Midwater trawlers harvest schools of Pacific whiting, also known as hake. A net is towed off the rear of the vessel (stern) from the surface of the water to just above the ocean floor. The nets are funnel-shaped with a wide mouth that tapers back to a narrow, tube-like section, called a codend, where the catch is collected.

Fishermen use sonar and other sophisticated electronic equipment to find the fish. Once the school of fish is located, the net is released off the stern. A trawl door on each side of the net holds it open. On average, the net is towed for 30 to 60 minutes. A single tow may yield 50 tons of fish or more.

Once caught, the whiting are transferred to a seafood processing ship, or released into a refrigerated fish hold and delivered to a local seafood processor. They clean and fillet the fish, then sell the fillets or process them into surimi, a fish paste used to make imitation seafood.

Pacific Whiting Management

The Pacific whiting fishery is the highest volume fishery found off the west coast. It is managed by federal and international agencies. Management measures include vessel monitoring systems and restrictions on gear, season, and the location of fishing. In addition, annual quotas limit the catch of Pacific whiting and untargeted species, or bycatch. All of these actions keep the number of untargeted species caught very low.

In 2009, this fishery was certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council.

Pacific whiting, Merluccius productus, is a very abundant fish species found off the west coast. Each spring they migrate north from their spawning grounds in California to feed off of the coasts of Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. They form large schools that span for several miles, making them an easy catch for midwater trawlers.