

## Summary

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**Meeting dates:** November 13, 2015

**Agenda item:** Commercial Smelt Fishery Update - (Briefing)

**Presenter(s):** Dr. Dayv Lowry, Senior Research Scientist, Fish Program

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### **Background summary:**

Smelt serve as an important food source for a variety of species in Puget Sound, including sea birds, marine mammals and salmon, some of which are federally protected. Smelt are also exploited for human consumption in recreational and commercial fisheries.

It is the policy of the department ([C3012](#)) to maintain healthy populations of forage fish species and individual stocks, while assuring the integrity of the ecosystem and habitat upon which marine resources depend. If insufficient information exists or the condition of the resource is poor, a conservative approach to fisheries will be taken.

As a result of conservation concerns, in 2014 the department implemented several changes to both recreational and commercial smelt fisheries in Puget Sound. Specifically, a night-time closure (10 p. m. to 6 a.m.) on open days was instituted for all fisheries except the recreational jig fishery, the commercial fishery was closed on Sundays, commercial purse seine and dip bag gear were disallowed, and an annual commercial harvest quota of 60,000 lbs was created. The creation of a commercial quota meant that active in-season management of harvest via quick reporting was required, which was not the case under the prior passive management regime.

In both 2014 and 2015 the commercial smelt fishery was managed to within 2% of the harvest quota. Harvest compiled from quick reports deviated less than 1% from final harvest documented on fish tickets, demonstrating the validity of this in-season management method. In both years the harvest quota was reached earlier than during years in which a quota was not in place, curtailing the fishery in the early fall. Building on this success, in 2016 the same management model will be employed.

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### **Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:**

N/A

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### **Public involvement process used and what you learned:**

Changes to smelt fisheries in 2014 involved public meetings, opportunities to testify before the commission, and numerous individual contacts with fishers, land owners, and members of the public at large. After these modifications were put in place, staff continued to communicate with these user groups and obtain feedback about successes and failures associated with the changes. While fishery conflicts still exist in some areas, the nighttime closure and commercial harvest quota appear to have reduced these issues. A status assessment of smelt populations in the whole of Puget Sound will occur in 2016 and 2017.

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### **Action requested:**

N/A

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**Draft motion language:**

N/A

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**Justification for Commission action:**

N/A

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**Communications Plan:**

Agency web site, continued individual contact, local meetings in focused areas, and ongoing contact with commercial fishers through quick reports.