suggest we have a problem.

Thinking about these problems while out at sea, surrounded by impressive science capacity and dedicated NOAA Corps and crew, it was hard not to reflect on how this passion and expertise is translated into management. Is NMFS using the science we have about our ocean bounty well and in good faith? How do we have all this amazing science and dedicated brilliance, while our California salmon runs are drying up and many commercial fisheries are

struggling? I'm humbled by how much we don't know about the ocean, and ourselves, despite these efforts.

The challenging state of fisheries in California suggests that we need to look at how we make decisions: it's not just about the quantity of data, it's about *what* data, knowledge, and information we're using and how we're using it, to conserve and manage for the overall benefit of the nation and to meet our Tribal treaty obligations.

Moving forward with science and management "because that's how we've always done it" is unacceptable. While the status-quo has a set of beneficiaries and thus momentum, NMFS is abdicating its duty to the nation if it does not assess its performance and make the needed adjustments to meet its mandate and not give up on fisheries or coastal communities because change—whether environmental or political—can make things challenging.

This duty isn't just for people who fish, but for the scientists who have devoted their lives to understanding our ocean ecosystem and the fisheries it supports. ●

For more information

Helpful links:

- [Council website](#)
- [News and events](#)
- [Subscribe to email list](#)
- [Upcoming Council meetings](#)
- [Navigating the Council](#)
- [Acronyms and Definitions](#)



Council website
www.pccouncil.org



Subscribe to the
mailing list



Upcoming
meetings



Council calendar

This newsletter was created under NOAA grant #NA25NMF441C00005

Council Coordination Committee, cont'd from page 2

preparing for another partial funding disbursement.

A recurring theme throughout the meeting was the imperative to better align Council and NMFS priorities, driven by ongoing reductions in capacity and resources. To address this, three collaborative efforts are planned for the summer and early fall. The west coast initiative, involving the Pacific Council, West Coast Region, and relevant science centers, will leverage the Council's recent work on Council Efficiencies and the Committee-of-the-Whole to inform its position on priorities and operations. A parallel effort will take place on the Atlantic coast, and a third effort will bring together Council Executive Directors and NMFS Headquarters to identify how to more effectively align priorities with available capacity. ●

Appointments, cont'd from page 3

Council dissolved the Cost Recovery Committee, Groundfish Electronic Monitoring Policy Advisory Committee, Groundfish Electronic Monitoring Technical Advisory Committee, Equity and Environmental Justice Committee, and National Standards 4, 8, and 9 Committee. ●

Habitat, cont'd from page 5

quality and quantity in supporting and restoring healthy salmon populations that in turn support sustainable commercial and recreational fisheries. It also reiterates the expectation that Federal agencies will provide detailed responses to Council habitat conservation recommendations.

The HC also developed, in collaboration with the MPC, a comment letter on the California initiative to identify suitable sea space for wave and tidal energy (see Marine Planning, page 10).

The HC continues to track several other issues including the Port of Coos Bay Channel Modification Project, invasive golden mussels, the National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program, and the Columbia River System Operations environmental review.

DATABASE OF FISHING GEAR IMPACTS ON MARINE HABITATS AVAILABLE

[A new database on the effects of fishing gear on](#)



Fishing vessel near San Diego by [Duncan Rawlinson](#), [CC BY-NC 2.0](#)

[marine habitats](#) (and associated app) is now available. The database includes literature on the impacts of fishing gear on marine fish habitats. It is intended to be a resource for fishery managers, researchers, and stakeholders. It should be helpful for essential fish habitat reviews and other Council management actions. Users may submit additional references via the online portal. ●

Upcoming meetings

Upcoming Council meetings	City	Dates	Location	Public comment portal opens
September 2025	Spokane, WA	Advisory bodies start virtually September 18 Council session starts September 19 (proposed)	DoubleTree by Hilton Spokane Center	8/14/24
November 2025	Costa Mesa, CA	Advisory bodies start November 13 Council session starts November 14 (proposed)	Hilton Orange County/Costa Mesa	10/9/24
March 2026	Sacramento, CA	Advisory bodies start March 4 Council session starts March 5 (proposed)	DoubleTree by Hilton Sacramento	TBA
April 2026	Portland, OR	Advisory bodies begin April 7 Council session begins April 8 (proposed)	Hyatt Regency Oregon Convention Center	TBA

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEPTEMBER COUNCIL AGENDA

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES

- International Management

PACIFIC HALIBUT

- Adopt 2026 preliminary commercial and recreational Catch Sharing Plan and regulation changes for public review

SALMON

- Identify final topics for 2025 methodology review

GROUND FISH

- Final action on stock definitions; adopt stock assessments
- Identify final stock assessment topics for a methodology review
- Review draft trawl catch share program review
- Begin establishing harvest specifications and management measures for 2027-28
- Inseason management including consideration of 2026 harvest

specification projections for canary rockfish, shortspine rockfish, and petrale sole

CROSS-FISHERY MGMT PLAN

- Adopt the scope of action for establishing a more adaptive and flexible management system
- Adopt final priorities in response to Executive Order 14276 Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness

Executive actions, cont'd from page 2

The Executive Order also requires a review of all existing marine national monuments to determine their potential for opening to commercial fishing activities.

The order tasks NMFS with creating a list of the most heavily regulated fisheries in the U.S., and requires that each Council submit a prioritized list of actions to reduce burdens on domestic fishing while increasing production of sustainable fisheries. In response, the Council has adopted a preliminary set of priorities, which will be finalized in September. Council members discussed the broader context within which fishery management takes place, stressing the importance of trade, science, and other factors that are critical to ensuring a vibrant domestic seafood industry.

On June 4 the House Natural Resource Subcommittee [held a hearing](#) focused on this topic. The chair of the Council Coordination Committee spoke at the hearing on behalf of U.S. fishery management councils. Notably, NOAA did not participate. Despite this, the hearing was well-attended by House members and generated discussion on topics such as stock assessments, fishery surveys, data collection, and trade issues. Aside from NOAA's absence, the hearing was largely uneventful. ●