

## **Shorebased Whiting Cooperative**

Salmon Mitigation Plan Postseason Report on the 2024 Pacific Whiting Fishery

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## **Purpose of Report**

The Shorebased Whiting Cooperative is submitting a Salmon Mitigation Plan (SMP) Report for the 2024 season on behalf of its membership, all of whom are party to SMP-2024-02. This report is intended to disclose all information required or identified in 50 CFR 660.113(e)(6).

## **SMP Report Requirements**

(6) ***SMP postseason report.*** The designated SMP representative for an approved SMP must submit a written postseason report to NMFS and the Council for the year in which the SMP was approved.

(i) ***Submission deadline.*** The SMP postseason report must be received by NMFS and the Council no later than March 17 of the year following that in which the SMP was approved.

(ii) ***Information requirements.*** The SMP postseason report must contain, at a minimum, the following information:

(A) Name of the SMP and SMP identification number.

(B) A comprehensive description of Chinook salmon bycatch avoidance measures used in the fishing year in which the SMP was approved, including but not limited to, information sharing, area closures, movement rules, salmon excluder use, and internal bycatch guidelines.

(C) An evaluation of the effectiveness of these avoidance measures in minimizing Chinook salmon bycatch.

(D) A description of any amendments to the terms of the SMP that were approved by NMFS during the fishing year in which the SMP was approved and the reasons the amendments to the SMP were made.

### **(A) Name of the SMP and SMP identification number.**

Salmon Mitigation Plan for the Shorebased Whiting Cooperative. SMP identification number: SMP-2024-02

### **(B) A comprehensive description of Chinook salmon bycatch avoidance measures used in the fishing year in which the SMP was approved, including but not limited to, information sharing, area closures, movement rules, salmon excluder use, and internal bycatch guidelines.**

The Shorebased Whiting Cooperative relied on near real time information sharing, hot spot closures and salmon excluders to minimize Chinook salmon encounters in 2024.

The Cooperative retains Seastate, Inc. as its monitoring agent. The monitor pairs each vessel's VMS and fish ticket data and distributes a daily catch report to the membership. The cooperative has also implemented a high-bycatch alarm system in conjunction with the monitor, that sends out automatic alerts to the membership with a map and location of any high bycatch tows. Near real time catch data helps vessels identify when Chinook salmon coincide with whiting and further helps captains avoid fishing in depths or locations with elevated Chinook. In addition to sharing information amongst Cooperative member vessels, information on high-by-catch tows was also distributed to the At-sea Sectors.

The Cooperative establishes both pre-season and in-season closures to restrict fishing in areas with elevated Chinook. The SWC provides its manager with the authority to unilaterally close bycatch hot spots throughout the season. The Cooperative manager utilized this provision to close an area for elevated Chinook interactions off Northern Washington in 2024. The hot spot closures served to reduce interactions with Chinook and redistribute fishing effort away from areas of high bycatch.

Additionally, the SWC requires all its member vessels to fish with salmon excluders 100% of the time. The excluders are a series of mesh panels built into the net which allow Chinook to exit the net while simultaneously allowing whiting to move back and be caught in the codend. Excluders work to reduce Chinook catch by utilizing the fact that salmon are stronger swimmers than hake, and with the right water flow and gear configurations can actually swim out of the net.

**(C) An evaluation of the effectiveness of these avoidance measures in minimizing Chinook salmon bycatch.**

The SWC members caught 798 Chinook, 7% of the 11,000 fish Chinook cap, while landing 158,351,020 lbs. of whiting. While Chinook salmon often overlap with whiting, Cooperative members were able to minimize encounters by effectively utilizing near real time information sharing, salmon excluders and closing hot spots when needed.

All of the Cooperative's member vessels are committed to limiting chinook encounters to the extent practicable. By sharing and monitoring near real time catch data, the vessels were able to identify when Chinook were present or likely to be in an area. This further allowed them to effectively shift their fishing effort to areas less likely to have Chinook.

Recent EFP studies in the Bering Sea Pollock fishery have found salmon excluders to have a 15-30% escapement rate when used by vessels with similar horsepower and gear configurations to SWC members. The effectiveness of salmon excluders is largely dependent on the individual vessel; however, these studies support the cooperative's use of excluders as an effective salmon mitigation tool.

Parties to the SMP operate under some of the best information and gear available to the industry; however, lightning strikes can and do still occur. The Cooperative was able to respond almost immediately on one occasion when vessels encountered Chinook hits and implemented a hot spot closure. The quick response time was in part a product of the SWC's membership

agreement, which provides the manager automatic hot spot closure authority. The closure was implemented upon thorough review of the fleet's in-season tow data at that time of the year. The temporary hot spot closure was effective at preventing other vessels from also catching Chinook in the same location and shifted effort to alternative areas.

**(D) A description of any amendments to the terms of the SMP that were approved by NMFS during the fishing year in which the SMP was approved and the reasons the amendments to the SMP were made.**

No amendments were made to the SMP.