

Status of analytical projects related to the Halibut & Sablefish IFQ Program

Updated January 2021

The IFQ Committee will meet virtually on Thursday, March 25 (and Friday, March 26 if necessary). The agenda will be made available through www.npfmc.org at the appropriate time.

	Description	Status / Target Date
Projects in Council Review (Council has tasked staff and scheduled review at a future meeting)		
Small Sablefish Release	Analysis of alternatives to allow discarding (careful release) in the IFQ sablefish fishery. The Council is motivated by low commercial value and high survival rates for small sablefish, with potential for positive effects on stock biomass and future value. Alternatives include voluntary release of sablefish and a range of DMRs for pot and hook-and-line gear. Voluntary release is preferred over a size limit because it maximizes flexibility. There are two options to address catch accounting including: observer-based and survey-based discard estimation. Total discard mortalities would be estimated in the stock assessment. The analysis will explore how voluntary release would be accounted for in stock assessments and in setting catch limits. Monitoring and enforcement provisions that could improve discard estimation will also be evaluated. The accounting system for the IFQ fishery would need to be overhauled since IFQ discards could reduce allocations to trawl and IFQ vessels. Because IFQ is assigned to an individual and discards might be attributed based on observer program estimates, individual liability may need to be addressed.	Initial Review February 2021
IFQ Access Opportunities	Consider design elements of a quota share “access pool” intended to promote entry into the halibut and sablefish IFQ fishery by entry-level participants. Entry-level is defined as a vessel owner/operator or crew who owns less than 5,000 lbs. of IFQ based on 2019 quota levels. Access pool QS would be held by a non-individual entity and could not be transferred by the eligible participants who qualify to fish the quota. The total amount of access pool QS would be capped at 1.0% of the total amount of quota for each species in each management area. QS could be placed in the access pool either by a one-time allocation or by withholding a percentage of QS that is transferred between existing QS holders until the cap is reached – or some combination of those two mechanisms. The paper will discuss the functionality and scope of the access pool’s impacts, identify Council decision points, and consider issues of consistency with MSA definitions of quota holding entities (e.g., Regional Fishery Associations).	Expanded Discussion Paper April 2021
GOA Sablefish Longline Pot Fishery 3-Year Review	The Council requested a review paper on the functioning of the GOA sablefish longline pot gear fishery to be conducted after three years of implementation. Due to scheduling changes in 2020, the timing of this review was delayed. The review will cover 2017 through 2020. The review will include – but is not limited to – information about participation, catch, bycatch, observer coverage, gear loss, and gear conflict. Economic performance data will be included for the 2017 through 2019 fishing years based on what is available. Staff will also consider any available information that relates to the Council’s policy objectives, including mitigation of whale depredation, safety at sea, and cooperation among fishermen to avoid gear conflict.	Fishery Review April 2021

	Description	Status / Target Date
Recreational Quota Entity (RQE) Funding Mechanism	The Council took action to allow the formation of an RQE in December 2016. The RQE has the ability to purchase commercial halibut IFQ on behalf of charter halibut anglers in Areas 2C and 3A to augment the apportioned pounds of halibut for the charter catch limit in an area. Additional pounds could relax the annual charter management measures (e.g., bag limits and size restrictions) up to the allowance for the unguided recreational sector (two fish of any size). To fund the purchase of halibut quota, U.S. Congress is currently considering a bill that would allow a fee to be assessed on the charter halibut sector in the form of a charter halibut stamp. The discussion paper will investigate how a halibut stamp could function – i.e., design, monitoring and enforcement, and the potential revenue that could be generated.	Discussion Paper April 2021

	Description
<i>Projects not yet scheduled (**order does not reflect priority**)</i>	
Discussion Paper: Use of Hired Master Provision	Given the increasing use of hired masters in the IFQ fishery, assemble data on hired master use and describe business arrangements between vessel owners, QS holders, and crew to the extent possible. The Council is scoping for potential modifications to hired master regulations that would promote the original program objected of an owner/operator fleet.
Discussion Paper: QS Transfer Mechanisms	Explore regulatory and non-regulatory options that promote willing transfers of QS from initial QS recipients to hired masters and crew, including but not limited to the Right of First Offer concept used in crab cooperatives. Also scope potential for changes to the Federal loan program that would increase use by individuals looking to purchase QS.