

Council Motion

D-3 Halibut and Sablefish IFQ/CQE Programs

October 11, 2026

The Community Quota Entity (CQE) Program was established in 2004 to mitigate the migration of halibut and sablefish quota share, and thus access to the fisheries, out of small, rural, Gulf of Alaska coastal communities. Eligible communities can form non-profit corporations called CQEs to purchase limited amounts of Gulf of Alaska catcher vessel quota share as a long-term community asset, with the resulting annual fishing privileges leased to community residents. While the CQE program was designed to create greater access for Gulf of Alaska communities, over the past two decades, the high cost of halibut IFQ and administrative burden of starting and managing a CQE has limited its success. In 2014, Adak was added to the program with different requirements, for the purpose of purchasing Area 4B halibut and Aleutian Islands sablefish. The Council is considering how to increase participation for active CQEs and encourage new participation, without changing the total amount of cumulative quota CQEs can hold or the original intent of the program.

In addition, under the halibut and sablefish IFQ Program, an individual must have at least 150 days of experience as part of a harvesting crew in any U.S. commercial fishery to be eligible to receive halibut or sablefish quota by transfer. The Council is considering allowing tendering time to count toward this requirement, similar to recent actions in other fisheries. In addition, there is no minimum age requirement in regulations to allow a person to hold quota share or the annual IFQ. Finally, the Council is considering changes to the landing requirements for IFQ fisheries to lower the burden for smaller, rural operators.

This set of actions relative to the IFQ and CQE Programs is intended to facilitate improved access to the halibut and sablefish resource, or in the case of a minimum age requirement, clarify rules for the affected public and NMFS. It is also intended to meet the intent of the *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness E.O.* (E.O. 14276) by reducing costs.

Alternative 1. No action

(Action alternatives are not mutually exclusive.)

Alternative 2. Changes to Transfer Eligibility Certificate (TEC) requirements

- Option 1. Establish a minimum age of (options: 14, 16, 18) in regulation to be eligible to receive IFQ or QS by transfer (replace interim policy of 18)
- Option 2. Allow time tendering in any U.S. commercial fishery to count toward the 150-day TEC requirement to receive annual IFQ

Alternative 3. Changes to unloading/landing requirements for halibut and sablefish IFQ deliveries

- Option 1. Allow IFQ to be received by a tender vessel with a registered buyer permit for delivery to a buying station or registered buyer in a port
- Option 2. Remove the prior notice of landing requirement for small IFQ deliveries (suboption: ≤500 lbs; ≤1,000 lbs; ≤2,000 lbs)

Alternative 4. Increase the amount of halibut quota an individual Gulf of Alaska CQE can hold. No change to the limit on the total amount of quota that can be held cumulatively by all CQEs. Clarify regulations such that a CQE representing more than one community may hold up to the combined community-level cap for each individual community it represents.

Area 2C pool:

Option 1. 1.5% of the 2C halibut QS pool

Option 2. 2% of the 2C halibut QS pool

Area 2C/3A/3B combined:

Option 3. 1% of the 2C/3A/3B halibut QS pool

Option 4. 2% of the 2C/3A/3B halibut QS pool

Option 5. 3% of the 2C/3A/3B halibut QS pool

Alternative 5. Allow CQEs to assign and manage quota in-season through the use of the hired master system, authorizing one or more individuals to land CQE-held halibut or sablefish to be debited against the CQE holdings. In the Gulf program, only residents of the community or communities represented by the CQE continue to be eligible to fish CQE-derived quota.

Alternative 6. Modify requirements for the Adak CQE

Option 1. Remove the 50,000 lb sablefish vessel use cap for the Aleutian Islands CQE Program

Option 2. Remove the 50,000 lb cap on individuals leasing IFQ derived from the Aleutian Islands CQE

Option 3. Remove the residency requirement for harvesting Aleutian Islands CQE-held quota