



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, AK 99802-1668

January 29, 2026

Agenda B-2: NMFS Tribal Engagement Report

Pre-Council Meeting Tribal Consultation and Engagement Session and Tribal Newsletter

On December 22, 2025, NMFS sent an [invitation for Tribal consultation and Tribal engagement](#) on two February North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting agenda items. On January 22, 2026, NMFS released the [2026 January/February Tribal Newsletter](#) featuring updates on upcoming Tribal engagements, Council actions, January and February calendars of events, and more.

On January 26, 2026, NMFS held a government-to-government Tribal consultation with the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, representing the Akiak Native Community, and other interested Alaska Native Tribes, Corporations, and Tribally-authorized Alaska Regional Native Consortium¹ on chum salmon bycatch management in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. Key points received from thirty-four Tribal participants during consultation were incorporated into the NMFS staff presentation to the Council for agenda item C2 at the Council's February, 2026 meeting. Once finalized, NMFS will post a consultation summary on the Alaska Region's website.

On January 27, 2026, NMFS held a Tribal engagement session on two of the Council's February meeting agenda items - 2026 Cook Inlet salmon harvest specifications and chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock fishery. Council staff joined NMFS staff to present information and answer questions from the twenty-three Tribal participants in attendance.

Tribal participants provided numerous comments and questions about the 2026 Cook Inlet salmon harvest specifications. In particular, participants were interested in the decline in Chinook salmon and why the draft Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report maintained previous harvest numbers. NMFS staff explained the Tier 3 aggregate designation, which includes Chinook salmon. Alaska Native Tribes reported precipitous salmon declines, showed interest in research for specific areas, and inquired about planned studies to identify issues related to the declines. Discussions also covered State escapement goal management versus Federal total allowable catch

¹ Tribal consultation participants: Pilot Station Traditional Village, Native Village of Kwinhaagak, Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Native Village of Georgetown, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Chickaloon Native Traditional Council, Kawerak, Inc., Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Native Village of Paimuit, Anvik Village, Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments, Native Village of Council, Ahtna Intertribal Resources Commission, Association of Village Council Presidents, and Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

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(TAC) management in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and questions were raised about genetic testing to determine Chinook salmon stock origins. Some Alaska Native Tribes shared Traditional Knowledge and offered assistance (e.g., photo sharing, speaking with Elders) in identifying stock origins of Cook Inlet salmon, which NMFS staff mentioned should also be shared with the Scientific and Statistical Committee. NMFS staff clarified that reaching the TAC only closes the Federal fishery in the EEZ, not the State fisheries. NMFS staff also offered to discuss the SAFE report in greater detail during a future meeting.

NMFS staff responded to two questions regarding chum salmon bycatch: what is this group's recommendation for highest impact and outcome regarding the various alternatives and how can Alaska Native Tribes be most effective in our comments? NMFS staff explained Alternatives 1-5 and various options as well as how to provide Tribal comments to the Council. Council staff provided more details on how public comments are collected and considered by the Council in their deliberations. One Alaska Native Tribe recommended an Alternative 6 that would mandate the retention of all bycatch. NMFS and Council staff provided more information on how all vessels are already required to retain all prohibited species catch in the pollock fishery and how some of that catch is distributed through the Prohibited Species Donation Program. A Tribal participant encouraged NMFS staff to provide information to Tribes on the Prohibited Species Donation Program more frequently. Another Tribal participant emphasized that the Council should include seats for Alaska Native Tribes to provide better balance of interests, particularly in light of the number of seats representing trawl fisheries.

Fisheries Tribal Consultation
October 2025 Council Actions²

On September 29, 2025, NMFS held a Tribal consultation with Kawerak Inc., representing the Native Village of Council, to discuss the following agenda items for the October Council meeting: Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Crab specifications; Groundfish harvest specifications; Essential Fish Habitat; and the Programmatic Evaluation.³ The following is a synopsis of Kawerak Inc. feedback and concerns by topic.

Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Crab specifications and Groundfish harvest specifications - Kawerak Inc. raised concerns regarding the Chinook salmon three-river index, which is currently below the 250,000 threshold. This region has experienced depressed stocks for several years. Kawerak Inc. suggested that the Chinook salmon bycatch cap does not appear to be constraining and questioned whether the incentive plan agreement program is effectively meeting its objectives. Kawerak Inc. wondered what else could be done to help these stocks rebound as subsistence fishing is now significantly constrained and certain areas are closed. Kawerak Inc. recommends further discussion on this topic to explore additional measures to reduce Chinook salmon bycatch. NMFS responded that NMFS is encouraging the Council to develop a robust range of alternatives on chum salmon bycatch and continuing to work with the fishing industry to implement Chinook bycatch reduction measures. NMFS emphasized the unanimous interest in the Council arena to reduce bycatch to the extent practicable, which is the standard under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

² A NMFS B-2 Tribal Engagement Report was not prepared for the 2025 December Council meeting. As such, the September consultation meeting summary is included here.

³ The October Council Meeting agenda can be found at: <https://meetings.npfmc.org/Meeting/Details/3095>.

Essential Fish Habitat - Kawerak Inc. inquired about how they can be engaged and collaborate during the next five-year review. NMFS noted that all agency information will be vetted through the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee and Advisory Panel, with multiple opportunities for Tribal and public input. Given their direct connection with and stewardship of the environments that comprise essential fish habitat, Kawerak Inc. wants to share knowledge and input on Habitat Areas of Particular Concern. They request to be included in the process rather than just being a commenter. Given staff capacity, Kawerak Inc. offered to organize meetings to facilitate the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in this five-year review.

Programmatic Evaluation - Kawerak Inc. recommended that the Programmatic Evaluation be off-ramped and that the Council continue to pursue incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge and solicit Tribal engagement in Council processes. Kawerak Inc. supports the overall focus of the Inflation Reduction Act workplan (IRA) and noted that the readjustment away from the Programmatic could focus more on the IRA objectives including the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge and climate risk. Kawerak Inc. requests that all Local Knowledge/Traditional Knowledge recommendations be adopted, rather than the subset previously adopted by the Council. Aside from the Programmatic Evaluation, Kawerak Inc. suggested that additional avenues for collaborative management and co-stewardship exist, such as in the development of robust harvest control rules and ecosystem-based fishery management. Kawerak Inc. also welcomes a more robust triennial review of the Council's research priorities and recommends the Council follow the approach taken by the Scientific and Statistical Committee for research, while encouraging broader participation. NMFS encouraged Kawerak Inc. and the Native Village of Council to testify to the Council on this topic.