

**Council motion**  
C2 Small sablefish  
April 5, 2025

I move the Council adopt the following revised Purpose and Need Statement and Preferred Alternative for final action.

## **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. Current regulations prohibiting sablefish discards for much of the fleet require sablefish of all sizes to be retained. Small sablefish have low commercial value under current market conditions. Although few 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 sablefish may increase the value of the commercial harvest.

## **Alternatives**

**All aspects of this action apply to both the IFQ and CDQ fixed gear sablefish regulations in the BSAI and GOA. The Council's preferred alternative is in bold.**

Alternative 1: No action, status quo

### **Alternative 2: Allow Release of Sablefish in the IFQ/CDQ Fisheries**

**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. The Council recommends NMFS use Inseason Management authority to prohibit discarding in the sablefish IFQ/CDQ fisheries when an area-wide sablefish discard allowance (SDA) is reached.**

**CVs: Require retention of sablefish 22 inches total body length or longer (provides for voluntary release of sablefish under 22 inches total body length) on catcher vessels fishing sablefish IFQ/CDQ.**

**CPs: Allow catcher processors fishing sablefish IFQ/CDQ to carefully release sablefish of any size.**

### **Element 1: Discard Mortality Rate**

**The SSC would recommend the DMR through the stock assessment/harvest specifications 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, the Council recommends NMFS establish a SDA to account for sablefish discards by fixed gear vessels engaged in directed fishing for sablefish in the IFQ and CDQ programs.**

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

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

**Element 3: Monitoring and Enforcement**

**Maintain status quo monitoring and enforcement provisions.**

**Element 4: Review**

**The Council expects to receive information on discard amounts in the NMFS annual Inseason Management Report and anticipates that the next scheduled IFQ Program Review will incorporate a more comprehensive review of this change to discard requirements.**

**Element 5: Release Requirements**

**The Council recommends careful release requirements for sablefish that are captured and discarded in the fixed gear IFQ and CDQ fisheries. These requirements include releasing sablefish immediately and with a minimum of injury and ensuring that observers have access to sablefish prior to discarding to collect necessary biological information. For hook-and-line gear, requirements would be similar to existing regulations for halibut. Careful release requirements also apply to vessels using pot gear.**

**The Council also recommends technical revisions to the BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMPs to clarify (and revise as necessary) use of “freezer longliner” language so the FMP language is in alignment with federal regulations.**

**The Council deems proposed regulations that clearly and directly flow from the provisions of this motion to be necessary and appropriate in accordance with section 303(c).”**

**The Council authorizes the Executive Director and the Chairman to review the draft proposed regulations when provided by NMFS to ensure that the proposed regulations to be submitted to the Secretary under section 303(c) are consistent with these instructions.”**