

Yurok Tribal Comments regarding Amendment 16, November 4, 2010

My name is Dave Hillemeier, Fisheries Program Manager for the Yurok Tribe. The Yurok Reservation is located along the lower 44 miles of the Klamath River. The Yurok Tribe relies on the fisheries of the Klamath River; therefore my brief comments pertain to Klamath River fisheries, especially Klamath fall Chinook.

I realize the intent of this agenda item today is for the Salmon Amendment Committee to seek clarification and guidance regarding the alternatives that will be analyzed for the Environmental Assessment. I would like to take this opportunity to clarify for the Council concerns the Tribe has with a couple of the draft preliminary preferred alternatives that were identified at the September Council meeting. In particular, we are concerned that some of the preliminary preferred alternatives identified at the September meeting are not based upon the use of the best available science (such as advice and or findings from STT and SSC). Furthermore, we are concerned that some of the identified preferred preliminary alternatives are focused more on short-term fishing opportunity rather than maximizing harvest over the long-term.

Overfished/Rebuilt/Geometric and Arithmetic Means

As noted in the “Issues Paper” of the SAC, there was somewhat of a contradiction in the preliminary preferred alternatives from the September meeting, given that a three year period was recommended for determining when a stock is “overfished” yet only a one year period was recommended for determining when a stock is “rebuilt”; therefore, under these criteria, it possible for a stock to be simultaneously classified as overfished and rebuilt. To remedy this situation, and for these stock classifications to be more reflective of stock status, we recommend that a three-year period be used to determine whether a stock is “overfished” and whether a stock is “rebuilt”. Given the inherent variability in fall Chinook abundance, and the fact that a three-year period encompasses more cohorts than a single year, we believe the three year period is more reflective of the stock’s status than just a single year and therefore a better indicator of whether a stock is “overfished” or “rebuilt”.

In regard to the use of the geometric vs. the arithmetic mean over this three-year period, I recommend that you use the geometric mean as recommended by the STT and SSC. Their recommendation is technically sound; therefore the geometric mean is typically used in other areas of salmon management.

MSY/Control Rule and de minimis fishing

The control rule that will be adopted for managing Klamath fall Chinook is extremely important for the future of this stock. Therefore this rule should be based upon the best available science; i.e. MSY. The Salmon Fisheries Management Plan speaks to the importance of managing for Optimum Yield, and the fact that Optimum Yield is prescribed on the basis of the Maximum Sustainable Yield of the fishery. The FMP goes on to say that MSY is usually approached in terms of annually achieving the number of adult spawners associated with this goal. After many years of managing Klamath fall chinook under harvest rate management regime (with a minimum floor of 35,000 natural adult spawners), we now have well over 20 years of completed cohort data from which to conduct a Stock/Recruit (S/R) analysis so that MSY can be estimated. This S/R analysis was conducted by the STT in 2005; they estimated the value of MSY to be 40,700 adults. This analysis was supported by the SSC's determination that the STT's analysis represents the best available science regarding the MSY value. While a control rule that goes to a lower value, such as the 35,000 that is in the preliminary preferred alternative, may allow slightly higher harvest rates in the short-term, this value is not based on science, nor will this higher harvest rate achieve optimum yield for the fishery over the long-term. We recommend that the PFMC adopt the STT's estimate of 40,700 adult Chinook as being the appropriate MSY for Klamath fall Chinook, and that this value serves as the basis for the control rule for Klamath fall Chinook.

De minimus Fisheries

We are concerned that the preliminary preferred alternative basically punts in regard to how the stock will be managed during times of extremely low abundance; i.e. the status quo with no control rule explicitly defined below stock sizes of 30,000. Rather than wait to make such decisions when going through the somewhat rushed, as well as politically/socially charged pre-season management process, we think the control rule adopted through Amendment 16 should extend throughout the range of stock sizes that are associated with de minimis fisheries. We would expect this rule to reflect expected fishing levels that NMFS stated could be expected in letters to the PFMC and the Yurok Tribal Council following adoption of Amendment 15 (i.e. they expected the 25% rate to decline as stock size dropped below 30,000 and that they expected to see a substantially greater decline in harvest rates at stock sizes near 22,000). We also would like to see an alternative that begins reducing the spawner reduction rate below 25% at the 0.75 MSY value (i.e. 30,525) – we thought this had made it in the alternatives at the September meeting, but cannot find it listed.

Miscellaneous

Regarding the timeline for adoption of Amendment 16, we hope that enough time is given for the SAC to give the thorough analysis necessary for this complex amendment, as well ample time for public review of the final Environmental Analysis. We would have no problem with this Amendment not being adopted until June of next year.