

ADVISORY PANEL
Motions and Rationale
December 3-7, 2019 - Anchorage, AK

D2 Sablefish Discards

AP Motion

The AP recommends the Council initiate an analysis of an amendment to the Sablefish IFQ Program to allow the careful release of small sablefish with a suite of alternatives and options including, but not limited to:

Alternative 1: Status Quo

Alternative 2: Allow voluntary careful release of sablefish in the IFQ fishery

Element 1: DMRs

Apply a DMR to discarded sablefish of:

- a. 5%
- b. 12%
- c. 16%
- d. 20%

Sub-option: Select different DMRs for pot gear and hook and line gear

Element 2: Catch Accounting

Option 1: Sablefish discards will be estimated in-season using observer and EM data. A discard mortality limit will be set annually as part of the specifications process. The fishery will be managed for full retention once the discard limit is estimated to be attained.

Option 2: Sablefish discards will be estimated pre-season based on AFSC longline survey encounter rates of sub-three pound sablefish with the DMR applied. The resulting estimate will be deducted before IFQ is issued.

(1)Element 3. Discard Accounting. (2)~~Sablefish IFQ discards will be deducted from the IFQ TAC.~~(2)All discard will be deducted from the apportionment for each sector from where the discard mortality occurred.

Amendment 2 to remove sentence 2 and add sentence 3 passed 10-7

Amendment 1 passed 10-7

Motion as amended passed 11-6

Rationale:

- *This action is intended to address the careful release of sablefish by fixed fish fisheries in part, because of the above-average recruitment classes and large amounts of juvenile sablefish encountered in the fishery being seen now and the understanding that release mortality of fixed gear caught sablefish is not 100%, the DMR currently assigned to all fisheries.*

- *Allowing sablefish fishermen to release small sablefish will provide a measure of protection to these important incoming year classes and increase the value of the sablefish catch since the price/size differential for sablefish is significant.*
- *Public testimony from both pot and hook-and-line stakeholders indicates that a voluntary approach to carefully releasing sablefish is most appropriate for this action.*
- *Tag recoveries and available studies of sablefish release mortality indicate sablefish have a high survival rate when carefully released (80-88%).*
- *The fixed gear sector feels DMR rates of 100% for carefully released fish are not accurate as evidence by tagging studies, State of Alaska's DMR for state waters black cod fisheries and public testimony.*
- *This motion captures two different options for Council consideration in regards to catch accounting of small sablefish releases.*

Rationale for Amendment 2:

- *The topic of discard mortality accounting was discussed robustly by the AP with some members requesting assignment only to the IFQ fixed gear fishery and others looking for a more holistic approach, similar to management of other fisheries.*
- *Incidental and PSC mortality is an increasing majority of the removals and is responsible for nearly all discard mortality at the current time. In 2020, based on the projected strength of the 2014 year class and a 12% DMR, it is estimated that if longline fisheries released all sablefish they caught under 3 lbs, there would be around 150,000 pounds of total release mortality. In comparison, in the Bering Sea, more than 4 million pounds of dead sablefish were discarded by the trawl sector after reaching its incidental catch allowance in 2019, 365% over the sector TAC. There is no management that reduces trawl bycatch of sablefish in the Bering Sea unless the overfishing level is reached. IFQ fishermen are penalized for all removals above their IFQ allocation. Sablefish discards in the trawl sector are only partially captured in the current year's stock assessment. The majority of discard impacts on the stock from the current year are not captured until the following year's assessment and are therefore not part of the TAC setting process until two years out. Any reduction in future ABCs from these discards would be carried by all users of the resource in this case.*
- *The majority of the AP supported the Council reviewing how discard mortality is addressed in all fisheries catching sablefish, highlighting the inequity in treating the sablefish IFQ fleet differently than the trawl sector in regards to accountability for discard mortality of juvenile sablefish.*

Rationale in opposition:

- *The action under consideration is narrowly focused on a modification to the current regulations to the sablefish IFQ fishery; it is not an action intended to address concerns with the incidental catch of sablefish in BS and GOA trawl fisheries. The trawl fisheries do not have an allocation of sablefish as occurs under the IFQ program, they have an apportionment so the management and accounting of catch in the directed sablefish fishery versus other fisheries that incidentally harvest sablefish is not equivalent.*
- *Recent increases in incidental catches of sablefish in the BS trawl fisheries is the direct result of a unique set of intersecting circumstances: a high abundance of young sablefish combined with encounters of Chinook salmon at a time of the year they have not previously been*

encountered making efforts to move away from sablefish while also avoiding salmon extremely difficult. The BS trawl fisheries were actively engaged in efforts to address sablefish take throughout 2019 while balancing the need to minimize salmon bycatch, which is the Council's stated priority. Statements implying that there is no accountability in the trawl fisheries are inaccurate: as requested by the Council, the trawl fisheries presented their plans/tools to address sablefish in the upcoming year.

- *The addition of the original Element 3, specific to the accounting of discards that may occur in the directed sablefish IFQ fishery, was intended to address an outstanding question in the discussion paper and reflective of some public testimony provided. Element 3, as amended, is not appropriate, especially as the Gulf of Alaska trawl is not rationalized and does not have the necessary tools for full accountability. When the sablefish TAC is not set equivalent to ABC (based on the best available science that incorporates all sources of mortality), trawl fisheries are unnecessarily constrained and forced to discard due to the high abundance of sablefish that's being encountered.*
- *Allowing high grading will decrease incentives to harvest selectively initially and the mortality associated with releasing fish should be better understood prior to implementing this regulatory change to the sablefish IFQ. An EFP may be a more appropriate first step at this point.*
- *IFQ fisheries should have any mortality associated with the fishery come off the IFQ to incentivize careful release and to minimize the impact on other stakeholders. For example, in the GOA rockfish program, all sablefish mortality comes off the boat's quota and full retention is required, when the quota is taken the boat is done fishing.*