

The Wheel Watch

a newsletter of the

Fishing Vessel Owners' Association

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Dear Members,

This newsletter will update you on recent IPHC halibut information, NPFMC regulations and stock status of sablefish, Pacific Council actions for the 2026 season and a market review.

North Pacific Council

The Council took action in May to allow for the release of small sablefish. Due to the 42-day government shut down, I am told NMFS will not have this resolution in place for 2026.

Sablefish Harvest Limits

Due to the 42-day government closure, the NPFMC will set harvest limits based on their 2024 estimates for 2026. The scientists did not have time to complete the sablefish or any other stock assessment off Alaska, despite surveys being completed. The 2024 estimates assume some natural mortality and only average year class strength so there is a slight decline for 2026. The preliminary information from the sablefish longline survey would have resulted in a 4% increase in the GOA. Below will be the new sablefish harvest limits for 2026.

Whale Adjusted Catch Tables by Region

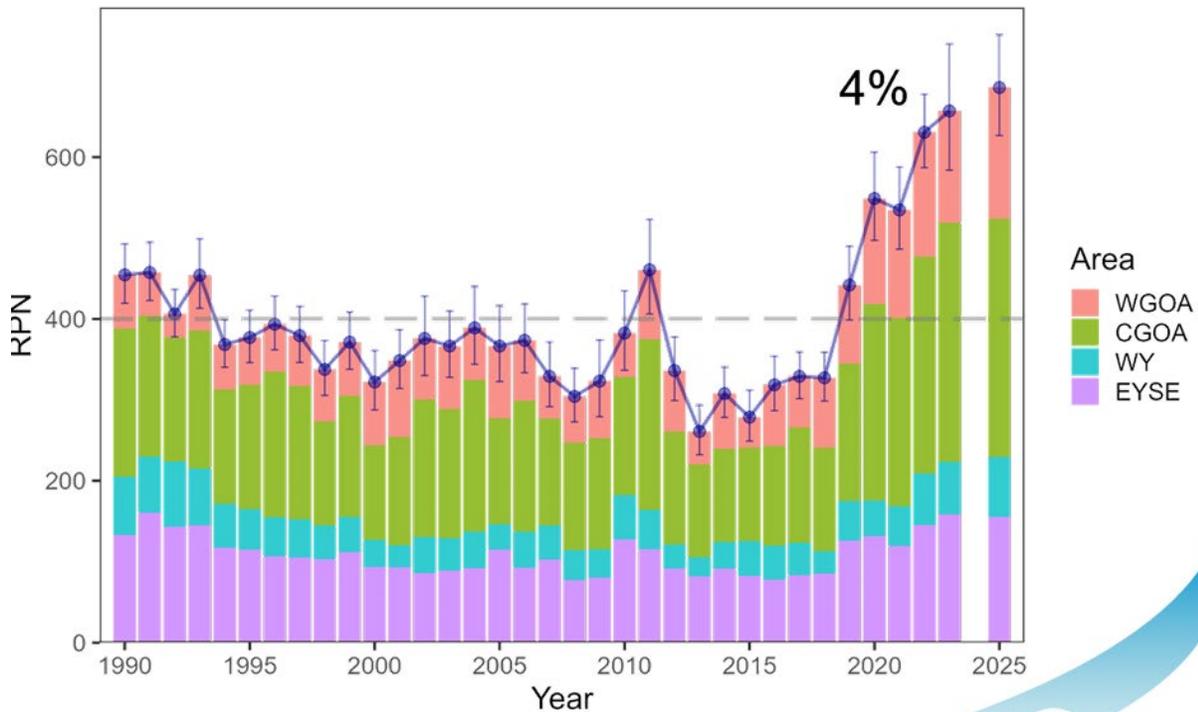
Year	2024				2025		2026	
	OFL _w	ABC _w	TAC	Catch*	OFL _w	ABC _w **	OFL _w	ABC _w **
BS	--	11,450	7,996	3,940	--	13,898	--	13,723
AI	--	13,100	8,440	1,266	--	12,175	--	12,022
GOA	--	22,596	22,596	13,406	--	24,038	--	23,737
WGOA	--	4,699	4,699	2,101	--	4,996	--	4,934
CGOA	--	9,651	9,651	5,655	--	10,257	--	10,128
**WY	--	2,926	2,926	2,172	--	3,125	--	3,086
** SEO	--	5,320	5,320	3,478	--	5,660	--	5,589
Total	55,084	47,146	39,032	18,612	58,532	50,111	57,797	49,482

*As of October 10, 2024 Alaska Fisheries Information Network. (www.akfin.org).

**After 95:5 trawl split shown above and after whale depredation methods described above.

The sablefish long line survey was financed this year. They fished 46 days, collected 2,869 sablefish otoliths, tagged 3,998 sablefish, recaptured 19 previously tagged sablefish. There was no survey in 2024. The number of sablefish showed a 4% increase in the GOA. Of note, the survey suggests 56% of the fish biomass is in the Aleutians and Bering Sea.

GOA Sablefish



2026 Observer Program

I testified on this agenda item in September, but got little help-- though a number of Council members expressed concern. I do not think they were aware of the proposed lack of coverage on the catcher boat trawl fleet in the GOA. Below are the observer coverage rates for 2026. The observer rate for GOA fixed gear catcher vessels will be 7.45%. This is similar to 2025 but down from 20% in 2024. Trawl catcher vessels GOA observer coverage will be 13.46%; previously it was 30% in 2024. The reason for those reductions is the Council required the pollock catcher vessels to have 100% EM due to salmon bycatch. The cost of this is about \$830,000. In order to finance this, NMFS has reduced cod and flounder trawl catcher vessel coverage and fixed gear coverage rates. These rates are horribly low and could affect your halibut MSC rating. Also, it leaves ineffective coverage on the hard on bottom trawl catcher boat fleet in the GOA. This is not acceptable. The pollock fleet does not need 100% EM and the associated cost. Fixed gear landing fees pay for 75% of the partial coverage fees. You are subsidizing the trawl catcher fleets EM program with cash and with lower observer coverage on the hard on bottom catcher boat fleet.

If you note, those who are signed up for EM coverage have a 100% greater probability of getting observed than a live observer option. Just an observation.

Selection rates presented here are **preliminary** based on estimated budget and costs. Final selection rates will be provided in the final ADP in December 2025.

Component	Pool	Stratum	Total No. Expected Trips	Selection Rate (%)	No. Trips Expected to be Monitored	Monitoring Location	Monitoring Purpose
Partial Coverage	At-sea Observer	Fixed-gear BSAI	346	19.19	66	At-sea	Discard & PSC estimation/ biological sampling
		Fixed-gear GOA	1,996	7.45	149		
		Trawl BSAI	30	45.21	14		
		Trawl GOA	289	13.46	39		
	EM Fixed-gear	Fixed-gear BSAI	84	38.47	32	At-sea	Discard & PSC estimation/ biological sampling
		Fixed-gear GOA	1,029	13.06	134		
	EM Trawl	EM Trawl GOA	794	100	794	At-sea	EM Compliance
				100	794	Dockside	PSC accounting
				33	265	Dockside	Biological sampling
	No-selection	No-selection	1,484	0	0		
Full Coverage	Full Observer	Full Observer Coverage	1,051	100	1,051	At-sea	Discard & PSC estimation/ biological sampling
	EM Trawl BSAI	EM Trawl BSAI	1,773	100	1,773	At-sea	EM Compliance
				100	1,773	Dockside	PSC accounting
			100	1,773	Dockside	Biological sampling	

2025 Observer Report

The expenditures for observer deployment in 2024 in the partial coverage category was \$3,809,373.00, resulting in an average cost per observer sea day in the partial coverage category of \$1,638.

Fee billing statements for 2024 were mailed to 102 processors and registered buyers for a total of \$3,496,312.00 in observer fees. The breakdown in contribution to the 2024 observer fees by species was **39% Pacific halibut, 31% sablefish**, 12% Pacific cod, 18% pollock, and 1% all other groundfish species.

Pacific Fishery Management Council

The Council amended the fixed gear sablefish program at their June meeting to allow your permits to be fished with any legal non-trawl gear. I talked to NMFS after the 42-day shut down. They believe it is possible to get this amendment finished as law by your April 1 opening, but it will be close. It will definitely become law in 2026, but whether they get it in by April 1 will be questionable.

<u>Future tier limits</u>	<u>2026</u>	<u>2027</u>	<u>2028</u>
Tier 1:	234,312	93,784	101,504
Tier 2:	106,506	42,629	46,138
Tier 3:	60,860	24,359	26,365

The Council did not change the ABC for sablefish for 2026 as they believe the fleets will not exceed 10,000 MT. In 2025, to date fixed gear has landed 10 million and the trawler landed 13,600,000 pounds, a significant amount of that is caught with fixed gear.

Color Coded Buoy Lines

With regard to the new rules for marking your pot and hook and line buoy line, you should contact Russ at Marine Service and Supply (206) 283-0064. There could be a wait time to get the new colored line. The first three years you can mark your gear yourself, perhaps with tape to match the colors required.

Last year the Council voted to require fixed gear sablefish operations for the 2026 season to have color coded buoy lines. From your buoy down at least 20 fathoms you must have color coded buoy line in 2026. Pot gear will be orange and blue, hook and line will be brown and blue. If there is white mixed in that is ok. Your buoys must be marked with your federal or state ID number. You will need a cow tag attached to the buoy indicating if you are pot or hook & line fishing. This can be attached with a zip tie.

If you fish North of Pt. Chehalis and want to retain halibut you will need to switch your buoy line if you were previously fishing with pots for sablefish. I know this will make things awkward. It was this or also require two sets of buoys to identify pots vs. hook & line buoys. The reason for these gear marking rules are due to a lawsuit from the Center for Biodiversity. The CBD is concerned about humpback whale entanglement and currently it is difficult to identify fishing gear entangled with whales. The Dungeness crab fisheries are also being required similar action. I talked to Russ at Marine Service and Supply and he indicated manufacturers are aware of this. The following I got from NOAA for further explanation. Let me know if you have trouble getting this marking gear.

Here is a refresh on the draft proposed tag rules/colors/marks and line color combinations. The rule is in review at HQ, and we do not know anything on a timeline for when to expect it to publish.

BUOY TAGS: NMFS is proposing that each tag must have a physical indentation and a contrasting color. NMFS proposes buoy tags on every surface buoy in a gear specific color (Brown=bottom longline, Orange=Pot gear), with a double-sided gear specific shape marked on it, "P" for pot and "L" for bottom longline, and that the vessel identification number be marked on the tag or on the buoy. NMFS is not proposing gear-specific tag shapes, or that vessel ID be etched on each tag. The thinking here is that retailers could stock the tags in bulk, or that industry members could buy in bulk, potentially reducing cost per tag to fishermen.

VERTICAL LINES: For the first 3 years after the initial effective date of these gear marking requirements, temporary marking methods may be used to satisfy the line marking requirements, and thereafter the top 20 fm (37 m) of vertical line must be line manufactured in the designated color schemes.

Color schemes (white may be visible, and that is okay): The proposed fishery common color is Blue and gear specific colors are proposed to be brown and orange. Bottom longline: Brown and Blue, Pot: Orange and Blue.

Sablefish 2025 Stock Assessment

The Pacific Council’s new 2025 stock assessment is out for sablefish. It drops the ABC from over 35,000 MT to about half of that for 2027-28. So, what happened? In 2023, the stock assessment review team did a partial re-assessment that blew up the ABC levels from about 9,000 tons to 35,000 tons. The Council policy is they do not do additional elements on a partial review assessment. Five new elements were added to the 2025 assessment, that were not included in the 2023 assessment which have resulted in a recommendation of an ABC of 13,965 MT in 2027 and an ABC of 15,103 MT in 2028. The ABC of 37,310 MT currently for 2026 was discussed at the September 2025 Council Meeting. The Council chose to leave the ABC where it is.

Table viii: Potential OFLs (mt), ABCs (mt), ACLs (mt), the buffer between the OFL and ABC, estimated spawning output, and stock status with adopted OFLs and ACLs and assumed catch for the first two years of the projection period (2025-2026). Projections were conducted assuming a category 1 time-varying sigma and a P* of 0.45.

Year	Adopted OFL (mt)	Adopted ACL (mt)	Assumed Catch (mt)	OFL (mt)	Buffer	ABC (mt)	ACL (mt)	Spawning output	Stock Status
2025	39,085	28,688	19,114	—	—	—	—	74,409	0.339
2026	37,310	27,238	19,082	—	—	—	—	80,877	0.369
2027	—	—	—	14,935	0.935	13,965	13,964	88,838	0.405
2028	—	—	—	16,240	0.930	15,103	15,103	98,185	0.448
2029	—	—	—	15,896	0.926	14,720	14,720	103,869	0.473
2030	—	—	—	15,287	0.922	14,094	14,094	107,603	0.490
2031	—	—	—	14,654	0.917	13,437	13,437	109,277	0.498
2032	—	—	—	13,970	0.913	12,755	12,755	107,167	0.489
2033	—	—	—	13,390	0.909	12,172	12,172	104,575	0.477
2034	—	—	—	12,997	0.904	11,749	11,749	103,162	0.470
2035	—	—	—	12,526	0.900	11,274	11,274	101,283	0.462
2036	—	—	—	12,186	0.896	10,918	10,918	99,821	0.455

Table viii depicts the current thinking of the stock assessment authors over the next 10 years. This assumes average recruitment.

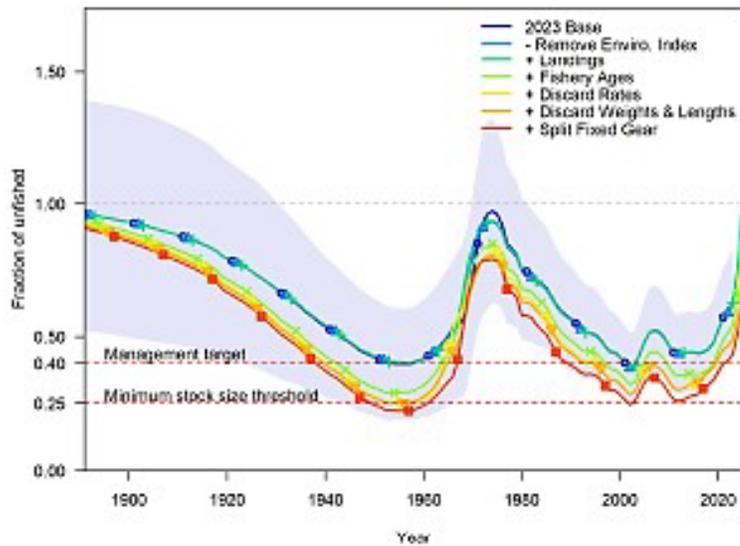


Figure 54: Comparison of estimated fraction unfished (i.e., stock status) when adding new data.

Table iii: Estimated recent trend in recruitment (1,000s) and recruitment deviations and the 95 percent confidence intervals.

Year	Recruitment (1,000s)	Lower Interval (1,000s)	Upper Interval (1,000s)	Recruitment Deviations	Lower Interval	Upper Interval
2015	2,507	1,327	4,736	-0.911	-1.557	-0.264
2016	68,575	55,918	84,096	2.376	2.183	2.569
2017	2,855	1,353	6,020	-0.811	-1.575	-0.048
2018	9,106	6,610	12,544	0.294	-0.017	0.605
2019	22,505	17,267	29,332	1.155	0.900	1.409
2020	80,372	64,260	100,523	2.382	2.169	2.595
2021	59,662	46,157	77,119	2.030	1.780	2.280
2022	4,612	2,158	9,855	-0.556	-1.338	0.226
2023	93,874	63,700	138,343	2.434	2.046	2.823
2024	35,534	7,603	166,077	0.507	-1.296	2.310

The sablefish resource is in excellent condition on the lower coast. In hindsight, it would have been better to have included the five elements to the stock assessment in 2023 than increasing the ABC by over 30%.

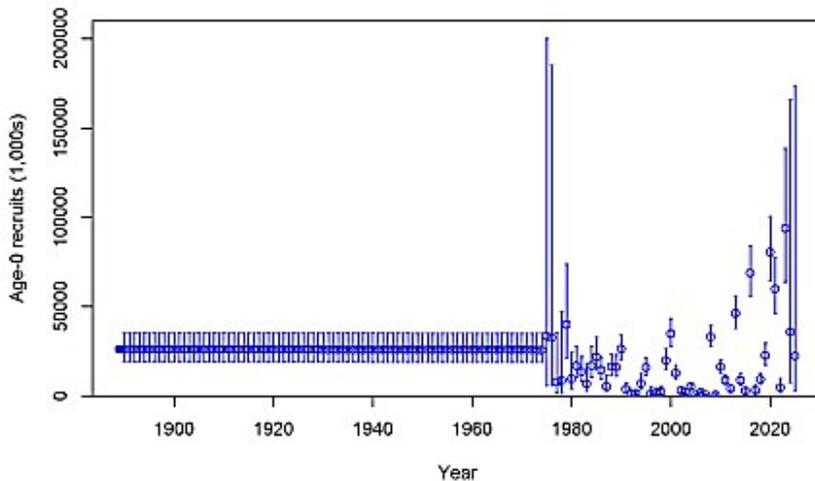
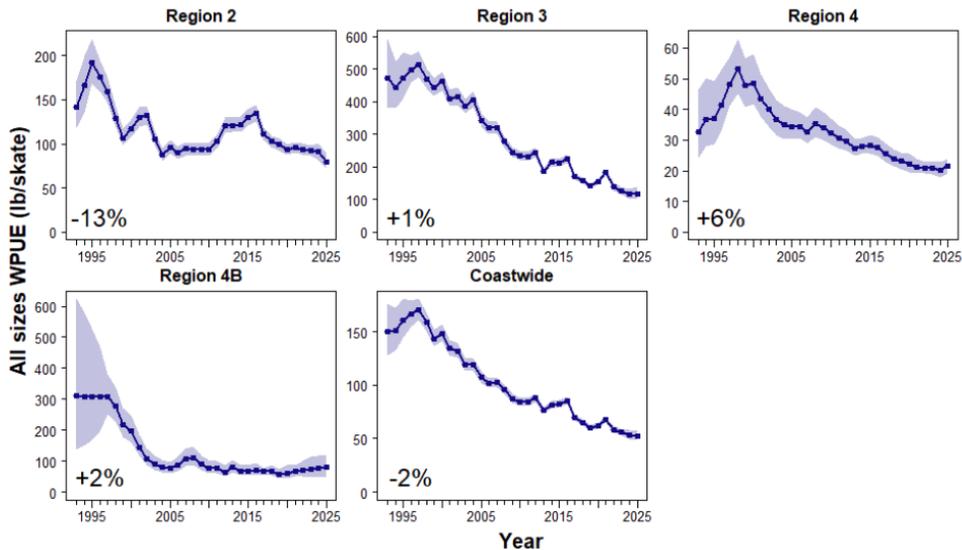


Figure iv: Estimated time series of age-0 recruits for the base model.

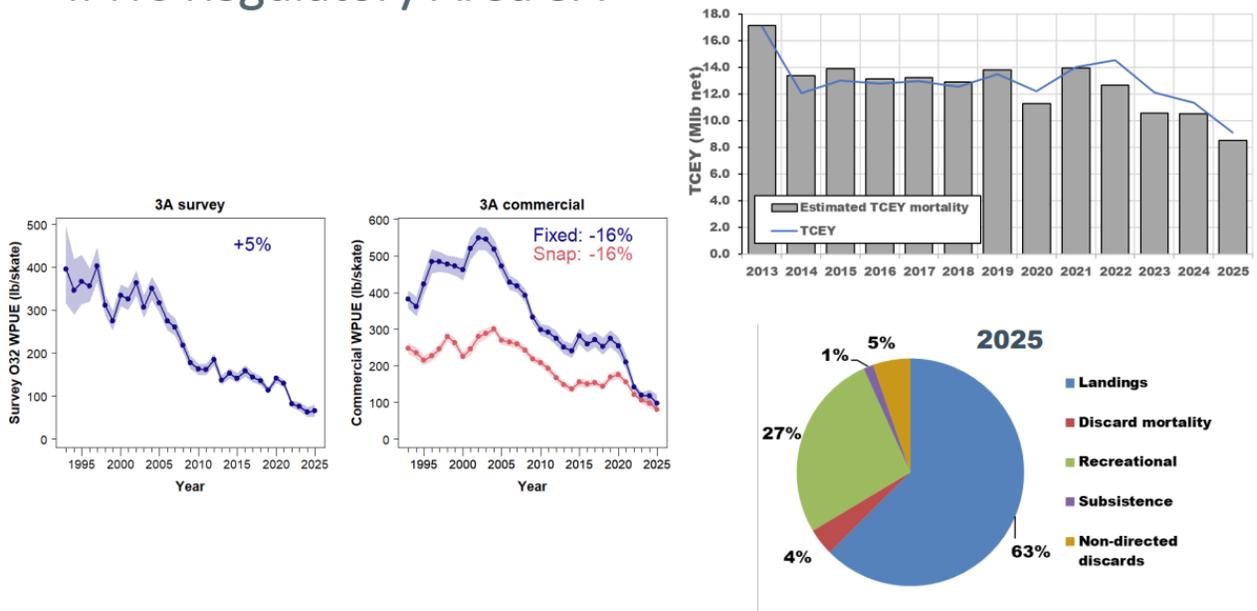
Halibut Commission

Below is the data from the abbreviated survey in 2025. Due to costs, the Commission did not survey all areas in the GOA. Luckily, the price improved and the survey this year broke even. Additionally, the U.S. State Department has provided an additional \$510,000 for survey work in 2026. Canada is attempting to provide additional funding as well.

Regional survey trends (all sizes)

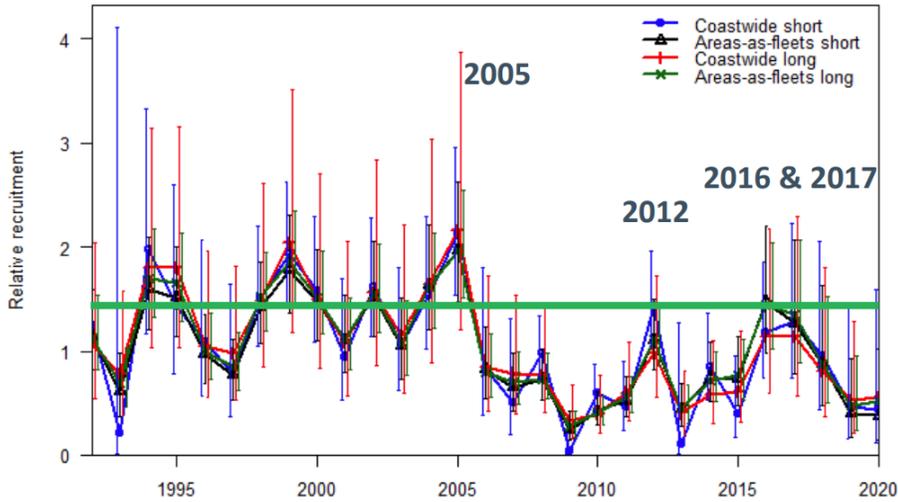


IPHC Regulatory Area 3A

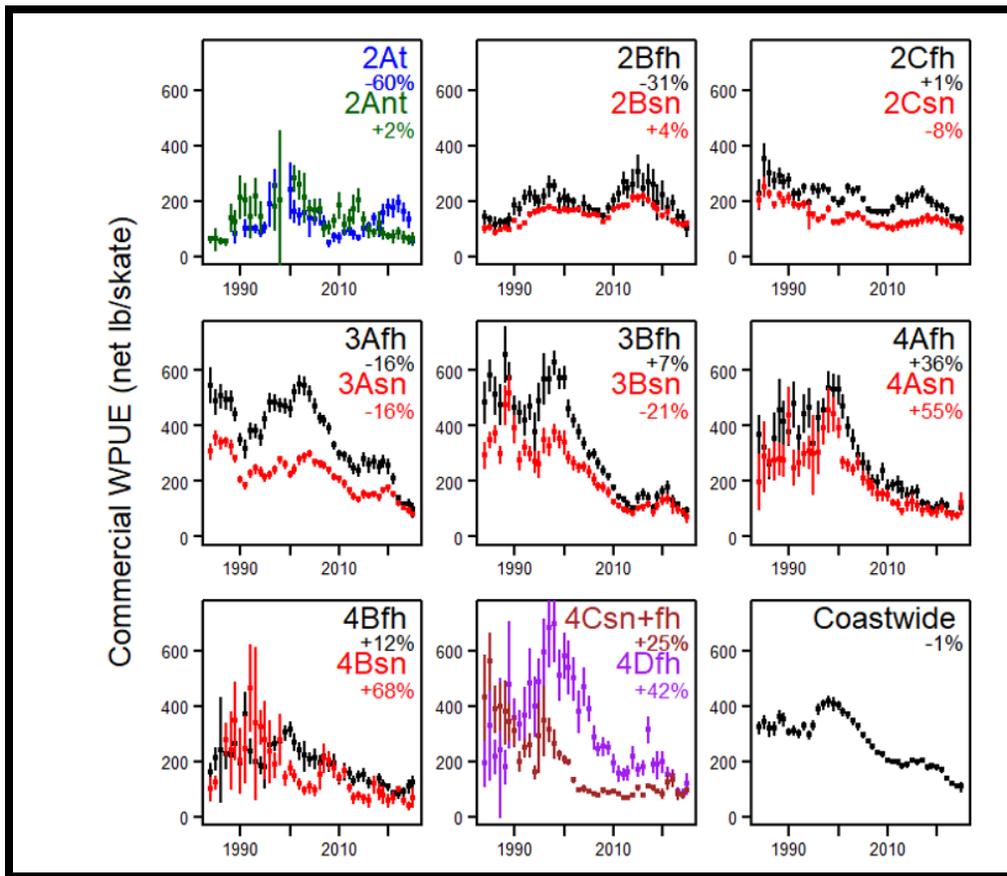


This chart shows the limited survey work was up 5% in 3A with commercial WPUE down 16%.

Recent relative recruitment estimates



This shows the halibut year class strengths overtime. Even though the 2016 and 2017 year classes are positive, they are not as strong as year classes before 2005. The good news is we do have noticeable two-year classes from 2016 and 2017.



Above are the WPUE from the commercial fleet.

Markets

Halibut

NOAA Fisheries

PO Box 21668

Juneau, AK 99802-1668

Prepared: 12/04/2025

Restricted Access Management

800-304-4846

Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Allocations and Landings

Area	Species	Vessel Landings	Total Catch Pounds	---- TAC ---- Allocation Pounds	Remaining Pounds	Percent Landed
2C	halibut	976	2,608,463	3,070,000	461,537	85
3A	halibut	1,423	5,357,422	5,890,000	532,578	91
3B	halibut	290	2,155,366	2,470,000	314,634	87
4A	halibut	101	664,753	1,000,000	335,247	66
4B	halibut	***	***	720,000	***	22
4C/4D	halibut	39	258,127	900,000	641,873	29
	Total	2,840	11,218,383	14,050,000	2,831,617	

Halibut catch rates remain low for the commercial fleet. However, prices were noticeably higher in Alaskan ports. Homer and Seward saw prices between 8 to 9 dollars a pound. Bellingham end of the year prices broke \$10 for 40 ups and over 60 pounds. Retail prices in Seattle were \$30 per pound. A major East Coast halibut buyer informed us that the Canadian maritime provinces will likely harvest 14 million pounds this winter. Their prices have been \$10 per pound in Boston for the last two years. Inventory is said to be tight already. Of concern, the Bering Sea districts were only able to produce 29% of 4CDE and only 22% of 4B. The situation is not likely to change for 2026. However, IPHC does note evidence of 2016 & 2017 year classes. Their strength in numbers is too early to estimate.

Sablefish

Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Allocations and Landings

Area	Species	Vessel Landings	Total Catch Pounds	---- TAC ----		Percent Landed
				Allocation Pounds	Remaining Pounds	
AI	sablefish	12	177,753	10,502,714	10,324,961	
BS	sablefish	58	1,991,444	7,491,231	5,499,787	2
CG	sablefish	548	14,013,909	17,184,857	3,170,948	27
SE	sablefish	653	11,187,845	12,478,036	1,290,191	82
WG	sablefish	182	6,688,540	8,370,866	1,682,326	90
WY	sablefish	226	4,440,023	5,002,237	562,214	80
Total		1,679	38,499,514	61,029,941	22,530,427	89
						63

Total number of vessel offloads containing only halibut IFQ: 2,804
 Total number of vessel offloads containing only sablefish IFQ: 1,665
 Total number of vessel offloads containing both IFQ species: 442

Last year, the Alaskan IFQ fleet landed 36 million round pounds. This year it will be closer to 39 million round pounds. In addition to that, 5.7 million pounds of Bering Sea and Aleutian trawl quota was landed and another 5.7 million trawl pounds from the GOA. WA/OR/CA landed about 10 million pounds of fixed gear fish and about 13.6 million pounds of trawl fish, over 50% of this was caught with fixed gear. Prices improved for 2025 but dropped in the last two months. Total landings appear to be about +78 million pounds including 4 million from Canada. I have not heard any major buyers complaining of inventory overload. This is positive news for 2026.

November prices for H and G iced

Kodiak: 1-2 lbs. = \$0.50 / 2-3 lbs. = \$1.55 / 3-4 lbs. = \$2.40
 4-5 lbs. = \$2.75 / 5-7 lbs. = \$3.75 / 7 & ups = \$6.75

Newport, OR: 1-2 lbs. = \$0.50 / 2-3 lbs. = \$1.20 / 3-4 lbs. = \$1.65
 4-5 lbs. = \$2.50 / 5-7 lbs. = \$3.20 / 7 & ups = \$6.50

August prices

East Central Gulf: 1-2 lbs. = \$1.00 / 2-3 lbs. = \$1.80 / 3-4 lbs. = \$2.35
 4-5 lbs. = \$2.75 / 5-7 lbs. = \$3.90 / 7 & ups = \$7.00

Newport, OR: 1-2 lbs. = \$1.10 / 2-3 lbs. = \$1.85 / 3-4 lbs. = \$2.35
 4-5 lbs. = \$2.85 / 5-7 lbs. = \$3.95 / 7 & ups = \$7.25

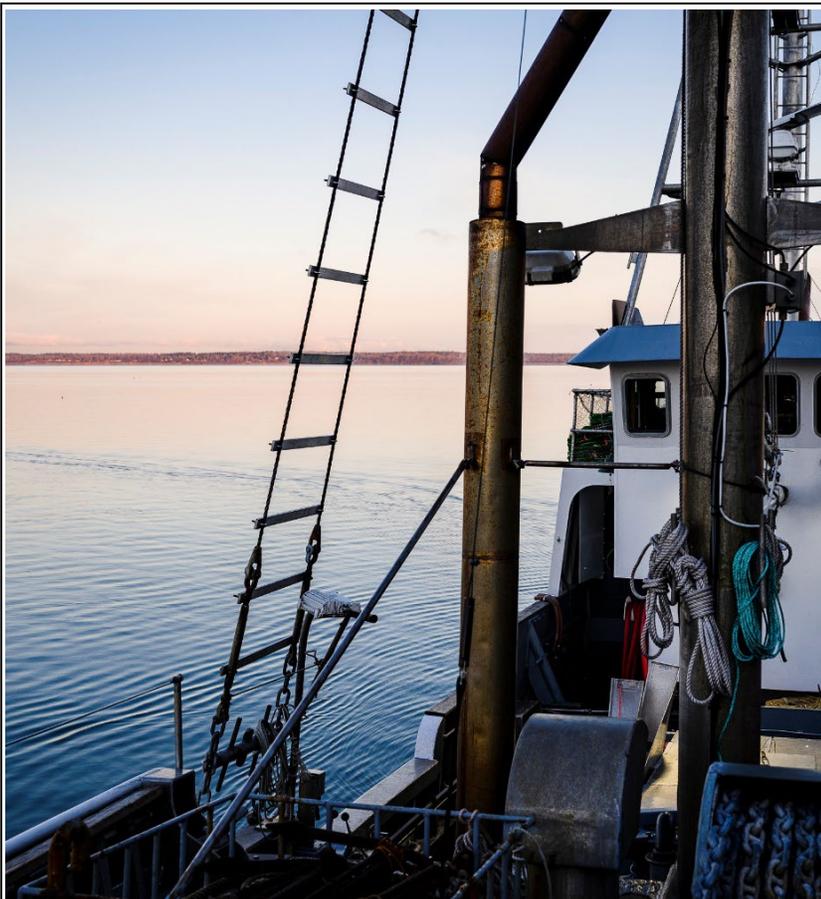
Second Watch

*“Anchorage, AK... The Commissioning of the **USS Ted Stevens (DDG 128)** in 2026 marks a historic milestone for Alaska and our nation. This Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer, named for Alaska's longest-serving U.S. Senator, carries forward a legacy defined by service, vision, and unwavering commitment to America's strength and unity.”*

Senator Stevens was a great friend to our industry.

“Salmon is Chile's largest food and agricultural export and the second largest total export sector after copper. In 2021, exports totaled 615 thousand metric tons worth \$4.8 billion. Production is growing rapidly; Chilean salmon production grew an average of 10.4 percent between 2016 and 2020 and totaled 1.1 million metric tons (MMT) in 2020.”

Congressman Begich from Alaska is promoting a no aquaculture Bill inside our 200-mile limit. The administration is promoting fish farms off California.



**Wishing you
calm seas, fair
winds, and a
bright holiday
season.**

