



# PRESS RELEASE

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### **Enforceable Western Alaska chum cap reshapes B season pollock operations with vessel-level accountability and mandatory closures**

**SEATTLE — Feb. 18, 2026** — United Catcher Boats (UCB), representing the majority of catcher vessels in the Bering Sea inshore pollock fishery, provided the following perspective on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council’s (NPFMC) adoption of a Western Alaska chum salmon prohibited species catch (PSC) limit and corridor closure framework.

In its final action, the NPFMC imposed a mandatory, enforceable cap on Western Alaska-origin chum salmon (WAK) in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. The council established sector allocations, in-season monitoring requirements and enforceable corridor closures that would restrict access to up to half of the designated inshore fishing grounds if limits are exceeded.

The corridor structure reflects input from Tribal organizations, who provided traditional knowledge regarding salmon migration timing and pathways, as well as on-the-water local knowledge from the pollock fleet. Near real-time genetic stock composition data also informed the corridor design, ensuring it targets areas and times of highest conservation concern for Western Alaska chum while remaining practical to implement on the fishing grounds. Together, traditional knowledge, fleet experience and emerging genetic tools helped shape a corridor intended to maximize conservation impact on Western Alaska chum salmon stocks.

The action also establishes a 45,000 Western Alaska chum salmon cap across pollock sectors in the Bering Sea area that encompasses most of the primary fishing grounds for shoreside catcher vessels and mothership from June 10 through August 31, the period when Western Alaska chum are most likely to be encountered in the B season.

“This is not a symbolic action,” said Andrea Keikkala, executive director of United Catcher Boats. “This fundamentally changes how our fleet operates. The cap must be managed down to the vessel level, and individual vessels that exhaust their allocation could lose access to fishing opportunities during the most important part of the season. At the sector level, exceeding the cap triggers mandatory corridor closures that restrict access to a large share of our primary summer grounds. This is a strong regulatory backstop with real operational consequences.”

Analysis of historical performance under the adopted cap structure shows that the catcher vessel and mothership sectors represented by UCB would have faced significant in-season management constraints in 9 of the last 14 years. In three of those years, sector allocations would have exceeded outright, triggering mandatory corridor closures for the remainder of the B season. In the remaining years, fleets would have altered fishing patterns, shift effort away from productive grounds and absorb additional operational costs to remain within sector limits. These are not hypothetical scenarios they reflect the real management conditions the fleet will face under this framework.

Four mandatory statistical areas set directly in federal regulation were identified during council deliberations following extensive public testimony. Council members acknowledged the value of the

information shared throughout the process, including perspectives on salmon migration timing and pathways, as they shaped the final corridor structure. Those four selected statistical areas account for more than 20 percent of the catcher vessel fleet's historical pollock harvest during B season. Triggering the cap would significantly alter fishing patterns, compress effort into a smaller footprint, and disrupt fishing operations for catcher vessels and the communities that depend on that activity. If required closures are not implemented in season, regulations mandate corridor restrictions during the entire June 10–August 31 period in the following B season. These enforcement mechanisms are new and significant.

Under the new framework, motherships, at-sea processors and catcher vessels delivering to shoreside processors must operate within defined sector allocations and carefully manage Western Alaska chum salmon encounters while harvesting pollock quota. Individual vessels may have access to only a limited portion of the sector allocation and could lose access to productive fishing areas if limits are reached. These measures introduce new operational risk and cost, particularly during the peak of the B season.

UCB recognizes the profound hardship facing Yukon, Kuskokwim and other Western Alaska salmon-dependent communities. “We understand the burden communities have carried through years of salmon closures,” Keikkala said. “Every Western Alaska salmon that returns to its river matters to the people who depend on them. This action reflects the seriousness of that situation and introduces enforceable measures that will require difficult decisions on the water.”

At the same time, the council strengthened tools that have already demonstrated measurable results in reducing Western Alaska chum salmon encounters, including:

- Mandatory salmon excluder technology for the full duration of A and B seasons
- Integration of genetic stock composition data to prioritize WAK chum salmon avoidance
- More frequent in-season monitoring of WAK chum salmon encounter rates through genetic testing
- Vessel outlier provisions and expanded weekly reporting transparency to Tribal organizations and other salmon users

Recent years have shown that targeted, stock-specific avoidance guided by genetics and fleet coordination can significantly reduce the Western Alaska component of chum salmon bycatch, even in higher-encounter years. These advancements have required significant private investment from the pollock fleet and CDQ groups, who have absorbed the substantial costs associated with near real-time genetic sampling programs, excluder development and testing, enhanced monitoring and in-season avoidance measures. They have also required more time on the water for captains and crew, longer transits, additional fuel consumption and increased operational uncertainty in an already volatile global seafood market. The industry remains committed to continuing and expanding these efforts under the new regulatory structure.

“As implementation moves forward, improving the turnaround time and availability of in-season genetic data will be critical,” Keikkala added. “The ability to distinguish Western Alaska chum salmon from other stocks in near real time is essential to managing this cap responsibly and ensuring that these measures deliver their intended conservation benefits.”

UCB emphasized that the pollock fishery operates under 100 percent observer coverage, full retention of prohibited species catch, and federal oversight. “This decision adds new layers of accountability and enforceable safeguards,” Keikkala said. “Our focus now is on implementation, making sure these measures function as intended, improve avoidance of Western Alaska chum salmon and maintain stability for the communities that depend on this fishery.”

UCB will continue working with the council, NOAA Fisheries, Tribal entities, CDQ groups and other stakeholders as the rulemaking process advances toward implementation.

### **About United Catcher Boats**

United Catcher Boats (UCB) represents catcher vessels in federally managed trawl fisheries off Alaska and the West Coast. As a nonprofit trade association, UCB advocates for sustainable management, responsible fishing practices and policies that support U.S. jobs and global seafood markets.