

## Council Motion

### D1 Small Sablefish Release

June 10, 2023

## Motion

The Council adopts the following Purpose and Need and Alternatives for Initial Analysis.

### 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 fixed gear fisheries and current regulations require IFQ holders to retain all sablefish. Small sablefish have low commercial value under current market conditions. Although no 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 and allow small fish to contribute to the overall biomass.

### ALTERNATIVES

#### Alternative 1, No Action

Under the No Action alternative, all regulations and FMP language related to a prohibition on discarding sablefish would remain intact. Those regulations include 50 CFR 679.7(d)(4)(ii) and 50 CFR 679.7(f)(11). Additionally, discarding is prohibited in both the BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMPs in the fourth provision under General Provisions section 3.7.1.7, prohibiting discarding of sablefish.

#### Alternative 2, Allow Release of Sablefish in the IFQ Fishery

This alternative would eliminate (Option 1) or modify (Option 2) the regulatory restrictions that prohibit release of sablefish caught by sablefish IFQ vessels as well as the FMP provision prohibiting discarding.

**Option 1:** eliminate the regulatory restrictions that prohibit release of sablefish caught by sablefish IFQ vessels as well as the FMP provision prohibiting discarding.

**Option 2:** Require retention of sablefish 22 inches total body length or longer (provides for voluntary release of sablefish under 22 inches total body length)

#### Element 1: DMRs

Apply a DMR to released sablefish of:

1. 5%
2. 12%
3. 16%
4. 20%
5. 25%
6. *SSC recommends the DMR through the stock assessment process.*

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

### **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. The analysis should describe the potential implications of voluntary discards on the sablefish stock assessment, specifications process and catch accounting in the context of other uncertainties.

### **Element 3: Monitoring and Enforcement**

The analysis should describe potential monitoring and enforcement provisions that could improve estimates of voluntary and regulatory discards

### **Element 4: Review**

**Option 1:** The ability to release sablefish will be reviewed in a) 3 years b) 5 c) 7 years following implementation.

**Option 2:** The ability to release sablefish will sunset after 5 years following implementation.

The analysis should include a discussion of selectivity in sablefish pots and whether requiring escape mechanisms meet the objective of this action.