



November 20, 2020

Ms. Linda Behnken
Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association
P.O. Box 1229
Sitka, AK 99835

Dear Ms. Behnken:

Thank you for your letter regarding the federally managed sablefish fishery off Alaska. I appreciate the concerns you have raised.

Alaska sablefish, assessed each year through a rigorous stock assessment, is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. In 2019, the sablefish catch exceeded the Alaska-wide sablefish Annual Catch Limit (ACL) by 1,487 metric tons (mt); however, Alaska-wide catch remained 50 percent less than the Alaska-wide Overfishing Limit (OFL). Pursuant to the groundfish Fishery Management Plans for both the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) implemented accountability measures following the 2019 sablefish overage. We do not project an Alaska-wide ACL overage for 2020 because there is over 3,550 mt remaining between the Alaska-wide catch and the Alaska-wide ACL, and we project less than 1,000 mt will be reported for the remainder of 2020.

The Bering Sea trawl catch has been changing as a result of unprecedented amounts of small sablefish appearing in fisheries like Bering Sea pollock and flatfish. We expect management through the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to continue to be responsive to these changes and encourage you to direct your concerns about catch overages to the Council. The Council may choose to modify current accountability measures to use if the ACLs are exceeded. In the meantime, NMFS is managing the sablefish fisheries under the existing regulations and accountability measures currently in place.

If you have any questions, please contact James Balsiger, Administrator, Alaska Region, at 907-586-7221.

Sincerely

Chris Oliver

