

Purpose and Need Statement Salmon Bycatch Committee 2023

The purpose of this proposed action is to develop actions to minimize bycatch of Western Alaska origin chum salmon in the Eastern Bering Sea pollock fishery consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act, National Standards, and other applicable law.

Western Alaska chum salmon returns to many Western Alaska river systems have experienced severe declines since 2018. These declines have created adverse impacts to culture and food security and have resulted in reduced access to traditional foods and commercial salmon fisheries. The best available science suggests that ecosystem and climate changes are the leading causes of recent chum salmon run failures, but consideration of additional measures to further minimize bycatch is warranted in light of the critical importance of chum salmon to Western Alaska communities.

The Council last considered chum management measures, including a cap on chum bycatch, in 2012, but periodic ocean warming and other oceanographic changes in concert with the significant declines in run size to Western Alaska watersheds require a review of potential measures to further minimize bycatch of Western Alaska origin chum salmon in the Eastern Bering Sea pollock fishery.

In recognition that the majority of chum bycatch is of non-domestic hatchery origin, options should focus on reducing the Western Alaska composition of salmon bycatch encounters. These options should include exploring the practicability and timing of implementing up-to-date genetic testing techniques, expanded management measures that could be incorporated into Incentive Plan Agreements, and the feasibility of implementing a chum cap.

Consideration of how mitigation of Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch may increase other bycatch species such as Chinook, herring, or cod should also be analyzed, and an understanding of all sources of chum salmon mortality will be important in informing the relative impact of bycatch encountered by the pollock fleet.