

A Scientific Workshop Process to Evaluate Effects of Salmon Fisheries on Southern Resident Killer Whales

Background: As a component of broader efforts to identify, evaluate and reduce all threats to Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKWs) listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), NOAA Fisheries scientists have collected data and conducted preliminary analyses of the potential effects of salmon fisheries on the well-being of SRKWs. At the same time, NOAA understands that Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) scientists have been conducting similar analyses in connection with developing an action plan to implement their Recovery Plan for these same whales, which also are listed under Canada's Species At Risk Act (SARA). The data and analyses performed to date suggest that salmon abundance, particularly Chinook salmon abundance, is significantly related to the wellbeing of the SRKW population. Among the many factors affecting Chinook abundance, fisheries that result in Chinook mortalities may detrimentally affect SRKW by reducing their available prey.

Scientific Workshop Process: Because of the potential ramifications of these preliminary findings for recovery plan implementation generally, and for salmon fisheries that affect the abundance and availability of Chinook within the range of the SRKWs, NOAA Fisheries and DFO will sponsor a series of broadly inclusive scientific workshops. The purpose of the workshops will be to share, refine, review, and potentially identify additional scientific information and analyses relevant to the effects of salmon fisheries on Chinook abundance and SRKWs. As currently envisioned:

- The workshops will be led by an Expert Panel comprised of a chief scientist and up to six other scientific professionals not affiliated with NOAA Fisheries or DFO.
- The panel would include scientists specializing in salmon abundance estimation (modeling), killer whale ecology, and predator/prey relationships.
- There would be three scientific workshops that would include presentations of relevant data and analysis by NOAA Fisheries and DFO scientists as well as relevant experts from other invited governmental and non-governmental organizations.
- Additional scientific experts will be invited to attend the workshops to assist in the review and provide a challenge function (peer review) of the presentations.
- The workshops would be open to observation by the public, but not to public participation.

Schedule and Focus of Workshops: The general schedule and purposes of the workshops are as follows:

Workshop 1 (2-3 days) would occur in the late spring of 2011 and would focus on:

1. Establishing the factual context: what we know about SRKW and their diet and the importance of specific prey populations to the diet;
2. Presenting and reviewing/critiquing analyses done to date by NOAA Fisheries and DFO;
3. Identifying key data gaps and uncertainties and the potentials for reducing them; and,
4. Identifying and assigning specific follow-up tasks for presentation at the next workshop.

Workshop 2 (~ 2 days) would occur in late summer or autumn of 2011 and would focus on presentations of updated/refined analyses and any new information, ideas, and analyses identified at Workshop 1. The Expert Panel would begin to formulate tentative conclusions and discuss them with workshop participants.

Workshop 3 (1-2 days) would occur in early winter/spring of 2012 and would focus on a review of a draft report of the Expert Panel.

Workshop Product: The Expert Panel would produce a report that (1) summarizes the status of the available science pertinent to the effects on SRKWs of reductions in prey abundance resulting from fishing and (2) identifies potential means for reducing data gaps and scientific uncertainties.