



## **Pacific Salmon Commission Test Fishing Policy Adopted February 10, 2021**

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of test fishing is to gather the necessary information for in-season management decisions (run size, timing, diversion rate, and other relevant biological information) of the Fraser River Panel (FRP or Panel) for each of the Fraser River sockeye management units and Fraser River pink salmon.

### **Operations:**

Test fishing plans are developed pre-season by the Panel, with the objective of obtaining data required to inform decisions of the Panel while minimizing any implications for conservation and for other fisheries (i.e. minimizing the number of fish retained). Test fishing may occur within Panel Area Waters (administered by the Pacific Salmon Commission) and outside of Panel Area Waters in Canada (administered by Canada). The information collected through these test fishing operations is critically important to FRP decision making. With input from the PSC Secretariat, the FRP makes decisions about start and end dates for all Panel-related test fisheries, within or outside of Panel Waters.

Fish retained for data collection purposes and those incidentally killed during test fishing activities are known as “test fish” and are accounted for in advance of allocating any Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for international sharing. Test fish are not limited to Fraser sockeye and pink salmon and the interception of other fish species and non-Fraser salmon stocks during test fishing operations is unavoidable. Once samples are collected along with other relevant biological data, test fish are sold to help cover the costs of the Panel approved test fishing program. When sockeye and/or pink salmon abundance permits (see guidelines 3 and 4), additional sockeye and/or pink salmon may be retained in Panel approved test fisheries to help cover the cost of the program – these fish are referred to as “pay fish” and decrease the commercial TAC available for the Parties for harvest. Financial accounting and the allocation of deficits and surpluses resulting from the retention and sale of fish will be governed within the PSC Bylaws<sup>1</sup>.

In 2017, the Parties and Commission staff, with support from the Southern Endowment Fund, completed a series of workshops to review Fraser test fishing programs and investigate ways to improve in-season assessment. This resulted in a [final report](#)<sup>2</sup> outlining criteria that can be used to help inform Panel decisions about annual test fishing plans. The report also contained test

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<sup>1</sup> Rule 25: Test Fishing Revolving Fund. Pacific Salmon Commission. PSC Bylaws: Chapter IX

<sup>2</sup> Nelitz, M., A. Hall, C. Michielsens, B. Connors, M. Lapointe, K. Forrest, and E. Jenkins. 2018. Summary of a Review of Fraser River Test Fisheries. Pacific Salmon Comm. Tech. Rep. No. 40: 155 p.

fishing planning criteria and a series of abundance and species scenarios for the Panel to consider as it works through the annual pre-season planning process.

Contracts pertaining to test fishing within each country's waters will be administered consistent with other PSC Bylaws.

Contracts for test fishers operating in either country shall provide for written consent to pursue other fishing opportunities or non-fishing interests while waiting for a period as agreed to by the Parties (relative to the scheduled start date of a particular fishery in a given year) to start test fishing. Such consent shall only be granted by the Fraser River Panel through the Secretariat. Such release would not guarantee availability of the fisher at the Panel's request on future dates.

### **Guidelines for retention of test fish and pay fish:**

The extent to which fish sales are to be used to cover part or all of the test fisheries shall be governed by the considerations set out below.

#### *1) Test Fishing Planning and Implementation:*

As provided for in Chapter 4, paragraph 5 of the Pacific Salmon Treaty, test fisheries will be planned to provide data that supports fishery management decisions of the Fraser River Panel. In developing pre-season test fishing plans and implementing test fisheries, the Panel will consider the following:

- a) conservation issues; i.e. test fishing will be planned to minimize impacts on weak stocks, as feasible (e.g. delay start to protect Early Stuart sockeye);
- b) signals from other test fisheries that may inform start dates;
- c) results of test fisheries, which will inform end dates; and
- d) other relevant considerations (e.g. attainment of TAC).

#### *2) Retention of Test Fish*

All fish caught in test fisheries that are required for sampling purposes and those fish incidentally killed in gillnet test fisheries will be sold to help offset costs of test fishing. Test fish will be retained in accordance with Panel decisions, which are informed by:

- a) conservation issues (i.e., test fishing will be planned to minimize impacts on weak stocks, as feasible);
- b) pre-season test fishing plans; and
- c) in-season information about run size.

#### *3) Retention of Pay Fish:*

Pay fish will be retained, up to the level which is required to cover costs of test fishery in the current year, in accordance with Panel decisions that are informed by:

- a) discussions with the Finance and Administration Committee, as necessary;
- b) pre-season test fishing plans; and
- c) in-season information about run size, which could include:
  - i) conservation issues and concerns;

- ii) harvestable surplus to allow retention of pay fish; and/or
- iii) in Canada, the amount of Fraser sockeye and pink salmon TAC necessary to fully address First Nations food, social and ceremonial fisheries and First Nations Treaty domestic allocations will be identified annually by Canada during, or prior to, the final pre-season meeting in June. In recent years, this has been approximately 1.1 million sockeye salmon, which is inclusive of the Aboriginal Fisheries Exemption of 400 thousand, and approximately 175 thousand pink salmon (odd years).

#### 4) Retention of Extra Pay Fish

Conditions under which the Panel may consider the harvest of “extra pay fish” (i.e. more than that which is required to cover the costs of the test fishery in the current year) include:

- a) an extremely high abundance of Fraser River sockeye or pink salmon; and/or
- b) the ability of either country to harvest their full TAC.

With approval of the Panel, some of this uncaught TAC may be taken as additional “pay fish.”