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January 11, 2024

To First Nations and Stakeholders,

Re: Salmon 2024/2025 Integrated Fisheries Management Plans (IFMPs) for Northern and Southern British Columbia (B.C.)

This letter is intended to identify a number of important planning considerations that the Department intends to discuss with First Nations and stakeholders during upcoming meetings for developing the 2024/2025 Northern and Southern B.C. Salmon IFMPs, as well as alert you to important dates and deadlines for this year's process. A summary of the important planning considerations that will be discussed as part of planning for the 2024 season is provided in **Appendix 1**.

There will be opportunities to discuss the Appendix 1 considerations and other considerations for the 2024 season at planned meetings as well as during the minimum 30-day comment period to provide feedback on the draft IFMPs. Further discussion with First Nations and advisory groups on these subjects will take place during the consultation process to develop the 2024/2025 salmon IFMPs. Additional details on specific changes to inform discussions will be identified in the draft IFMPs that will be released at the end of February.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is committed to working with First Nations on planning and management of the salmon fisheries through existing and emerging bilateral and regional processes and relationships, and to achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples by working towards renewed nation-to-nation relationships and partnerships that contribute to reconciliation, the recognition of rights and mutual understanding, trust and respect. For the upcoming 2024/25 Pacific Salmon IFMP, the Department is seeking to support a more constructive engagement process with First Nations in the planning stages of the IFMP process. As an initial step, the Regional Salmon Team reached out to First Nations in British Columbia to seek input on key priorities to inform additional planning, analysis, and early development of potential management actions and/or options for consideration in the draft IFMPs. This occurred from mid-October to early December 2023.

Further discussion will be required to align input received on key priorities with available technical capacity, existing work plans, availability of data or technical advice, etc. and, as a result, some priorities received will require longer term plans to address. The Department considered the priorities received from First Nations when developing this IFMP planning letter and has included a summary of broad topics for consideration throughout the consultation process. For other specific priorities received that are not identified here, the Department plans to respond directly with those who submitted letters. These priorities were also informed by the Department's engagement with stakeholder groups, including commercial harvesters, representatives of the Sport Fish Advisory Board, as well as various ENGOs. All of these discussions will inform the development of the 2024 Salmon IFMPs.

Salmon IFMPs are developed annually; the plans currently in place are effective June 1, 2023, to May 31, 2024. The process to develop the salmon IFMPs is consistent with national guidelines for all IFMPs (see <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/peches-fisheries/ifmp-gmp/index-eng.htm>).

The current 2023/2024 Salmon IFMPs are available at:

Southern BC – <https://waves-vagues.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/library-bibliotheque/41187404.pdf>

Northern BC – <https://waves-vagues.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/library-bibliotheque/41187398.pdf>

Below is a table outlining the important dates for the development of the salmon IFMPs for the coming year.

2024-2025 Salmon IFMPs Process Timelines

| Activity | Proposed Timelines |
|--|---|
| Salmon Post-season Review Meetings All First Nations and stakeholders invited to attend | Northern: December 7-8, 2023 Southern: December 5, 2023 |
| Release of DFO IFMP Planning Letter and timelines for 2024/2025 season | January, 2024 |
| 2024 Salmon Outlook All First Nations and stakeholders invited to attend | January 16, 2024 |
| Deadline for new Commercial Salmon Allocation Framework (CSAF) proposals | January 26, 2024 |
| Deadline for any new fishery proposals to be included in the Draft IFMP for comment | January 26, 2024 |
| Meetings to review and discuss potential changes to IFMPs and opportunity for focussed discussion on key IFMP issues | Fraser Forum: January 30 – February 1, 2024 Northern IHPC: January 17, 2024 Southern IHPC: January 18, 2024 |
| Draft IFMPs released for public review & comment | February 12, 2024 |
| Meetings to review draft IFMP | Fraser Forum: March 5-7, 2024 Northern IHPC: February 21, 2024 Southern IHPC: February 22, 2024 |
| Submission deadline for comments on IFMP Draft. All proposals for new fisheries are due on this date; proposals received after March 29 th will not be considered for the 2024/25 fishing season. | March 29, 2024 |
| Final meetings for discussion on IFMP feedback | Fraser Forum: April 9-11, 2024 Full IHPC: April 11-12, 2024 |
| Deadline for all final feedback on the IFMP - any comments on previously raised feedback provided during the Draft IFMP consultation period. Input provided after this date will not be | April 15, 2024 |

| | |
|--|---------------|
| considered for the 2024/25 IFMP. | |
| Target for public release of salmon IFMP | June 28, 2024 |

Meetings will be virtual and held on MS Teams or Zoom. Meeting invitations and details will be sent out as they become available.

Yours sincerely,

DFO Pacific Salmon Management Team

DFO.PacificSalmonRMT-EGRSaumonduDpacifique.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca.

Attachments (1):

Appendix 1: Summary of important planning considerations for the 2024 season

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General

1. Environmental Conditions and Drought Management

Changing environmental conditions continue to impact Pacific salmon populations throughout British Columbia. In recent years, these conditions include rising water temperatures, lower in-river water levels, earlier snow melts, lower dissolved oxygen levels, as well as increased frequency and intensity of weather events like floods and droughts. Exposure to variable environmental conditions impact salmon survival and spawning in various ways leading to increased uncertainty and variability in abundance.

Rising water temperatures have been recorded in both the marine and freshwater habitats of Pacific salmon with low water levels in river systems. This can impede adult migrating salmon and affect their ability to spawn. In combination with lower dissolved oxygen levels, Pacific salmon experience increased stress impacting their survival. Earlier and more extreme freshet from snow and glacial melt as well as increased flooding events can destroy spawning habitats, flush away redds, and increase sedimentation on vulnerable eggs.

The Department manages fisheries using the precautionary approach, in the face of these extreme environmental conditions decisions are based on scientific advice that considers data quality and incorporates uncertainty. While the environmental stressors encountered by individual salmon populations vary, fisheries management decisions may involve further reductions in fisheries for stocks impacted by these extreme events.

A priority flagged for the 2024/25 salmon management cycle is managing the changing environmental conditions such as drought. The Department is preparing for ongoing drought conditions in 2024 and is continuing to communicate and collaborate with provincial partners to support actions to help mitigate the impacts of drought on salmon populations. The Department will continue to consider available science advice to inform potential fisheries management actions to respond to drought conditions. Fishery management responses are anticipated to be case specific; with efforts made to target fisheries management action to specific situations (i.e., fishery restrictions in areas where fish may be holding or are anticipated to suffer mortalities due to environmental conditions). Specific language outlining key considerations for drought management responses will be added to the IFMP based on available science advice.

2. Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative (PSSI)

The Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative (PSSI) will continue its long-term strategy to address serious declines in key Pacific salmon populations through a series of initiatives under four pillars. Pillar 3, the Harvest Transformation pillar, aims to transform the way that Pacific salmon is harvested in light of Pacific salmon trends.

The Department is continuing to take a precautionary approach to managing fisheries that interact with stocks of conservation concern as part of a coordinated approach under the PSSI to help stabilize and support rebuilding of these depressed populations. Under the Harvest Transformation pillar, a number of initiatives are underway and the Department will continue to seek feedback from First Nations and stakeholders on areas where additional changes (e.g. improvements to fishery monitoring and catch

reporting, fishery management approaches, etc.) may be implemented to modernize fisheries management.

For commercial fisheries, the Department is interested in exploring possible opportunities to expand share-based management approaches (i.e. Individual Transferable Quota, Individual Transferable Effort, pooled arrangements) to support more predictable and sustainable harvest. Area Harvest Committees and First Nations with commercial allocations interested in exploring share based management pilots in 2024/25 should contact Ge Li, A/Senior Regional Salmon Officer (ge.li@dfo-mpo.gc.ca) by January 26th, 2024.

Further details can be found here: [Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative \(dfo-mpo.gc.ca\)](#)

3. Big Bar Landslide - Update

Salmon migration monitoring results in 2023 at the Big Bar landslide site results indicate no delay in salmon passage in 2023 as in 2022. The 2023 monitoring data, in conjunction with data from 2022, have provided valuable information to inform recommendations into the Structured Decision-Making process (SDM). However, due to the 2019 and 2020 blockage of adult spawning as a result of the landslide, it is anticipated that 2024 returns of age 4 and 5 Chinook and Sockeye will be low.

The SDM process developed recommendations based on review of all potential options for a long-term solution to ensure fish passage at the Big Bar slide site. Through the SDM process, it was determined that Big Bar no longer appears to be the primary factor limiting the overall success of salmon migration into the Upper Fraser River watershed. Monitoring of 2021, 2022, and 2023 salmon migration has demonstrated that Big Bar is likely no longer a significant barrier to fish passage through a broader range of water levels. However, recognizing Big Bar is still a concern, the site will continue to be monitored by the Department with First Nations involvement. Should future monitoring indicate that salmon passage thresholds at Big Bar are decreasing, it is then recommended the Big Bar Joint Executive Steering Committee (JESC) should reopen the SDM process within the broader context of fish passage problems and potential solutions along the entire Fraser River. Monitoring during Early Stuart Sockeye migration will continue in 2024, including implementing sonars downstream and upstream of the slide site. In addition, hydraulic monitoring and assessment of the stability of the Nature Like Fishway (NLFW) will continue on an annual basis for the next 5 years. The Upper Fraser Enhancement program, which is focused on stocks that were impacted by the slide in 2019 and 2020, will continue in 2024. Ongoing collaborative planning with First Nation Partners continues to inform 2024 production planning.

4. First Nations Food, Social and Ceremonial Fishery Opportunities

Conservation is the primary objective in managing Pacific Salmon. After conservation requirements are met, the Department is committed to respecting Constitutional and Treaty obligations to provide priority access for First Nations Food, Social and Ceremonial (FSC) harvest opportunities. It is anticipated that conservation measures to protect co-migrating stocks of concern or low returns for many salmon populations, particularly those returning to the Fraser River, may constrain First Nations FSC harvest opportunities.

For 2024, pre-season fishing plans will need to consider how to manage FSC harvest opportunities for abundant populations while addressing on-going conservation concerns and constraints for co-migrating stocks. Food fishing and FSC opportunities are priorities for First Nations, and Departmental staff will

work with First Nations on fishing plans that achieve conservation objectives and provide FSC fishery opportunities for harvest of small numbers of fish for ceremonial purposes (particularly when stocks of concern may be impacted), as well as more abundant stocks and/or surpluses that are identified. Input will be sought on FSC sharing arrangements for circumstances in which Fraser River Sockeye returns are not adequate to provide for full First Nations FSC access. Additional restrictions in commercial and recreational fisheries will likely be required to provide for First Nations harvest opportunities. Pre-season and in-season plans to address these concerns will be discussed with First Nations and stakeholders as part of the IFMP development process.

5. First Nations Collaborative and Reconciliation Agreements

For Fraser River salmon, the Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement¹ (FSCMA) was signed on July 5, 2019, by the Minister and the President of the Fraser Salmon Management Council. The Fraser Salmon Management Council is a mandated Indigenous organization with First Nations membership from throughout the Fraser watershed and approach waters. The FSCMA establishes a Tier 2 governance framework between the FSMC and the Department, including the joint Fraser Salmon Management Board (FSMB) and Joint Technical Committee (JTC), that will support engagement, decision making, and recommendations relating to management of Fraser salmon. The work of the FSMB and its JTC is guided by their annual work plan which sets shared priorities for the year ahead, including some of the issues identified in this letter (e.g., management approaches for Fraser River Chinook salmon).

The Fisheries Resources Reconciliation Agreement (FRRA), signed in July 2021, is a historic agreement between eight First Nations of the central and north coasts of British Columbia and Haida Gwaii, the Great Bear Initiative Society, and the Government of Canada. In the spirit of reconciliation, the signatories seek to advance a more collaborative, coordinated, and efficient approach to the governance and management of fisheries resources. All signatories are committed to working collaboratively on a Nation-to-Nation, government-to-government basis through consensus to develop effective strategies for the management, conservation, and use of fisheries resources. Building a common understanding in our approach to collaborative salmon governance in the Central Coast will continue in 2024/25. While the Department is committed to working towards collaborative governance with First Nations and incorporating these priorities to IFMPs, the Department will also continue to engage with all First Nations and stakeholders in the IFMP planning process.

6. COSEWIC Assessments and *Species at Risk Act* Listing Decisions

To date, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has assessed 62 designatable units (DUs) of Pacific salmon and two DUs of anadromous trout. For those DUs assessed as endangered, threatened, special concern, or extirpated, COSEWIC's submission of its assessments to the Government of Canada, via its annual report, initiates a process to determine if the Governor in Council (Cabinet), on the recommendation of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada, decides to list the DU under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).

To inform a listing decision, the Department prepares a package that includes: science advice (e.g., a Recovery Potential Assessment); management scenarios that outline measures that would potentially

¹ For more information on the Fraser Salmon Collaborative Management Agreement (FSCMA) see SC IFMP at page 87 or <https://frasersalmon.ca/>

be taken under a Do Not List or a List decision, including those that may impact fisheries; Indigenous Cultural Significance; a Cost-Benefit Analysis; and a summary of consultation with First Nations, Wildlife Management Boards, stakeholders, Environmental Non-Government Organizations (ENGO)s, Provinces and Territories, and the general public, that will inform a regulatory impact analysis statement. Development of packages to inform listing decisions is currently underway for the 45 Pacific salmon and steelhead DUs which have been assessed as endangered, threatened, or special concern by COSEWIC.

Additional details can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry.html>.

7. Marine Conservation Initiatives

On October 12, 2023, the Department distributed an information package on DFO's Marine Conservation Targets (MCT) to members of the Commercial Salmon Advisory Board. The package provides an update on relevant MCT initiatives, potential changes to fisheries, and details on upcoming consultation. At this time, the only potential fisheries closure for MCT initiatives for the 2024 fishing season is for Lophelia Reef on the central coast; the salmon sector has not been identified as potentially affected by this proposed closure.

Upcoming opportunities for consultation on MCT initiatives where salmon fisheries have been identified for further assessment include:

- Northern Shelf Bioregion Fisheries Act Marine Refuges – Masset and Skidegate Inlets: Fisheries Management sent an email to fisheries representatives offering to meet and consult on these sites. Feedback is also welcomed in writing at: DFO.PACFMMCT-OCMGPPAC.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca.
- Biodiversity Protection Regulation within the Scott Islands marine National Wildlife Area: Fisheries Management is seeking updated feedback from affected groups prior to moving forward to pre-publication in Canada Gazette Part I. Although there is no active commercial salmon fishery in the Scott Islands, salmon fisheries have been identified as a risk to seabird colonies and are proposed for closure. Feedback is welcomed in writing at: DFO.PACFMMCT-OCMGPPAC.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca.
- Glass Sponge Reef-Rockfish Conservation Area Project in Howe Sound: Fisheries Management anticipates consulting on a new proposal, through workshops and bilateral meetings, that incorporates feedback received from January 2023 engagement. Invitations will be provided through appropriate sectoral representatives and via email. There are no anticipated changes to commercial salmon fisheries, but recreational fishing using downriggers has been identified for assessment.
- For the three sites identified for potential *Oceans Act* designation in the Northern Shelf Bioregion Network Action Plan (Haida Gwaii Offshore, Kitkatla Inlet and Caamaño Sound), there will be engagement via Advisory Committees. The Advisory Committees for each site are anticipated to be established in winter 2024.

The information package is available upon request from DFO.PACFMMCT-OCMGPPAC.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca.

8. Fish Stocks Provisions / Rebuilding Plans

In April of 2022, three stocks of Pacific Salmon were included in a regulatory amendment to the *Fishery (General) Regulations* (FGR) under the Fish Stocks provisions (FSP). FSP includes obligations to maintain prescribed fish stocks at levels necessary to promote their sustainability (s. 6.1); and to develop and implement rebuilding plans for stocks that have declined to or below their limit reference point, Limit Reference Point (LRP), (s. 6.2). The first three prescribed salmon stocks are Okanagan Chinook, West Coast Vancouver Island (WCVI) Chinook, and Interior Fraser (IFR) Coho. Collaborative work is underway to develop Rebuilding Plans for both WCVI Chinook and Okanagan Chinook. A rebuilding plan for IFR Coho is not planned as this population is above the LRP. A summary document will be included as an appendix to the 2024/25 IFMP describing the current management strategy for Interior Fraser Coho and how it is compliant with the Precautionary Approach policy.

In addition to the first batch of stocks, the Department sought feedback from October 19 to December 19, 2022, on a proposal for a regulatory amendment to the FGR to prescribe the second batch of fish stocks that would be subject to FSP (sections 6.1–6.3 of the Fisheries Act). This regulatory amendment would see the addition of 62 fish stocks to Schedule IX of the FGR nationally, including four Pacific salmon stocks. Schedule IX currently contains 30 fish stocks.

Information on the proposed batch two stocks can be found here: [Consultation on a Regulatory Proposal to Prescribe Stocks to the Fish Stocks Provisions in the Fisheries Act \(dfo-mpo.gc.ca\)](https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/consultation/consultation-on-a-regulatory-proposal-to-prescribe-stocks-to-the-fish-stocks-provisions-in-the-fisheries-act)

9. Commercial Salmon Allocation Framework (CSAF) Demonstration Fisheries

The Department is continuing to implement existing fisheries and review new CSAF demonstration fisheries proposals through the IFMP process. CSAF demonstration fishery proposals are intended to provide increased flexibility for harvesters to fish their commercial salmon shares. CSAF demonstration fishery proposals are assessed through an Evaluation Framework which outlines Departmental objectives and were developed with support from the Salmon Coordinating Committee (SCC) and Commercial Salmon Advisory Board (CSAB).

The Department is requesting any new demonstration fishery proposals be submitted by proponents to DFO.PacificSalmonRMT-EGRSaumonduDfo@dfo-mpo.gc.ca and their local Fisheries Manager **no later than January 26, 2024**. As in previous years, this is to ensure sufficient time for the Department to evaluate the proposals and provide an opportunity for feedback and discussion through the draft IFMP consultation process. Demonstration fishery proposals that are not submitted by this deadline will not be considered for the 2024/25 season. A template for new proposals, as well as the Evaluation Framework that will be used to assess new proposals, are available upon request from DFO.PacificSalmonRMT-EGRSaumonduDfo@dfo-mpo.gc.ca.

10. Indigenous Community Based Fisheries

As outlined in the DFO-Coast Guard Reconciliation Strategy (<https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fisheries-peches/aboriginal-autochtones/reconciliation-eng.html>), the Department is committed to reconciliation with First Nations through strengthened Indigenous-Crown relationships, recognizing self-determination and reducing socio-economic gaps. In support of these objectives, the Department and several First

Nations have finalized, or are negotiating, reconciliation agreements that include provisions for Community-Based Fisheries.

Community-Based Fisheries (CBFs) are collaboratively managed (by the Department and First Nations) sale fisheries that are designed to enable enhanced community participation by supporting First Nations to fish existing commercial fishing access according to a set of negotiated flexibilities. CBFs will have a defined area and will be characterized by fishery management flexibilities that are consistent with community objectives of enhanced participation and self-determination in fisheries, and will be designed and implemented to ensure conservation, sustainable use and orderly fishery management. As part of an agreement implementation, in 2024 the Department anticipates working in collaboration with several nations to implement CBFs, including in salmon fisheries. Currently a troll CBF is being developed with the Haida Nation.

11. Dual Fishing

Many First Nations have expressed a strong interest in conducting dual fishing to support self-determination, cultural practices and methods of fishing (particularly utilizing all fish caught); to increase flexibility in harvesting practices; to eliminate inefficiencies; and to reduce cost of conducting FSC fisheries by minimizing the need for separate fishing trips. Continuing to respond to dual fishing interests, the Department worked with several North Coast and Lower Fraser First Nations to successfully pilot new *Type B* (i.e., commercial fisheries where retention of bycatch species for which there are FSC allocations, or 'bycatch type') dual fishing pilots in 2023.

In 2024, the Department will again be considering limited opportunities to pilot *Type B* (bycatch-type) dual fishing in salmon economic opportunity and demonstration fisheries, similar to the approach taken in 2023. Dual fishing may also be implemented as part of Community Based Fisheries. These pilots would enable retention of non-target bycatch for FSC purposes that the First Nation would otherwise be licensed to harvest under their FSC licenses, where there is commercial TAC identified to initiate a directed commercial fishery of a different target species. The Department will be engaging First Nations who have expressed an interest to explore potential bycatch-type dual fishing pilots for 2024.

12. Coastwide Commercial Catch Monitoring

The Department intends to improve the data collection and verification of retained catch and by-catch/incidental mortality by implementing additional independent verification in commercial salmon fisheries. This includes plans to consult on initial steps to improve independent verification of retained and release catch (i.e., by setting a minimum level of coverage) in 2024/25 with longer term comprehensive monitoring plans developed through consultation in subsequent years. Increased requirements for additional monitoring in commercial fisheries aligns with initiatives in the Commercial Harvest Transformation, as part of the Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative, to improve monitoring and assessment programs for all fisheries. These measures will help to improve information gathering and help quantify impacts on stocks of concern consistent with the precautionary approach. Changes to catch monitoring in commercial fisheries will be discussed with CSAB and Area Harvest Committees during engagement on Commercial Harvest Transformation and through IFMP consultations.

13. Early Season Fisheries

The timing of the IFMP and, in particular, the gap between when current IFMPs expire on May 31, 2024, and new IFMPs are approved later in June/early July has been identified as a challenge for many First Nations and stakeholders. Various factors, such as salmon fisheries timing and data availability, vary throughout the IFMP cycle and can affect salmon pre-season planning and consultation. For early timed salmon fisheries that occur before the new IFMPs are approved, the Department is proposing to manage these fisheries based on provisions already approved for the previous years' IFMP until the new IFMP is approved. The Department is exploring options to improve the uncertainty currently surrounding early season fisheries, with the aim of improving predictability for all participants in fishery planning. Any proposed changes will be consulted on through the IFMP consultation processes.

Southern B.C.

1. Southern BC Chinook

In recent years, DFO has implemented fisheries management measures to support the recovery of at-risk Fraser River and Southern B.C. Chinook populations (see details for Fraser Chinook here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/fisheries-oceans/news/2020/06/2020-fraser-river-chinook-salmon-management-measures.html>). These measures were developed following consultation with First Nations communities, recreational and commercial harvesters, and environmental organizations. These measures include precautionary fishery restrictions intended to provide a high degree of protection to at-risk Fraser Spring 4₂, Spring 5₂ and Summer 5₂ Chinook. The management objective was to allow as many fish to pass through to the spawning grounds as possible, which was expected to reduce overall Canadian fishery mortalities on these populations to very low levels. In 2023, additional restrictions on recreational and commercial fisheries were put in place to protect the Fraser River Summer 5-2 stock management unit. An assessment of fishery mortalities for the 2023 season will require additional time to process coded-wire tags, stock composition information, and an evaluation of impacts of the Big Bar rockslide; information to support this assessment is expected to be available in the Fall of 2024.

For 2024 and beyond, ongoing precautionary fishery management actions to support conservation and promote the rebuilding of these stocks will be needed. Additional discussions on management measures may be required to address other Chinook stocks of conservation concern and Pacific Salmon Treaty obligations for specified Chinook stocks.

Addressing the above concerns for Southern BC Chinook will require continued restrictions and/or closures to fisheries in times and areas where these stocks are encountered in Northern and Southern B.C., including First Nations, recreational, and commercial fisheries in marine areas and the Fraser River. The Department will be exploring different options and consulting on those options through the IFMP process.

Mass Marking / Mark Selective Fisheries

The Government of Canada's announcement of the Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative (PSSI) in 2021 included additional resources and capacity to support the expanded use of mass marking (MM) of hatchery-origin Chinook, explore mark-selective fisheries (MSF) opportunities as part of an integrated

management approach, and address supporting stock assessment changes that may also be required (e.g., catch monitoring, stock identification).

After the Department released its discussion paper *Implementing Hatchery Mass Marking (MM) and Mark-selective Fisheries (MSF) for Chinook Salmon* (2022), DFO hosted a series of MM/MSF technical workshops with interested external groups to discuss the key issues and technical challenges of MM/MSF implementation. Topics discussed include enhanced monitoring plans including assessment of stock composition for releases, and mark-rate in areas open to MSF; risk evaluation and how to improve transparency; post-season data review and reporting; and MM for genetic management objectives. Feedback from the workshop process informed DFO's development of a draft MSF Implementation Framework, which is anticipated to be released in early 2024, and to be consulted on with the IFMP. The MSF Implementation Framework is designed to support longer term decision making using risk-based, transparent and collaborative way forward for guiding evaluation, decision making, implementation and review of MSFs in B.C. waters targeting adipose fin-clipped hatchery Chinook Salmon.

2. Southern Resident Killer Whales – Management Measures to Address Reduced Prey Availability, and Physical and Acoustic Disturbance

The Government of Canada, together with Indigenous groups, partners, and stakeholders, continues to take important steps to protect and recover the Southern Resident Killer Whales (listed as Endangered under the *Species at Risk Act*). Given the status of the population and ongoing threats to Southern Resident Killer Whale recovery, Canada has implemented a number of enhanced measures starting in 2018, aimed at increasing prey availability and accessibility for Southern Resident Killer Whales, particularly with respect to Chinook Salmon, and reducing threats related to physical and acoustic disturbance in key foraging areas within Southern Resident Killer Whale critical habitat.

For 2024, the Government of Canada will be reviewing the suite of management measures implemented in 2023, and will be discussing potential adjustments to measures for 2024 and 2025, as well as advancing longer-term measures and associated processes, with the Indigenous Multi-Nation Group, the Southern Resident Killer Whale Indigenous and Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Group, Technical Working Groups, as part of our consultation and engagement process with Indigenous groups, key stakeholders, and the public. Canada intends to ensure that any updates to actions for the 2024 season can be implemented beginning in the spring of 2024 to coincide with the return of Southern Resident Killer Whales in typically greater numbers to the Salish Sea.

While the fisheries management measures for 2024 and 2025 will be implemented as in previous years, the fisheries management-related measures for 2025 and ongoing will be incorporated into the Southern BC Salmon Integrated Fisheries Management Plan process. DFO hopes this will help to better align with other salmon fisheries management measures and processes.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marine Mammal Team at DFO.SRKW-ERS.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca.

3. Interior Fraser River Steelhead - Fisheries Management Measures

Expectations for IFR Steelhead in 2024 are for continued extremely poor returns. This will require a continuation of measures that were in place in 2023 to reduce impacts in salmon fisheries to maximize the number of potential IFR Steelhead spawners. Longer term closures in some commercial Chum fisheries will continue to be implemented to protect co-migrating stocks of concern. Consultations will occur on all fisheries management measures taken to protect IFR Steelhead in the coming year as part of the Department's pre-season planning and associated management measures for management of Chum salmon.

In addition to the measures taken to reduce incidental fisheries mortalities of IFR Steelhead in salmon fisheries, DFO continues to work with the Province of B.C. on an Action Plan to address other threats to IFR Steelhead. As part of this process, DFO will be working to ensure that all our programs, including hatchery and habitat management, are aligned to support IFR Steelhead recovery.

4. Fraser River Sockeye

A quantitative forecast for Fraser Sockeye returns is expected in early 2024. Fraser Sockeye returns have been well below the median forecast in most recent years, with the exception of all run timing groups in 2021, Early Stuart Sockeye in 2022, as well as Early Stuart, Early Summer, and Late Run Sockeye in 2023. Brood year escapement in 2020 was the lowest recorded. The 2023 return was still below the cycle average. Planning for 2024 will need to consider the potential for a range of returns, as well as specific management measures for protecting and rebuilding weak stocks.

Key Fraser Sockeye considerations during consultations will include the duration of the window closure to protect weak stocks returning early in the season, particularly for those migrating above the Big Bar landslide, and additional management measures for stocks of conservation concern (e.g., Cultus). Consistent with the approach in recent years, the Department plans to identify escapement plan options in the draft IFMP for consideration in 2024. Options are usually informed by the Sockeye escapement plan implemented in the brood year (2020), and modifications to account for annual considerations including forecast returns. Development of recommendations and objectives for Fraser Sockeye escapement plans will be undertaken with the Fraser Salmon Management Board. Some First Nations in B.C. have expressed a desire for more flexibility in Fraser Sockeye fishing either through directed fisheries or as bycatch, however, other First Nations have requested that all fishing mortality impacts to Sockeye be restricted. Further discussion will be required on the potential for additional terminal harvest opportunities for Fraser Sockeye stocks that may return in abundance. Key considerations will include taking into account the uncertainty of in-season information, but also bycatch concerns of co-migrating stocks and species of concern. In addition, discussions regarding the Fraser test fishery program are planned.

5. Southern B.C. Coho

As outlined in Chapter 5 of the Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST), allowable exploitation rates (ERs) for Canada and the U.S. are identified based on the status of Coho management units (MUs). Canada is responsible for determining the status level for Canadian MUs and setting the corresponding ER caps for both parties. Canada's management approach is driven by the status of Interior Fraser River (IFR) Coho MU, based on an integration of marine survival rates (with break points at 3% and 6%) and spawner

abundance. Under this approach, ER caps are set at 20%, 30% and 45% for *Low*, *Moderate*, and *Abundant* status, respectively. Canada is required to confirm the status of Interior Fraser River Coho MU in March of each year.

Southern B.C. Coho have been in a low productivity regime for many years. Based on smolt to adult survival rates in the last three years, marine productivity remains low, thus Interior Fraser River Coho will remain in *Low* status in 2024. Under *Low* status, Canada's allowable exploitation is capped at 10%, with domestic fisheries managed to 3% to 5% or less in recent years. The Department may discuss additional requests for increasing Coho mortality with FSMB for recommendations. These discussions on domestic management measures will part of the annual process to develop the IFMPs.

Status determination and corresponding ER caps are not completed for the Strait of Georgia and Lower Fraser MUs at this time, due to insufficient data. However, new stock assessment projects are being developed throughout these areas to provide additional information for these MUs, which can be used to determine status in the future. New programs include mark-recapture escapement estimation for Lower Fraser Coho and Cowichan River, improved escapement and survival rate estimates for Sakinaw Lake Coho and other Strait of Georgia Coho populations and investigating the use of genetic markers to assess aggregate wild Coho returns to areas on the East Coast of Vancouver Island. Consultations on these programs, including the impacts of these assessments on stocks of conservation concern, will occur as part of the preseason planning process.

Interior Fraser River (IFR) Coho Exploitation Rate

In recent years, the IFR Coho exploitation rate in Canada has been managed to between 3-5%. The overall spawner abundance has improved; however, marine productivity remains low. Therefore, the stock remains in the "Low" management zone. In this zone, total exploitation rate is capped at 20%, with both Canada and the US having an allowable 10% exploitation rate cap. In response to requests for additional Coho retention, the Department is exploring an increase in overall exploitation above the current 3-5% domestic target, while still falling under the 10% harvest cap described in the Pacific Salmon Treaty. These proposals will be discussed with FSMB for viability.

Northern B.C.

1. Northern B.C. Coho

After experiencing near-record low returns of Coho on the North Coast in 2018, the Department implemented additional measures to reduce the overall exploitation rate of commercial fisheries starting in 2019. Additional reductions were implemented throughout 2020-2023, with a goal of a 50% overall reduction in commercial exploitation in Northern Fisheries. While both commercial and recreational catch was reduced in 2023, and some Coho stocks showed modest improvement, preliminary escapement data suggest that many Northern Coho populations remain at reduced abundance. Ocean survival continues to be a concern for Coho returning in 2024; and subsequently, a continued precautionary approach to Coho fishery management is warranted for the coming year. The Department plans to consult with First Nations and stakeholders through the IFMP development process to discuss specific Northern Coho management actions for North and Central Coast stocks.

2. Northern B.C. Chinook

There has been a trend of below average returns of Chinook to North Coast systems, which began in 2017. For 2023, in response to this continued trend in poor productivity, the Department continued and increased a suite of management measures intended to reduce the overall exploitation rates on Skeena and Nass Chinook. The 2023 restrictions also included an extended closure of the Area F commercial troll fishery in Northern BC until August 16, to pass through Fraser Summer 4₁ Chinook in order to support Fraser First Nations FSC harvests. This change in fishery timing was part of a suite of management measures which included a period of non-retention for recreational fisheries, and reduced retention limits. Several First Nations have identified Northern B.C. Chinook as a priority for the 2024/25 salmon management cycle, including the continuation of the precautionary approach to support recovery.

While there is an improving trend regarding escapement estimates of Skeena and Nass Chinook over the previous five years, the 2024 expectation is that North Coast Chinook remain in a period of reduced productivity; therefore, continued precautionary management measures will be required. The Department intends to engage with First Nations and stakeholders both bilaterally and as part of the 2024 IFMP planning process to develop fishing plans, which will be informed by the management actions implemented in recent seasons.

3. Skeena River Sockeye

For the 2024 IFMP, we are exploring potential options to change the management approach of Skeena River Sockeye, as this has been identified as a priority for both the Department and First Nations. The changes being considered include (but are not limited to) the use of a TAC based approach for the management of Commercial and Demonstration fisheries, and a review of the recreational triggers. The Department plans to seek input on any changes to these methodologies within the IFMP planning process.

The Department has heard interest from First Nations in the Skeena watershed in developing an approach for informing commercial catch shares for commercial Sockeye fisheries on the weekly commercial total allowable catch (CTAC) rather than commercial catch. This would allow for increased flexibility in fishery planning, as well as better protections for weak co-migrating stocks. The Department is seeking feedback on this management approach for all Skeena Sockeye commercial fisheries, including First Nations demonstration fisheries. This process would involve the development of weekly exploitation rate caps and setting a weekly CTAC in-season. The Department is also proposing weekly planning meetings for Skeena Sockeye fisheries, to be paired with a pre-season collaboratively developed fishing calendar. The fishing calendar will be used to describe the broad plan of how fisheries across harvest sectors will be executed, and the CTAC and weekly exploitation rate caps will be the key inputs to these weekly fisheries planning meetings. Consultation and information about this new proposed management approach will occur throughout the pre-season planning process.

4. Skeena and Nass Sockeye Escapement Goal Development

In 2022, the Department initiated an engagement process that addresses Canada's obligation under the renewed Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST) provisions (2019): *Canada agrees to complete a comprehensive escapement goal analysis (prior to the 2023 fishing season) for Nass and Skeena river sockeye salmon that shall be peer-reviewed by an independent contractor and then submitted to the Committee and*

Northern Panel for further review (Per Annex IV, Chapter 2, paragraph 10 of the Pacific Salmon Treaty). Specifically, the purpose was to review and seek feedback on alternative approaches for identifying aggregate escapement goals for Sockeye salmon returning to the Nass and Skeena Rivers as required for implementing Annex IV, Chapter 2 of the PST. Alternative methods for setting escapement goals were developed by a technical working group and scientifically peer reviewed through the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) in April 2022.

Canada plans to provide an update on the status of this work following the PST post-season meeting in January 2024.

5. Skeena River Steelhead

Due to concerns over ongoing poor returns of Steelhead to the Skeena River, the Department and the Province of B.C. continued discussions on an approach to the management of Steelhead returning to the Skeena watershed, consistent with the 1999 fisheries management protocol between the federal and provincial governments. Incidental encounters of Skeena Steelhead in recreational, commercial, and First Nations fisheries may be a significant factor in management and execution of fisheries in the Skeena River for 2024 in the event of poor Steelhead returns. The Department is working collaboratively with the Province of B.C. on this issue. The Department intends to engage First Nations and stakeholders both bilaterally and as part of the 2024 IFMP planning process on Skeena Steelhead management.