



C4 Small Sablefish Release

June 2024 Council Meeting

Action Memo

Council Staff: Sara Cleaver

Other Presenters: Dr. Dan Goethel (AFSC), Andrew Olson (NMFS), Jon McCracken (McCracken & Associates)

Action Required: 1. Initial Review of analysis
2. Recommend action as necessary (may select preliminary preferred alternative)

BACKGROUND

The Council will review a second Initial Review Draft of an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Regulatory Impact Review (RIR) that analyzes potential environmental, economic, and social impacts of a proposed management measure to allow sablefish IFQ/CDQ harvesters using fixed gear in the BSAI and GOA to carefully release small sablefish. “Small sablefish” in this document is defined by sablefish less than 22 inches in total length. Current regulations require full retention of sablefish in these fisheries, and fishery encounters with large numbers of small sablefish have become more frequent because recent year classes of sablefish are more abundant than any previously recorded.

The previous analysis related to this action was reviewed in February 2021 and analyzed an alternative to allow voluntary release of sablefish of any size. In June 2023, the Council augmented the alternatives to include an option requiring that any sablefish ≥ 22 ” must be retained. Upon review of this current draft, the Council may choose to proceed to final action with the alternatives as identified in this document, or with modified alternatives, or the Council may request additional analysis and optionally, another review.

The analysis also addresses the application of a discard mortality rate to IFQ/CDQ sablefish under the proposed action, and how to monitor, enforce, and account for discards as needed for inseason management and to inform the stock assessment. These were elements of the Council motion initiating this action, and while not Council decision points, they are important for understanding how the action would be implemented and any associated impacts. The action also includes an element that the Council can adopt at final action, regarding whether to require a review of the effects of adopting Alternative 2 after a given number of years, or a sunset date. At the Council’s request, this document also addresses the effectiveness of escape mechanisms in sablefish pots.

Several appendices provide supporting analysis, additional context, and further discussion as requested by the Council. These include:

- Sablefish size/age conversion table and equation (Appendix 1)
- Responses to prior SSC comments (Appendix 2)
- Discussion of Escape Rings and Selectivity (Appendix 3)
- Table of requirements applicable to sablefish discarding in other regions/ fisheries (Appendix 4)
- The simulation analysis and results for projecting ABC for Alaskan sablefish (Appendix 5)