

Chinook Salmon FAQ

Version 2.0: 2024



What is the new PCC Chinook Sourcing Standard?

[PCC's Chinook Sourcing Standard](#) is a sourcing evaluation framework, developed in collaboration with National Fisheries Conservation Center (NFCC), to identify fisheries with robust data indicating harvesting from them should have no or minimal impact on Southern Resident Killer Whales' (SRKW) access to Chinook salmon, or overall Chinook stocks. It was developed to better refine our moratorium on the sale of Chinook salmon caught in Washington, Oregon and British Columbia and ensure better protection of endangered Southern Residents and Chinook. PCC sells Chinook salmon only from approved fisheries that have been evaluated against the standard by experts.

How does the PCC Chinook Sourcing Standard work?

Working with our partners at the National Fisheries Conservation Center (NFCC), PCC identifies potential fisheries from where we might want to source Chinook salmon. NFCC then analyzes data collected on the subject fishery against three categories of risk: (1) prey interception risk, (2) stock depletion risk, and (3) knowledge risk. Each of the categories within the standard has a set of indicators that help NFCC analysts determine the risk level for the fishery. For example, one of the indicators under the stock depletion risk requires that fishery managers and policies must implement a precautionary approach to harvest control rules and in-season adjustments of allowable catch and/or fishing practices. After the data and management policies are evaluated against the indicators, analysts with NFCC then determine whether the data satisfy the requirements or fail and then assign a rating. Fisheries that earn an A in the prey interception risk category and A or B in the stock and knowledge risk categories are then approved for PCC sourcing.

Why did PCC develop this standard?

Chinook salmon are an iconic species in the Pacific Northwest with significant ecological, cultural, and economic importance—many subspecies of which are listed as endangered. The Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW), also a regionally iconic species, depend on Chinook as a primary food source. Due to a combination of noise pollution, toxic chemicals, food scarcity, habitat destruction, and climate change, the populations of Southern Residents have reached devastating lows and the future of the species is uncertain.

Consumer concern for Chinook salmon, Southern Resident populations, and the many ecological and cultural systems that depend on them have created a demand for action and increased sourcing consciousness. As a grocery co-op with a strong commitment to social and environmental responsibility, we asked ourselves, "How can we sell Chinook without contributing to the Southern Residents' food shortage or harming already vulnerable populations of Chinook salmon?" We also asked the question of whether we should sell Chinook salmon at all. Listening to experts in conservation biology, fisheries management, and tribal leaders was critical in helping us answer those tough questions.

The catalyst for addressing our Chinook salmon offerings came in September of 2018 after Tahlequah (J35), a female member of the J Pod carried her deceased calf across her brow for 17 days. In response to this demonstration and the demands of our customers, we issued a moratorium on all Chinook salmon caught in waters from British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon. This action received wide acclaim from the public, but

also brought to the forefront new information from many experts in the community that it was an imperfect solution.

After many discussions with conservation and fishery experts and a thorough review of existing seafood sustainability certifications to identify if an appropriate standard for sourcing Chinook salmon existed, PCC determined it was necessary to develop an individual standard.

Does the PCC Chinook Sourcing Standard allow fish from hatcheries?

In some cases, yes, but they must be reviewed against the standard to ensure that the hatcheries and enhancement programs underpinning the fishery use recognized best practices to avoid or mitigate impacts on naturally spawning fish.

But aren't hatcheries bad?

This is an important question and one that does not have a good answer. We asked our researchers at NFCC to be sure to analyze this issue and the findings pointed to an even greater problem—us. The harsh reality is that modern civilization has wrecked so much habitat—especially in rivers and estuaries—that hatcheries are now tasked to do nature's work in raising young salmon. For better or worse, they now provide 75 percent of the catch in Puget Sound, 90 percent in the Columbia River, and most of the Chinook available to Southern Residents in much of their range. In other words, if hatcheries did not exist, it is doubtful that Chinook and the Southern Residents would exist.

Yet, the job of replacing nature's damaged spawning and nursery grounds with engineered fish-rearing systems has unquestionably been problematic. Lessons are being learned and best practice guidance on hatchery management is an evolving and contentious subject. Despite broad areas of agreement, expert views diverge on the benefits and risks of hatcheries.

That said, the research conducted in developing PCC's Chinook Sourcing Standard indicated that it was an important part of the Southern Resident and Chinook survival to allow within the evaluation framework a way to support best practices for hatcheries.

Does all of PCC's salmon meet this standard?

No. Because the primary source of food for the Southern Resident Killer Whales is Chinook salmon (approximately 80%), this standard only applies to Chinook salmon. All other species of salmon, such as Sockeye and Coho, are sourced according to Monterey Bay Seafood Watch criteria and PCC's general Finfish, Shellfish, Crustaceans and Cephalopods Standard.

Is the Chinook sold at PCC also approved by Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program?

This depends on the specific area where a Chinook is caught. For many of the approved fisheries under the PCC Chinook Sourcing Standard, Chinook caught from those fisheries would also meet Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch (Seafood Watch) criteria and receive a green or yellow rating. What we found in our discussions with our partners at Seafood Watch, however, was that in many cases they do not have the resources to evaluate specific fisheries on a more localized level or with added criteria concerning other species' risks, such as the Southern Residents. Thus, for many of the "red" listings of Chinook from the Puget Sound region, it was necessary for Seafood Watch to take a broader regional approach in their ratings without examining individualized data on stocks or fishing practices. Under PCC's Chinook Sourcing Standard, we examine individual data on each fishery we approve, ensuring that we are minimizing negative impacts on Southern Resident prey stocks and Chinook stocks. This ensures that local fishermen and tribes, many of whom have dedicated their lives to protecting the

Chinook stocks on which their lives depend and utilize conservation-minded fishing practices, could be evaluated and provide Chinook salmon to our stores.

Isn't it better just to stop selling Chinook?

Unfortunately, human consumption of Chinook salmon is a very small piece of the problem facing both Chinook salmon and Southern Residents. Human impacts, such as destruction of habitat, dams that block access to spawning grounds, introduction of pesticides and toxins into the marine environment, and climate change are some of the primary drivers of their declines and struggles. While some conservationists support the elimination of Chinook as a source of food for humans, many do not because it will have little impact and remove valuable incentives for continued research and conservation efforts.

Does this guarantee that the Southern Resident killer whales will get enough food?

No. Not by a long shot. Human activity that has resulted in loss of habitat and spawning grounds, warmer and more polluted water, and other impacts from anthropogenic climate change, are some of the primary drivers of their declines and struggles. While important, targeted, place-based sourcing is merely a small step in the efforts that consumers and retailers must make to truly change the declines facing Chinook and Southern Residents. We are looking forward to continuing our work with NFCC, tribal nations, and other marine conservation experts who have helped to develop PCC's Chinook Sourcing Standard to evaluate other opportunities for retailers to address the broader, systemic threats facing these iconic species.