



**Over 18,000 wild salmon - primarily Chinook - caught, killed and discarded
in British Columbia trawl fishery in just five months**

DFO's recent "enhanced monitoring" program for wild salmon bycatch shows alarming waste of salmon

For immediate release

Victoria, B.C., January 18, 2024 - The pre-publication findings of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) new enhanced monitoring program of salmon bycatch in the Pacific Region confirmed that an estimated **28,117 salmon were caught, killed and discarded as bycatch** in the groundfish trawl fishery by Option A trawl licence holders in the 2022/2023 fishing season. **Chinook salmon was the primary species caught, representing 93% (26,273 salmon) of total salmon catch.** According to the findings of DFO's report, over 20,000 Chinook salmon were likely thrown overboard while 3,700 were landed and subsequently discarded as offal. Salmon discarded as offal were disposed of as a waste product or compost, depending on the processing facility, but the details are unclear. Chinook salmon are the main food source for critically endangered Southern Resident killer whales. There are only 75 Southern Resident killer whales remaining.

"The Chinook eliminated by the midwater trawl fishery during the 2022/2023 fishing season could have fed three or four Southern Resident killer whales for an entire year. This is an appalling waste for not just a salmon species that is listed as threatened and endangered in many B.C. and US rivers but also when the survival of the few remaining Southern Resident killer whales is also at stake." – Sydney Dixon, Marine Specialist, Pacific Wild

At the same time the Canadian government is investing millions of dollars into the protection of Southern Resident killer whales as well as hundreds of millions of dollars to support wild salmon, thousands of Chinook salmon are being slaughtered and squandered by B.C. trawlers each year. The indiscriminate nature of this fishery undermines the conservation, stewardship and enhancement measures in place to protect Pacific salmon as well as the sacrifices made by coastal communities, First Nations and other fishers to preserve B.C.'s remaining salmon stocks.

"These salmon figures are alarming enough but what would we learn if DFO implemented "enhanced monitoring" for countless other species being indiscriminately caught and destroyed by the B.C. groundfish trawl industry, such as herring, halibut and rockfish," said Ian McAllister, Pacific Wild conservation advisor. "We are choosing a wasteful fishery that is making pet food and fast food fish sticks over the future of our wild salmon."

The vast majority of salmon bycatch was recorded during a five-month period with 18,867 salmon caught between September 26, 2022 and February 20, 2023. This catch of Pacific salmon in the 2022/23 fishery was the highest recorded since 2008. This is unsurprising as it is also the first year that the fishery has been subject to enhanced monitoring for salmon bycatch. In the absence of enhanced monitoring, salmon bycatch recorded by the groundfish trawl fishery is as low as approximately 12% the number of fish that enhanced monitoring recorded. DFO discontinued having at-sea observers on vessels during Covid and has not reinstated the program preferring electronic monitoring and other industry-supported reporting efforts.

The program also collected coded wire tag (CWT) and stock composition information of the salmon caught. Many of the Canadian-origin Chinook salmon caught as bycatch by the midwater trawl fleet in 2022/2023 originated from at-risk, threatened or endangered populations, such as those in the Fraser River. CWT analysis also revealed that thousands of the salmon caught by Canadian trawl vessels were bound for US spawning grounds.

“Canada’s most important source of Chinook salmon for Southern Resident killer whales spawns in the Fraser River.” – Sydney Dixon, Marine Specialist, Pacific Wild

Pacific Wild supports the continued enhanced monitoring program through the 2023/24 fishery, however, the organisation is urging DFO to immediately implement longer-term measures to eliminate salmon bycatch in trawl fisheries, to reinstate the At-Sea Observer program and if mitigation of bycatch is not possible that more closures be put into effect.

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About:

[Pacific Wild](#) is a Canadian charity that protects wildlife and their habitat in the Great Bear Rainforest and beyond through impactful communications, innovative research, public education, community outreach and raising conservation awareness for lasting environmental protection in British Columbia.

Background: On November 14, 2023 at 13:50, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) released a fisheries notice informing harvesters of in-season area closures to portions of Pacific Fisheries Management Area (PFMA) 12 to fishing groundfish with mid-water trawl gear. Effective November 15, 2023 to February 20, 2024, the entirety of subareas 12-9 to 12-12, 12-15, 12-16, and 12-39, located around northeastern Vancouver Island, is closed to mid-water trawl gear. The closure was enacted as a precautionary effort to reduce Pacific salmon bycatch, in response to the preliminary results of the enhanced monitoring program that was implemented beginning on September 26, 2022. During the enhanced monitoring program, Option A trawl licence holders in the 2022/2023 fishing season were required to retain 100% of salmon caught incidentally as bycatch.

Canada’s fisheries monitoring programs are often unreliable or inaccurate. DFO has been under sharp scrutiny for years for lack of sufficient monitoring, most recently in November’s damning report by the Office of the Auditor General which concluded that DFO “remain[s] unable to collect the dependable and timely catch data that it needs to sustainably manage commercial marine fisheries and protect Canada’s fish stocks”.¹

During the standard monitoring period (prior to September 26, 2022) salmon bycatch data was collected using fisher logbook, at-sea observers, and dockside monitoring sources. Since 2020, at-sea observation data has been based on fisher-reported information and corrected using electronic monitoring (EM) data “where the

¹ Office of The Auditor General of Canada. 2023. Monitoring Marine Fisheries Catch – Fisheries and Oceans Canada (Report 9). Retrieved from https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/docs/parl_cesd_202311_09_e.pdf

audit reveals consistent differences between EM and fisher reported data”.² Pacific Wild obtained enforcement reports for the groundfish trawl fishery which further illustrate the gaps in the system, detailing that only eight of 34 active vessels submitted fish slips for the 2022/2023 season.

Before the enhanced monitoring program, “there were no requirements for monitoring Pacific salmon in the groundfish trawl fishery, other than the requirements that apply to all species encountered in the fishery”.³ As a prohibited species within the fishery, Pacific salmon are required to be “released” at-sea if caught as bycatch. There is no established mortality rate for salmon caught with trawl gear and released at-sea; however, all salmon species recorded entering the receiving tank of trawl vessels have a 100% mortality rate. It is therefore assumed that most salmon do not survive being caught in a trawl net and are dumped back to the ocean dead. For the purpose of the enhanced monitoring program, “changing to mandatory retention was not expected to significantly increase mortality from trawl bycatch”.⁴ Additionally, “the sale, trade, or personal use of any retained salmon [within the enhanced monitoring program] remained prohibited in the licence requirements” for trawlers.⁵

Code Wire Tags (CWT) are small pieces of metal wire inscribed with a numeric code that are inserted into the snouts of some hatchery-produced coho and Chinook salmon. CWT provide important information about the origin, age, growth, run timing, and other characteristics of salmon when they are caught. The use of CWT is one aspect of Canada’s obligations under the Pacific Salmon Treaty with the United States in order to work together to conserve and manage transboundary Pacific salmon. Within the enhanced monitoring program, 25% of trips for vessels landing fresh catch were randomly selected for collection of Chinook and Coho salmon heads at offload for CWT analysis. For vessels landing frozen catch, 100% of trips were targeted for collection of salmon heads for CWT analysis. Vessels landing fresh catch were required to retain and land whole salmon while vessels landing frozen catch were only required to retain the heads of salmon “in recognition of the limited freezer space available for storage of non-marketable fish”.⁶ For vessels landing frozen catch, there are six active licence holders in the 2022/23 groundfish Option A trawl fishery, including the Sunderoey (capable of bringing in about 500 metric tons of fish) and the Raw Spirit (around 340 metric ton catch capacity). They are two of the largest factory fishing vessels on the B.C. coast.

² Lagasse, C.R., Fraser, K.A., Houtman, R., Grundmann, E., Komick, N., O’Brien, M., Braithwaite, E., Cornthwaite, A. M. 2023. Review of Salmon Bycatch in the Pacific Region 2022/23 Groundfish Trawl Fishery and Preliminary Results of an Enhanced Monitoring Program. Can. Manuscr. Rep. Fish. Aquat. Sci. 3273: v + 35 p.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lagasse, C.R., Fraser, K.A., Houtman, R., Grundmann, E., Komick, N., O’Brien, M., Braithwaite, E., Cornthwaite, A. M. 2023. Review of Salmon Bycatch in the Pacific Region 2022/23 Groundfish Trawl Fishery and Preliminary Results of an Enhanced Monitoring Program. Can. Manuscr. Rep. Fish. Aquat. Sci. 3273: v + 35 p.