

**C4 Council Motion
Small Sablefish Release
June 9, 2024**

The Council recommends releasing the analysis for final action with the following revised Purpose and Needs statement and alternatives.

Purpose and Need

Beginning with the 2014 age class, a continuing series of large year classes of sablefish are resulting in significant catches of small sablefish in the IFQ and CDQ fixed gear fisheries and current regulations require retention of all sablefish. Small sablefish have low commercial value under current market conditions. Action is needed to reduce the harvest of small sablefish. Although no scientific studies are available to estimate survival rates for Alaska sablefish, information from other areas suggests that survival rates for carefully released sablefish may be high enough to warrant consideration of relaxing full retention requirements. Limited operational flexibility to carefully release or avoid catching small sablefish may increase the value of the commercial harvest and could allow small fish to contribute to the overall biomass.

Alternatives:

All aspects of this action apply to both the IFQ and CDQ fixed gear sablefish regulations. Preliminary preferred alternative is in bold.

Alternative 1: No Action, status quo

Under the No Action alternative, all regulations and FMP language related to a prohibition on discarding sablefish would remain intact. Those regulations include 50 CFR 679.7(d)(4)(ii) and 50 CFR 679.7(f)(11). Additionally, discarding is prohibited in both the BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMPs in the fourth provision under General Provisions section 3.7.1.7, prohibiting discarding of sablefish.

Alternative 2: Allow Release of Sablefish in the IFQ Fishery

This alternative would modify the regulatory restrictions that prohibit release of sablefish caught by sablefish IFQ and CDQ vessels as well as the FMP provision prohibiting discarding.

Require retention of sablefish 22 inches total body length or longer (provides for voluntary release of sablefish under 22 inches total body length).

Elements of the Alternative:

Element 1: DMRs

The SSC recommends the DMR through the stock assessment process.

Element 2: Catch and Release Mortality Accounting

Sablefish catch and release mortality associated with the IFQ fishery will be accounted for in the stock assessment. For inseason management, an ICA must be established to account for sablefish discards:

Option 1: As part of the annual harvest specification process, fixed gear ICAs will be established separately for the CP and CV categories.

Option 2: As part of the annual harvest specification process, a fixed gear ICA will be established for all IFQ vessels combined.

Element 3: Monitoring and Enforcement

The analysis should describe potential monitoring and enforcement provisions that could improve estimates of voluntary and regulatory discards.

Element 4: Review

The ability to release sablefish will be reviewed in:

a) 3 years **b) 5 years** c) 7 years following implementation.

Element 5: Release Requirements

The Council recommends development, in conjunction with industry, of careful release requirements for all fixed gear sablefish fisheries. The analysis should describe gear modification options (voluntary and regulatory) used to improve size-selectivity for pot and hook-and-line gear fisheries.