NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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PRESS RELEASE

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NOTICE OF COUNCIL ACTION

Council action to minimize chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery

At its April meeting, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) received significant feedback and testimony from over 100 people, including Tribal leaders and members, CDQ groups, Alaska communities, and pollock fishery participants that helped inform modifications for the next stage of analysis on a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) focused on bycatch reductions of Western Alaska chum. The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) determined that the document was insufficient for decisionmaking and, in addition to public testimony, provided numerous recommendations to better assess the impacts of the actions under consideration.

The Council approved changes to the existing alternatives and included new options for further evaluation including:

- lowering the range of bycatch limits being analyzed
- making an alternative that links bycatch limits based to western Alaska chum abundance more responsive to signals of salmon declines;
- adding an alternative to create an area-specific bycatch limit to control pollock fishing effort from June through August in locations where Western Alaska chum bycatch are likely more present based on historical genetic data; and
- modifying the current regulations for the pollock fleet to avoid bycatch by closing fishing areas in near real-time throughout the season when chum are on the fishing grounds

Annual genetic sampling by fishery observers certified by the National Marine Fisheries Service show the Bering Sea pollock fishery intercepts predominantly hatchery origin Russia and Asia chum, but the Council is focused on management actions that could minimize bycatch of western Alaska origin chum salmon, as returns of these fish have declined substantially in recent years, negatively impacting the subsistence way of life for western and interior Alaska residents.

Available science indicates recent declines in chum salmon populations across many regions of the North Pacific, including Canada, Japan, Russia, Korea, and the U.S., appear to be driven by warmer water temperatures in both the marine and freshwater environments which impact juvenile surivival, prey availability and quality, metabolism and growth rates, and

reproductive rates.However, Western Alaska chum salmon are also taken as bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery, reducing the amount of salmon that return to western and interior Alaska rivers, and the Council is considering action to address these impacts.

The next required step will be further impact analysis as required by Federal law, to analyze potential environmental, social and cultural, and economic impacts. The Council's decisions were based on information from the preliminary analysis and recommendations from the SSC, the Advisory Panel, and public testimony.

Multiple alternatives can be selected, and the full description of the alternatives and options is available here. The Council is scheduled to review the next analysis when it is available in late 2024 or early 2025.

North Pacific Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional councils established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act in 1976 (MSA) to manage fisheries in the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone, 3 miles off the coast of Alaska. Per the MSA, the 11 voting members serving on the Council are made of up people appointed by the Secretary of Commerce, and the state marine fisheries commissioners from Alaska, Washington, and Oregon as well as the Regional Director of the National Marine Fisheries Service. Federal fisheries decisions must be consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other federal laws.The Council, along with the advisory bodies, were formed so federal fishery management decisions could be made at a regional level, emphasizing public input.

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