

PROPOSAL 14 – 5 AAC 34.263. Prince William Sound Walleye Pollock Pelagic Trawl Fishery Management Plan.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Outdoor Council.

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This would prohibit a directed walleye pollock pelagic trawl fishery in Prince William Sound (PWS) unless no part or attachment to pelagic trawl gear contacts the seafloor habitat and there is no bycatch of king salmon.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The *Prince William Sound Walleye Pollock Pelagic Trawl Fishery Management Plan* (5 AAC 28.263) allows for a directed pelagic trawl fishery from January 20, which coincides with the opening of federal Gulf of Alaska walleye pollock trawl fishery, through March 31. This fishery occurs in three defined sections of PWS and no more than 60% of the harvest may come out of any one section. Additionally, regulations allow only 5% of the total weight of the harvest to be bycatch (5 AAC 28.263 (d)), and the department has further allocated percentages for rockfish, salmon, sharks, squid, and miscellaneous species by emergency order (EO).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? A verifiable method for establishing whether pelagic trawl gear contacts the seafloor habitat would need to be established. King salmon bycatch in the PWS walleye pollock pelagic trawl fishery would be prohibited. Pollock harvest and effort would decrease by an unknown amount depending on whether king salmon bycatch can be avoided. From 2021 to 2023, 96% of pollock landings had some salmon bycatch.

BACKGROUND: The PWS walleye pollock pelagic trawl fishery begins January 20, which coincides with the opening of federal Gulf of Alaska walleye pollock trawl fishery. Harvest in this state-waters fishery has ranged between a high of 9.82 million pounds in 2015 and 1.40 million pounds in 2008 (Table 15-1). Annual participation has ranged from fewer than 3 vessels to 22 vessels. Vessel participation has been stable in recent years with an average of 14 vessels participating annually from 2016 to 2019 and 15 vessels participating annually from 2021 to 2023. During the most recent three seasons, from 2021 to 2023, average ex-vessel value has been \$1,022,928 annually at an average price of 17 cents per pound.

In 2002, when there was a dramatic increase in bycatch rates for all species (Table 15-2), and during board meetings it was determined that ADF&G would encourage cleaner fishing practices by instituting bycatch limits; bycatch is restricted to no more than 5% of the total round weight of pollock harvested, and ADF&G further manages bycatch by apportioning the percentage among the following species groups by EO: rockfish (0.5%), salmon (0.04%), shark (0.96%), squid (3.0%), and other species (0.5%). The department has emergency order authority to raise or lower these bycatch percentages in response to conservation concerns or other factors. However, in 2014, the rockfish bycatch limit of 0.5% during the directed pollock pelagic trawl fishery was adopted into regulation by the board.

In-season management during the PWS directed pollock fishery is intensive, with close contact between the fleet and managers with attention to the section harvest and bycatch limits. ADF&G management requirements include mandatory check-in and check-out procedures before fishing in or leaving a management section, as well as recording fishing information in log sheets. The majority of the fleet transits from Kodiak, which increases the lead time necessary to make management decisions. Trip limits of 300,000 pounds are established in regulation and are an

important management tool to control the rate of harvest in the fishery. Historically, vessels have often achieved this harvest trip limit in less than 12 hours of fishing time.

Although bycatch rates in this fishery are low relative to other groundfish fisheries, bycatch has sometimes warranted management measures. Because bycatch levels are a percentage of the directed harvest, as pollock GHLS increase, bycatch allowances increase. For recent years bycatch in excess of bycatch allowances resulted in section closures in 2014 for rockfish, 2020 and 2024 for squid, and 2020 and 2021 for salmon.

In recent seasons, ADF&G has worked with the fleet to rotate vessels through PWS and limit the number of vessels fishing at a given time, with the goal of minimizing bycatch harvest and monitoring the GHLS closely.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **OPPOSES** this proposal. The department has the management tools necessary to monitor bycatch closely and stay within the 5% limit specified in regulation and the assemblage bycatch limits specified in EO. The provision of this proposal related to sea floor contact would be difficult to enforce.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in an additional direct cost for a private person to participate in this fishery. Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in an additional cost to the department.

PROPOSAL 15 – 5 AAC 34.263. Prince William Sound Walleye Pollock Pelagic Trawl Fishery Management Plan.

PROPOSED BY: The Chenega IRA Council.

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This would replace the current 5% bycatch limit in the *Prince William Sound Walleye Pollock Pelagic Trawl Fishery Management Plan* with a limit set in pounds that does not fluctuate with the walleye pollock guideline harvest level. Additionally, this would require full retention of all bycatch.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The *Prince William Sound Walleye Pollock Pelagic Trawl Fishery Management Plan* (5 AAC 28.263) allows for a directed pelagic trawl fishery from January 20, which coincides with the opening of federal Gulf of Alaska walleye pollock trawl fishery, through March 31. This fishery occurs in three defined sections of PWS and no more than 60% of the harvest may come out of any one section (Figure 15-1). All walleye pollock brought on board a vessel when a directed fishery for walleye pollock is open must be retained (5 AAC 28.070(e)(2)). Additionally, regulations allow only 5% of the total weight of the harvest to be bycatch (5 AAC 28.263(d)), and the department has further allocated percentages for rockfish, salmon, sharks, squid, and miscellaneous species by emergency order (EO).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Bycatch in the PWS walleye pollock trawl fishery would be limited by weight instead of a percentage of the pollock harvest. Depending on the limit set, bycatch could be higher or lower under a weight limit than under a percentage of harvest limit in any given year.

BACKGROUND: Please refer to proposal 14 for background information on the PWS walleye pollock pelagic trawl fishery.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **OPPOSES** this proposal. Emergency order authority provides the department with the tools necessary to adjust the bycatch limits by species or assemblage within the 5% limit set in regulation.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in an additional direct cost for a private person to participate in this fishery. Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in an additional cost to the department.

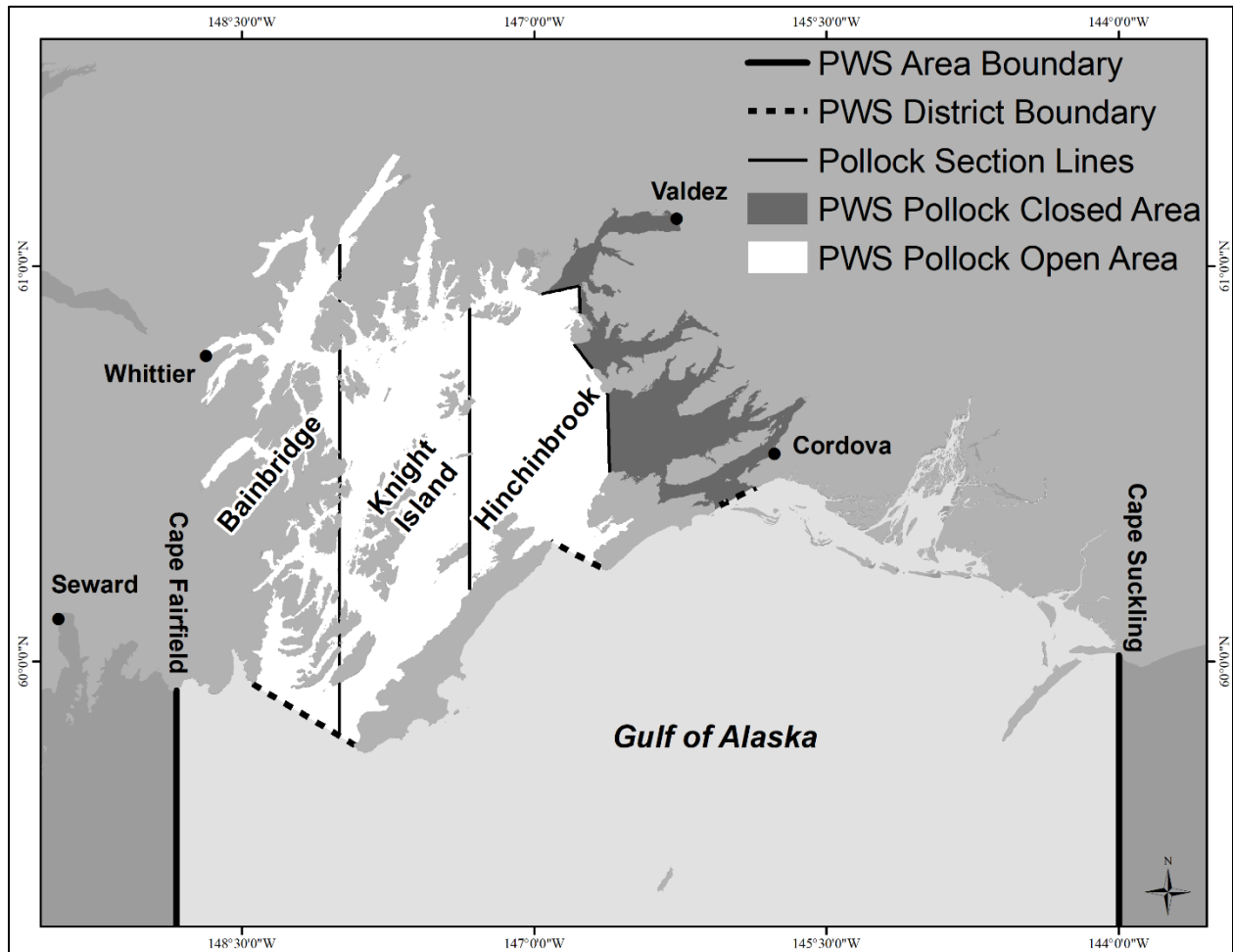


Figure 15-1.—Prince William Sound Inside District walleye pollock management sections for the directed commercial trawl fishery.

Table 15-1.—Prince William Sound Area walleye pollock harvest (in pounds) and effort by gear type, guideline harvest level (GHL), and season length, 1995–2023.

Year	Effort			Harvest				GHL (million lb)	% of GHL
	Vessels	Landings	Season Length (days)	Directed	Test fishery	Bycatch	Total		
1995	9	35	26	6,325,575	215,025	10,220	6,540,600	2.1-4.4	144%
1996	11	24	5	3,265,740	420,571	7,905	3,686,311	3.1	105%
1997	10	31	8	4,319,707	539,123	7,184	4,858,830	3.9	111%
1998	11	29	7	4,013,725	631,751	2,680	4,645,476	3.9	103%
1999	6	38	36	4,673,074	490,761	11,890	5,163,835	4.6	102%
2000	4	20	70	2,256,504	366,724	8,045	2,623,228	3.1	73%
2001	a	a	64	a	381,502	a	381,502	3.1	100%
2002	3	22	70	2,364,143	177,003	68	2,541,146	3.8	62%
2003	3	17	84	2,421,772	53,595	1,221	2,475,367	3.8	64%
2004	3	9	68	1,928,458	400,403	824	2,328,861	2.0	96%
2005	6	8	48	1,677,157	317,183	805	1,994,340	2.0	84%
2006	8	15	58	3,486,499	ND	590	3,486,499	3.6	97%
2007	5	11	69	2,339,978	259,155	a	2,599,133	3.6	65%
2008	5	7	56	1,395,933	ND	a	1,395,933	3.6	39%
2009	7	12	60	3,243,959	300,806	a	3,544,765	3.6	90%
2010	11	14	42	3,662,919	311,853	4,939	3,974,772	3.6	102%
2011	7	12	17	3,377,325	339,683	13,608	3,717,008	3.6	94%
2012	9	21	24	5,785,295	ND	a	5,785,295	6.1	95%
2013	14	22	14	5,779,241	488,666	a	6,267,907	5.8	99%
2014	19	22	8	5,220,121	ND	1,096	5,220,121	8.6	61%
2015	17	35	16	9,818,616	ND	3,674	9,818,616	9.3	99%
2016	9	30	71	8,573,163	779,979	13,265	9,353,142	13.1	72%
2017	8	15	71	4,143,533	ND	3,720	4,143,533	9.4	44%
2018	16	24	42	6,802,350	926,066	2,358	7,728,416	7.1	96%
2019	22	25	24	6,539,859	935,114	1,295	7,474,973	6.6	99%
2020	14	23	41	5,090,676	928,792	a	6,019,468	5.1	100%
2021	10	20	12	4,710,088	898,250	256	5,608,338	4.9	96%
2022	17	23	27	6,174,300	960,297	1,737	7,134,597	6.4	96%
2023	19	27	68	7,167,286	539,582	4345	7,706,868	7.3	98%
<u>Averages</u>									
1995-2015	8	20	40	3,554,586	355,863	5,077	3,661,546	4.2	90%
2016-2019	14	23	43	3,738,430	892,488	5,160	6,943,906	8.3	86%
2021-2023	15	23	46	4,017,768	799,376	2,113	6,816,601	6.2	83%

Table 15-2.—Prince William Sound Area walleye pollock fishery bycatch by species or species group, in pounds and as a percentage of the directed pollock harvest, 2008–2023.

Year	Harvest												Total Bycatch	
	Pollock	Rockfish		Chinook Salmon		Shark		Squid		Other				
	Pounds	Pounds	Percent	Pounds	Percent	Pounds	Percent	Pounds	Percent	Pounds	Percent	Pounds	Percent	
2008	1,395,933	20,790	1.49%	48	0.00%	1,550	0.11%	30,619	2.19%	1,066	0.08%	54,073	3.87%	
2009	3,249,441	21,093	0.65%	142	0.00%	19,101	0.59%	15,747	0.48%	14,115	0.43%	70,199	2.16%	
2010	3,662,919	3,594	0.10%	223	0.01%	3,133	0.09%	17,052	0.47%	21,854	0.60%	45,856	1.25%	
2011	3,377,325	5,290	0.16%	50	0.00%	411	0.01%	15,006	0.44%	2,410	0.07%	23,167	0.69%	
2012	5,785,295	16,904	0.29%	1,431	0.02%	1,810	0.03%	8,123	0.14%	12,682	0.22%	40,950	0.71%	
2013	5,779,241	27,824	0.48%	61	0.00%	3,230	0.06%	86,116	1.49%	3,401	0.06%	120,632	2.09%	
2014	5,220,121	67,446	1.29%	260	0.00%	526	0.01%	171,946	3.29%	24,322	0.47%	264,500	5.07%	
2015	9,818,616	20,785	0.21%	442	0.00%	889	0.01%	240,125	2.45%	7,337	0.07%	269,578	2.75%	
2016	8,573,163	21,992	0.26%	1,067	0.01%	2,720	0.03%	41,993	0.49%	12,286	0.14%	80,058	0.93%	
2017	4,143,533	2,552	0.06%	177	0.00%	117	0.00%	259	0.01%	2,857	0.07%	5,962	0.14%	
2018	6,802,350	3,437	0.05%	1,172	0.02%	477	0.01%	1,732	0.03%	20,421	0.30%	27,239	0.40%	
2019	6,539,859	6,995	0.11%	258	0.00%	679	0.01%	31,744	0.49%	5,358	0.08%	45,034	0.69%	
2020	5,090,676	17,436	0.34%	2,240	0.04%	10,357	0.20%	153,959	3.02%	2,562	0.05%	186,554	3.66%	
2021	4,710,088	8,198	0.17%	2,268	0.05%	2,959	0.06%	39,027	0.83%	2,422	0.05%	54,874	1.17%	
2022	6,174,300	14,736	0.24%	2,464	0.04%	4,489	0.07%	58,970	0.96%	3,311	0.05%	83,970	1.36%	
2023	7,167,286	14,211	0.20%	2,473	0.03%	1,405	0.02%	53,980	0.75%	4,565	0.06%	76,634	1.07%	
<u>Averages</u>														
1995-2015	3,868,061	12,510	0.37%	477	0.01%	6,937	0.26%	44,845	1.15%	7,968	0.23%	72,737	2.03%	
2016-2020	6,229,916	10,482	0.16%	983	0.02%	2,870	0.05%	45,937	0.81%	8,697	0.13%	68,969	1.16%	
2021-2023	6,017,225	12,382	0.20%	2,402	0.04%	2,951	0.05%	50,659	0.85%	3,433	0.06%	71,826	1.20%	

Note: Bycatch allowances are 0.5% for rockfish, 0.04% for salmon, 3% for squid, 0.96% for sharks, and 0.5% for other species.

Table 15-3.—Estimated number of rockfish and king salmon harvested in the Prince William Sound walleye pollock trawl fishery, 2010-2023.

Year	Number of Rockfish	Number of king salmon
2010	220	46
2011	324	33
2012	1036	448
2013	1704	14
2014	4132	65
2015	1273	142
2016	1347	262
2017	156	50
2018	135	265
2019	429	77
2020	1068	754
2021	502	789
2022	903	895
2023	871	980
<i>Averages</i>		
2010-2015	1,448	125
2016-2020	627	282
2021-2023	759	888

Note: Number of rockfish is estimated based on the average weight of shortraker and roughey rockfish sampled for 2010-2023.

PROPOSAL 16 – 5 AAC 34.263. Prince William Sound Walleye Pollock Pelagic Trawl Fishery Management Plan.

PROPOSED BY: The Chenaga IRA Council.

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This would close the directed walleye pollock trawl fishery in Prince William Sound (PWS).

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The *Prince William Sound Walleye Pollock Pelagic Trawl Fishery Management Plan* (5 AAC 28.263) allows for a directed pelagic trawl fishery from January 20, which coincides with the opening of federal Gulf of Alaska walleye pollock trawl fishery, through March 31. This fishery occurs in three defined sections of PWS and no more than 60% of the harvest may come out of any one section. Additionally, regulations allow only 5% of the total weight of the harvest to be bycatch (5 AAC 28.263 (d)), and the department has further allocated percentages for rockfish, salmon, sharks, squid, and miscellaneous species by emergency order (EO; Figure16-1).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? Walleye pollock harvest in PWS would be reduced by 99%. Annual revenue for the PWS pollock fishery is approximately \$1,000,000 shared by 15 vessels from 23 landings. Rockfish and king salmon harvest would be reduced by approximately 12,000 pounds and 2,400 pounds, respectively based on average bycatch from 2021 to 2023 (Figure 16-2).

BACKGROUND: Please refer to the comments on Proposal 15 for background information.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **OPPOSES** this proposal. This would eliminate fishing opportunity on a stock where there are no conservation concerns and where a portion of the stock has been harvested sustainably for many years. The department has the management tools necessary to closely monitor bycatch and stay within the 5% limit specified in regulation and the assemblage bycatch limits specified in EO.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in an additional direct cost for a private person to participate in this fishery. Approval of this proposal is not expected to result in an additional cost to the department.

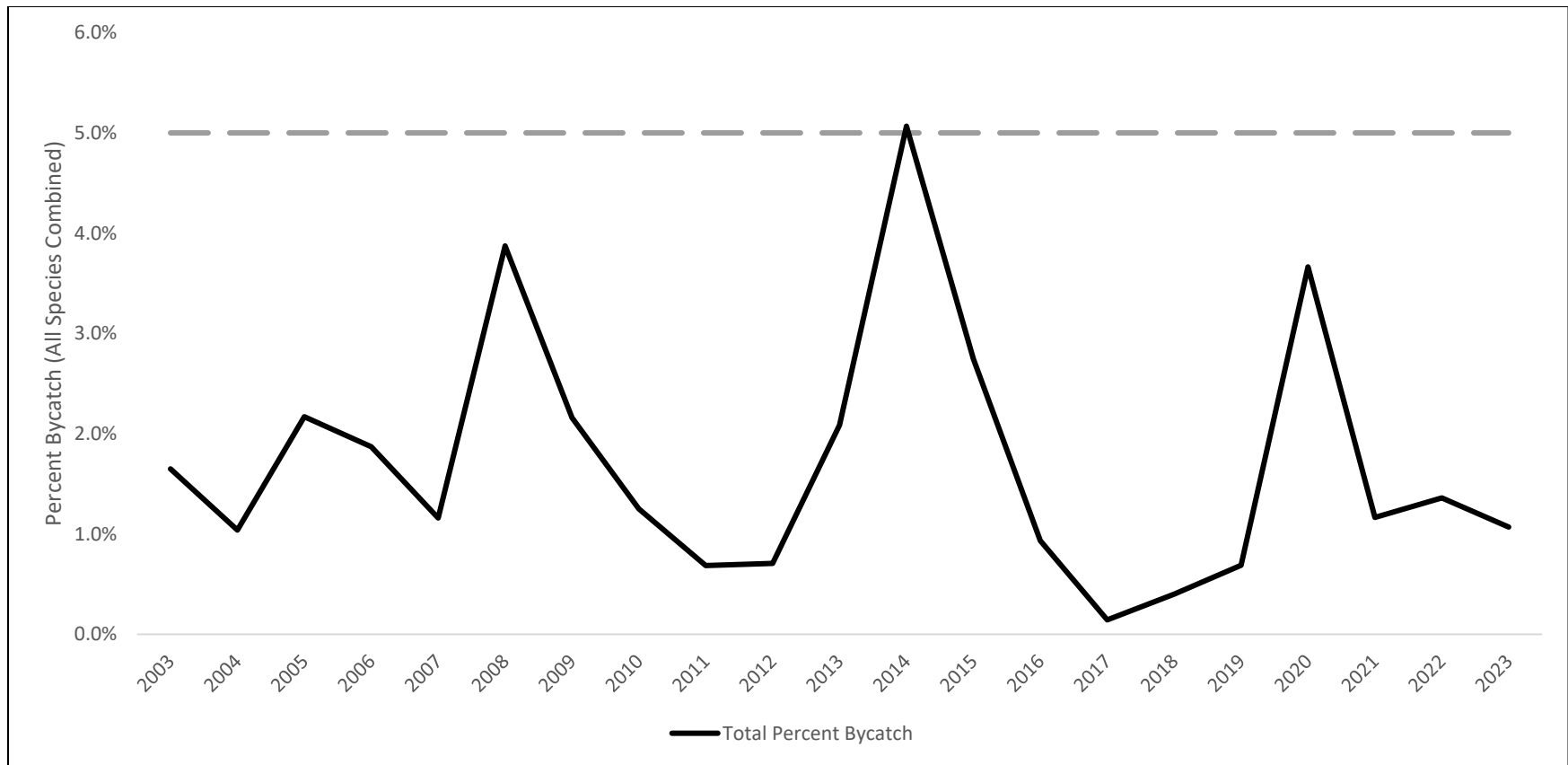


Figure 16-1.—Total percent bycatch in the PWS Trawl Fishery as a percentage of directed walleye pollock harvest in pounds, 2003-2023. Dashed line represents 5 percent cap on all bycatch.

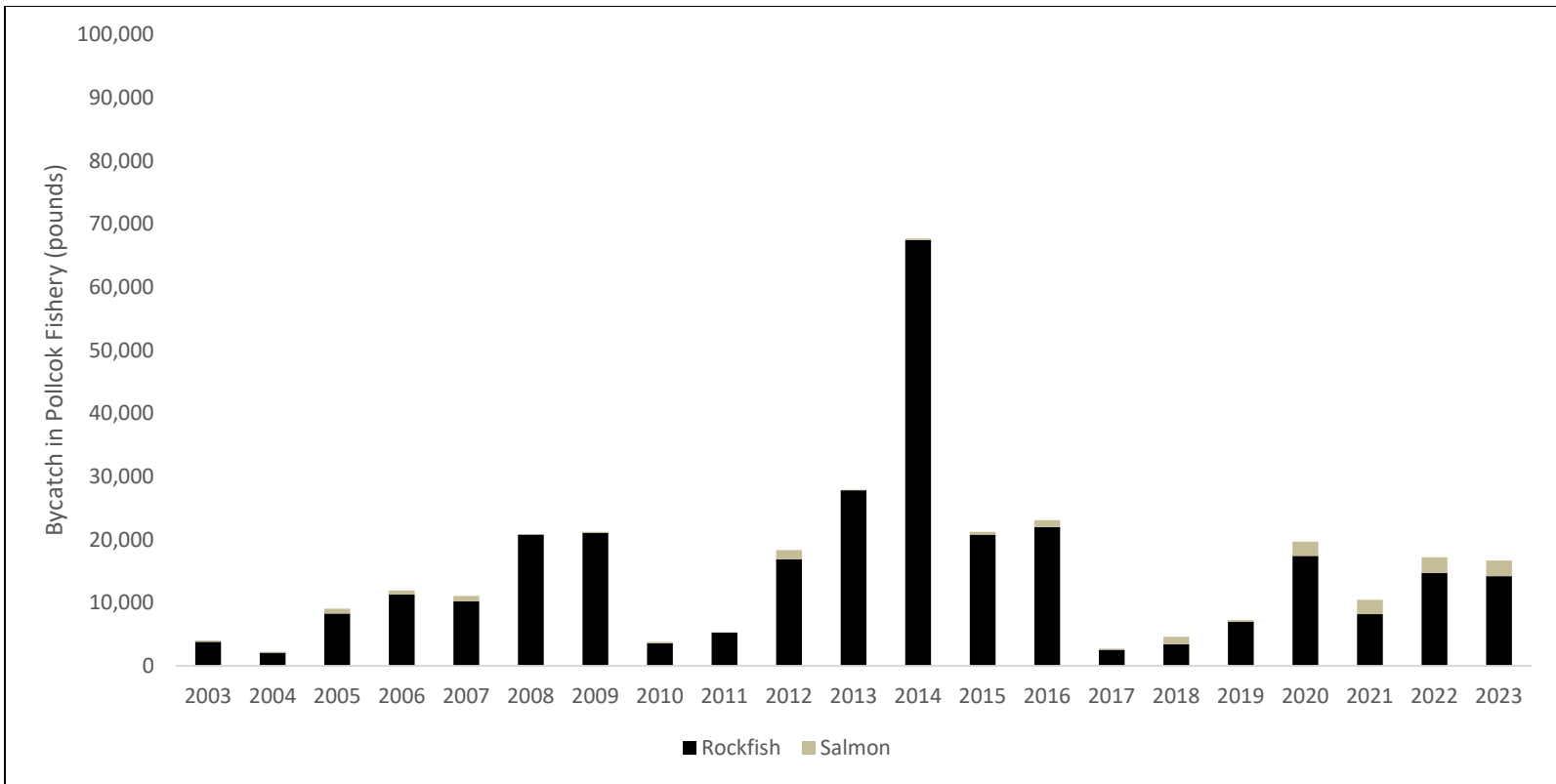


Figure 16-2.—Bycatch of rockfish and salmon in pounds during the directed PWS walleye pollock fishery, 2003-2023.

PROPOSAL 17 – 5 AAC 34.263. Prince William Sound Walleye Pollock Pelagic Trawl Fishery Management Plan.

PROPOSED BY: The Chenega IRA Council.

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This would require 100% onboard electronic monitoring and 50% physical onboard observation in the PWS walleye pollock trawl fishery.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? The *Prince William Sound Walleye Pollock Pelagic Trawl Fishery Management Plan* provides the commissioner with the authority to require onboard observers on a vessel during fishing operations (5 AAC 28.263(h)).

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? This would establish an electronic and on-board observer program to assess the accuracy of walleye pollock harvest and bycatch data from the PWS walleye pollock trawl fishery. This would result in considerable costs to the department and industry to implement.

BACKGROUND: Observers are deployed by the department in Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands crab and statewide weathervane scallop fisheries to collect biological and fishery data at sea. This is done for two reasons – first, most scallops and some crab are processed at sea, making shorebased biological data sampling not possible; second, data on the nonretained portion of the catch is a critical component of stock assessment models and requirement of the Federal Fishery Management Plan for these fisheries. In the PWS walleye pollock trawl fishery directed harvest and bycatch are delivered to shorebased facilities for processing. In-season assessment of bycatch limits is based on fish tickets from processors and call in data from the fishery.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department **OPPOSES** this proposal. The department has the authority but not the resources to deploy onboard observers in the walleye pollock fishery. If the board were to adopt this proposal it is unlikely the department could mobilize a walleye pollock observer program and identify a funding source for the program by the 2025 fishery. Additionally, the board does not have authority to require electronic monitoring.

COST ANALYSIS: Approval of this proposal will result in additional direct cost for the department to implement an observer program and additional direct cost to private persons participating in the fishery. The estimated cost of an onboard observer program for the PWS pollock fishery would depend on coverage levels determined by the board or department and the type of observers deployed in the fishery. The department currently administers an observer program for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands crab and statewide scallop fishery. Observers in those fisheries are either contracted third-party or department employees and costs are covered either by vessels required to carry an observer or through test fishery revenues generated by the department. Additional costs would be incurred to hire new department employees to administer an observer program.