

# The Wheel Watch

*a newsletter of the*

Fishing Vessel Owners' Association  
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## ***Thank you for your support!***

Members and Friends,

This newsletter will inform you on activities at the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, Pacific Council, Halibut Commission, markets and COVID-19 related emergency funding availability.

### **\*\*NPFMC\*\***

The Council met during October electronically. The Council acted on Abundance Based Management (ABM) of incidentally caught halibut in the Bering Sea and put sablefish issues on the winter and spring agendas of 2021.

#### **ABM**

The Council got rid of all of the alternatives they have been discussing for the past two years and adopted the following three bycatch alternatives. The trawl bycatch limits will be a combined function of the NMFS Bering Sea Trawl survey and the IPHC setline survey. The high, medium and low marks are based on halibut density generated from the two surveys.

To give you some context, the current trawl PSC cap is 1745 mt. This action will only address the trawl bycatch from the Amend 80 fleet. The Amend 80 Trawlers have been averaging 17% below 1745 mt for the last 5 years, being as low as 42% below in 2016. Currently, status quo, both the trawl survey and IPHC survey are statistically “low.” To read alternative 2 you read across to low for the trawl survey and down to low for IPHC survey, this sets the PSC CAP at 1396 MT or 20% below current PSC CAP or about 3% below the 5 year average.

#### **Alternatives**

**Alternative 1:** No Action

**Alternative 2:** A 3X2 look-up table with PSC limits that range from current PSC limit to 20% below current limit. PSC limit is determined annually based on survey values from the most recent year available.

		<b>EBS shelf trawl survey index (t)</b>	
		<b>Low &lt; 150,000</b>	<b>High ≥ 150,000</b>
<b>IPHC setline survey index in Area 4ABCDE (WPUE)</b>	<b>High ≥ 11,000</b>	1,571 mt (10% below current)	1,745 mt (current limit)
	<b>Medium 8,000 – 10,999</b>	1,483 mt (15% below current)	1,571 mt (10% below current)
	<b>Low &lt; 8,000</b>	1,396 mt (20% below current)	1,483 mt (15% below current)

**Alternative 3:** A 4X2 look-up table with PSC limits that range from 15% above current PSC limit to 30% below current limit. PSC limit is determined annually based on survey values from the most recent year available.

		EBS shelf trawl survey index (t)	
		Low < 150,000	High ≥ 150,000
IPHC setline survey index in Area 4ABCDE (WPUE)	High ≥ 11,000	1,745 mt (current limit)	2,007 mt (15% above current)
	Medium 8,000 – 10,999	1,396 mt (20% below current)	1,745 mt (current limit)
	Low 6,000-7,999	1,309 mt (25% below current)	1,396 mt (20% below current)
	Very Low < 6,000	1,222 mt (30% below current)	1,309 mt (25% below current)

**Alternative 4:** A 4X2 look-up table with PSC limits that range from current PSC limit to 45% below current limit. PSC limit is determined annually based on survey values from the most recent year available.

		EBS shelf trawl survey index (t)	
		Low < 150,000	High ≥ 150,000
IPHC setline survey index in Area 4ABCDE (WPUE)	High ≥ 11,000	1,396 mt (20% below current)	1,745 mt (current limit)
	Medium 8,000 – 10,999	1,222 mt (30% below current)	1,396 mt (20% below current)
	Low 6,000-7,999	1,047 mt (40% below current)	1,222 mt (30% below current)
	Very Low < 6,000	960 mt (45% below current)	1,047 mt (40% below current)

Options for Alternatives 2, 3 and 4:

**Option 1:** PSC limit is determined using a 3-year rolling average of survey index values instead of the most recent survey value.

**Option 2:** PSC limit varies no more than (suboptions: 10% or 15%) per year.

**Option 3:** Establish an annual limit of (suboptions: 80% or 90%) of the PSC limit generated by the look-up table. In 3 of 7 years, the A80 sector may exceed the annual limit up to the PSC limit generated by the look-up table. If the A80 sector has exceeded the annual limit in 3 of the past 7 years, then (suboptions: 80% or 90%) of the PSC limit generated by the look-up table is a hard cap for that year.

**Option 4:** (mutually exclusive with Options 2 and 3) PSC unused in one year may roll to the following year to increase the PSC limit generated by the lookup table up to 20%. Any PSC savings in excess of 20% would stay in the water.

Some of the weaknesses of these alternatives are that the PSC CAP can be exceeded 3 out of 7 years and the 7 years do not start until this amendment becomes law. Additionally, the role overs would compromise any option by actually increasing the PSC CAP chosen. The new alternatives come back to the Council in April 2021.

### **Sablefish**

NMFS recorded an 81% increase in the use of pots during 2020. They had such a big increase they ran out of pot tags. I expect 50% to 65% of the sablefish to have been landed with pots for 2020.

The Council kept the release of small sablefish on the agenda for February 2021 for initial review and final action at the April meeting. This action would make it legal for pot and longline vessels to release small sablefish. The Council will have their IFQ Committee meet, chaired by Cora Campbell in March 2021. Some issues that could be presented at the IFQ committee could include recommended changes to the pot sablefish fishery. The Council now has the 3 year pot sablefish review on the April 2021 agenda. Comments and direction from the IFQ committee in March regarding changes for pot operations will be important for directing the Council in April.

### **IFQ access opportunities**

An expanded paper on this will be presented at the April meeting. One option previously discussed was to give a portion of your quota shares (QS) to a pool that would be used by new young fishermen. As quota shares go up a portion of your QS could be taken for this project.

### **Problem developing**

The large new-year classes of sablefish have resulted in unprecedented bycatch by the pollock fleet in the BSAI. They are allowed 750 MT of retention. However, the scientists and Council last year combined all the regulatory areas and now permit all the trawl bycatch to come out of the BSAI. It appears the Council took this action so the Pollock fleet could operate with no risk of being shut down. This year, as of October, they are 460% over their allotment. They have a bycatch waste for 2020 at 8,723,720 pounds and counting. National standard 1 requires NMFS/NOAA to take action to curtail such overages, but nothing has occurred. The Council had announced that some action maybe recommended at the December meeting. The picture below is of a trawler after sorting dockside taking sablefish out to be dumped, likely taken as bycatch in the Pollock fishery.



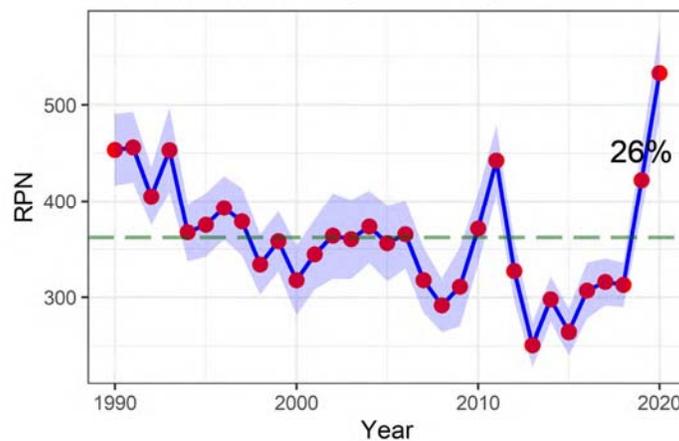
**BSAI  
sablefish  
trawl bycatch  
waste for  
2020 is at  
8,723,720  
lbs. and  
counting...**

**Sablefish survey 2020**

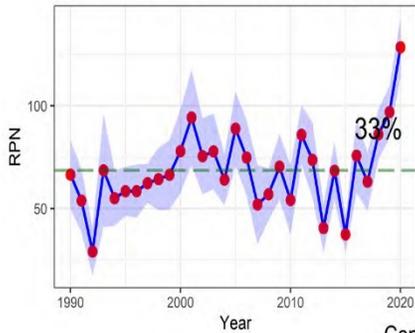
The following graphics I took out of this year's preliminary report on the 2020 sablefish survey. I interpret these graphs as showing a slow, but steady migration of sablefish from the west to the east, which is their normal migration behavior. The Bering Sea is full of sablefish, and apparently western gulf has shown a 50% increase over the last 4 years. Central Gulf has two years of increase, but one really big increase in 2020 and the Eastern GOA showing now one year above the average line.

The plan team will announce their recommended harvest amount in late November. They will likely do so by a Zoom meeting. We will keep you informed when this occurs.

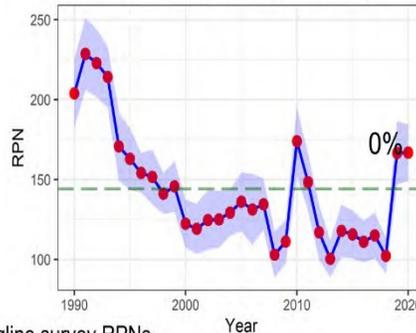
GOA Sablefish longline survey RPNs



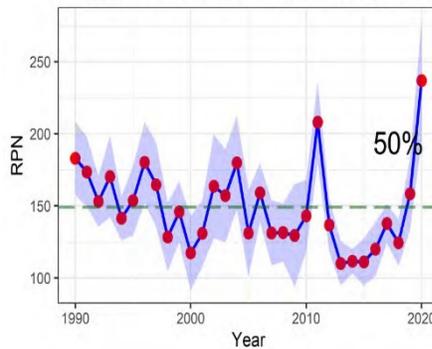
Western GOA Sablefish longline survey RPNs



Eastern GOA Sablefish longline survey RPNs



Central GOA Sablefish longline survey RPNs



Chris Lundford, one of the Alaska sablefish scientists, provided the following growth information for sablefish. (1 kilogram = 2.2 pounds)

Age	Fork length (cm)		Fork length (inches)		Weight (kg)		Weight (lb)		Fraction mature	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2	48.1	46.8	18.9	18.4	1	0.9	2.20462	1.984158	0.059	0.006
3	53.1	53.4	20.9	21.0	1.5	1.5	3.30693	3.30693	0.165	0.024
4	56.8	58.8	22.4	23.1	1.9	2.1	4.188778	4.629702	0.343	0.077
5	59.5	63	23.4	24.8	2.2	2.6	4.850164	5.732012	0.543	0.198
6	61.6	66.4	24.3	26.1	2.5	3.1	5.51155	6.834322	0.704	0.394
7	63.2	69.2	24.9	27.2	2.7	3.5	5.952474	7.71617	0.811	0.604
8	64.3	71.4	25.3	28.1	2.8	3.9	6.172936	8.598018	0.876	0.765
9	65.2	73.1	25.7	28.8	2.9	4.2	6.393398	9.259404	0.915	0.865
10	65.8	74.5	25.9	29.3	3	4.4	6.61386	9.700328	0.939	0.921
11	66.3	75.7	26.1	29.8	3	4.6	6.61386	10.14125	0.954	0.952
12	66.7	76.6	26.3	30.2	3.1	4.8	6.834322	10.58218	0.964	0.969
13	67	77.3	26.4	30.4	3.1	4.9	6.834322	10.80264	0.971	0.979
14	67.2	77.9	26.5	30.7	3.1	5.1	6.834322	11.24356	0.976	0.986

**\*\*PMFC\*\***

The PFMC met in September over a Zoom meeting. The big issues were moving options restricting gear switching (GS) forward to the November meeting. They may or may not add options at the November meeting. I believe the Council has invested so much time to this issue they will ultimately approve some form of restrictions. The least restrictive option is the state of Washington's proposal that would limit the amount of sablefish gear switching from January to August and then allow unrestricted gear usage. A couple of processors want a very significant curtailment on GS and claim their trawlers will use the sablefish to subsidize the landing of dover sole. Only a couple processors benefit from this. Trawlers lease out 2/3 of the fish that are gear switched. This issue will be on the November agenda for additional, but not final action.

The Council at the request of FVOA supported an emergency action to extend the tiered sablefish fishery until December 31<sup>st</sup>. Additionally, they increased the halibut bycatch in that fishery from 200 lbs. halibut/1000 lbs. of sable to 250 lbs. halibut/1000 lbs. sable. This will go until November 15<sup>th</sup> or until the halibut allocation is harvested. I got late word the emergency action was approved and will be effective October 27, 2020.

**Correction of 2021 and 2022 Allowable Catch limit (ACC) for sablefish.**

Year	Area	Incorrect ACLs	Correct ACLs	Difference
2021	N of 36 N. lat.	6,479 mt	6,892 mt	+413 mt
2022	N of 26 N. lat	6,172 mt	6,566 mt	+394 mt
2021	S of 36 N lat.	2,312 mt	1,899 mt	-413 mt
2022	S of 36 N lat.	2,203 mt	1,809 mt	-394 mt

## \*\*Markets\*\*

### Halibut

#### Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Allocations and Landings

Area	Species	Vessel Landings	Total Catch Pounds	Allocation Pounds	---- TAC ----  Remaining Pounds	Percent Landed
2C	halibut	1,125	2,954,425	3,410,000	455,575	87
3A	halibut	1,241	6,310,634	7,050,000	739,366	90
3B	halibut	223	2,110,190	2,410,000	299,810	88
4A	halibut	149	1,099,149	1,410,000	310,851	78
4B	halibut	45	666,213	880,000	213,787	76
4C/4D	halibut	109	908,070	919,200	11,130	99
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,892</b>	<b>14,048,681</b>	<b>16,079,200</b>	<b>2,030,519</b>	<b>87</b>

Halibut has been surprisingly resilient at the retail level. Prices in Seattle at major grocery stores have seen prices at \$14.99, which has helped move a lot of fresh fish. Halibut delivered to Kodiak west to Dutch Harbor has seen ex-vessel prices at close to \$3.75/pound, priced for the frozen market. Prices received for October for landings at Bellingham Cold Storage have ranged 5.05 to 5.35 for 10-20's; 5.30-5.50 for 20-40's and 5.50-5.75 for 40+. We expect 95% of halibut quotas to be delivered during this year of the pandemic. The closure of major restaurants has depressed prices for this year. The IPHC surveys during the summer saw the following average prices in 2B \$5.90; 2C \$4.57; 3A \$4.38; 3B \$4.36 (in U.S. dollars).

### Sablefish

#### Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Allocations and Landings

Area	Species	Vessel Landings	Total Catch Pounds	Allocation Pounds	---- TAC ----  Remaining Pounds	Percent Landed
AI	sablefish	40	600,475	2,696,226	2,095,751	22
BS	sablefish	54	840,464	1,640,222	799,758	51
CG	sablefish	519	6,624,193	11,366,918	4,742,725	58
SE	sablefish	672	5,785,509	8,075,450	2,289,941	72
WG	sablefish	105	2,203,985	3,425,948	1,221,963	64
WY	sablefish	277	3,286,293	4,503,998	1,217,705	73
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,667</b>	<b>19,340,919</b>	<b>31,708,762</b>	<b>12,367,843</b>	<b>61</b>

Total number of vessel offloads containing only halibut IFQ: 2,837

Total number of vessel offloads containing only sablefish IFQ: 1,612

Total number of vessel offloads containing both IFQ species: 728

Prices have been significantly depressed due to the pandemic and restaurants shut down in Japan and the U.S. Also, the tariff action affected the China exports. China has been about 10% of the market and Japan is about 65% of the market for sablefish. Late news suggests that the smaller sizes are moving, but larger sizes that might be destined to the restaurant trade are showing weak demand. Prices paid recently to FVOA boats in Bellingham were: under 2 lbs \$0.75; 2-3 lbs \$1.75; 3-4 lbs \$2.45; 4-5 lbs \$2.95; 5-7 lbs \$3.80; and above 7 lbs \$6.00. We expect 65 to 67% of the

sablefish harvest limits to be landed. The Pacific Council harvest limit will increase their harvest limits for 2020 about 6%. The NPFMC may increase Alaska limits by as much as 30%.

The following are sablefish prices, based on round weight from the Pacific Council area of management.

Table 4

Year	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Apr-Oct
2017	\$3.35	\$3.04	\$3.52	\$4.01	\$3.90	\$3.83	\$3.74	\$3.63
2018	\$2.00	\$2.08	\$2.87	\$2.91	\$3.00	\$3.00	\$3.00	\$2.77
2019	\$1.81	\$2.02	\$2.18	\$2.42	\$2.41	\$2.41	\$2.23	\$2.28
2020	\$1.43	\$1.22	\$1.45	\$1.52	\$1.60	\$1.51		\$1.48*

\*2020 average calculated through mid-September.

### **\*\*Second Watch\*\***

The House Committee on Natural Resources Majority introduced a bill called “The Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act.” This legislation would designate 30% of federal Exclusive Economic Zone waters closed to commercial fishing. It is designed to protect habitat and address climate change.

#### **Russians in U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone**

I talked to an ex-employee of the State Department regarding the Russian military action near Zhemchug Canyon in the Bering Sea. He said other countries have a right to do military exercises up to 12 miles from our coast. They are obligated to provide notice to mariners. The area can be closed, but only temporarily and in a reasonable area. The U.S Coast Guard in Alaska was never informed until the fishing fleet informed them of the recent Russian incursion. These encounters are called FONOPS, Freedom of Navigation Operations. The U.S. does this in S.E. Asia and the South China Sea.

### **\*\*NOAA/NMFS\*\***

All regional Council meetings are now done through telecommunication media. NOAA cancelled 55 fishing surveys. This included 5 trawl surveys in the GOA and BSAI and lower west coast. NOAA is trying to use unmanned wind and solar powered surface vessels and underwater ocean gliders to collect fishery and ocean condition data. The solar surface vessels can give a resource population prediction for whiting and pollock but not for flounders.

### **\*\*CARES Act\*\***

The State of Alaska has published a DRAFT spend plan proposed application. The State of Washington DRAFT should be available soon. The State of Oregon came out with theirs several weeks ago. Oregon’s spend plan was based on if one had purchased an Oregon fish permit, whereas Alaska’s is based on Alaskan residency.

**\*\*USDA\*\***

Our office has been helping members fill out the USDA application for the Seafood Trade Relief Program. The relief funds are \$0.10 per pound for damage done by the tariff action that affected sablefish. If you have questions on this, contact our office or visit [www.farmers.gov/seafood](http://www.farmers.gov/seafood)

**\*\*Calendar of Events\*\***

<b>Nov. 18-19, 2020*</b>	IPHC Interim Meeting
<b>Nov. 12-15, 2020*</b>	NPFMC Plan Team Meeting
<b>Nov. 11, 2020 (office closed Nov. 13 in observance)</b>	Veteran's Day
<b>Nov. 9-10 / 12-13 / 16-20, 2020*</b>	Pacific Council Meeting
<b>Nov. 26-27, 2020 (office closed)</b>	Thanksgiving Holiday
<b>Dec. 4 / 7-11, 2020*</b>	North Pacific Council Meeting
<b>Jan. 25-29, 2020*</b>	IPHC Annual Meeting
<b>Feb. 1-8, 2021*</b>	NPFMC meeting
<b>Mar. 3-10, 2021*</b>	Pacific Council Meeting
	<b>*All meetings to held virtually until further notice</b>



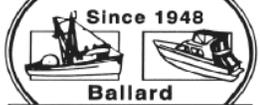
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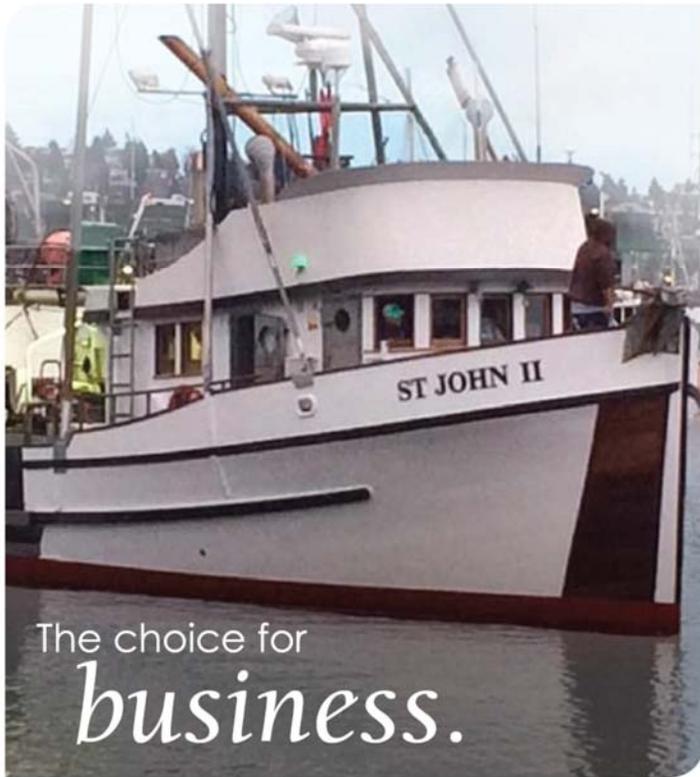
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**Above are the crew of the F/V Seymour using the new “slinky pot.” They have had success with it and are pleased not to be feeding the whales. High marks for those who have switched over to this new gear.**