

The Wheel Watch

a newsletter of the

Fishing Vessel Owners' Association

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Dear Members,

This newsletter will bring you up to date through the April council meetings of the NPFMC and PFMC. We also touch on IPHC and market issues.

NPFMC

ABM lawsuit on amendment 123

FVOA is now part of the Halibut Defense Alliance (HDA), which has filed as an intervener on the side of the Secretary of Commerce. The Abundance Based Management (ABM) of halibut bycatch in the Bering Sea and Aleutians was an 8-year process by the NPFMC. It became effective this year and targets the Amendment 80 fleet that accounts for 52% of halibut bycatch in the BSAI. There are 12 groups that make up the alliance. The halibut bycatch in the BSAI for the Amendment 80 fleet was reduced 25% for the 2024 season. The state of Alaska has indicated they will provide an amicus brief supporting the new restrictions to the court.

The court time table is as follows:

- April 19, 2024: Motions regarding the sufficiency of the record are due. If a motion is filed, the case will be paused while the court resolves the dispute.
- April 26, 2024: Amendment 80's brief is due.
- May 27, 2024: DOJ and Halibut Defense Alliance briefs are due.
- June 10, 2024: Amendment 80's reply brief is due.
- August or September (?): Possible hearing on motions?
- November or December (?): Possible decision?

There is a GoFundMe link for this litigation: <https://gofund/9312fbbc>

If you would prefer to donate through FVOA, you can mail a check to the office and we will contribute the funds directly on your behalf.

Area 4 Vessel CAPS

The Council will look at an initial review for permanent exemptions to the vessel CAP relative Area 4. There is an exemption currently that goes through 2027. The current alternatives would set a separate area for CAP's such as a sub-CAP of 138,640 pounds for Area 4. The coastwide CAP would still be in play, which is 86,480 this year. One of the options works as follows. If you were at a halibut CAP and all or some was in Areas 3 and 2, you would have to catch all of your Gulf halibut, then go into the Bering Sea and you could catch the difference of 138,640 lbs. – 86,480 lbs. (or an additional 52,160 lbs). However, if you left some of your Gulf quota uncaught midseason and went into the Bering Sea and caught fish, that would count against your 86,480 lbs. CAP and potentially freeze you out of going back in the Gulf to catch your uncaught halibut. The current option forces you to fish from east to west if you want to take advantage of this Area 4 exemption. Our efforts at the April Council will be to make this work like the current exemption is working.

Current 2024 Vessel CAPS

Vessel IFQ Caps			
	Vessel Use Cap %	Annual IFQ TAC	Vessel Use Cap
Halibut	1% OF 2C HALIBUT IFQ TAC	3,500,000 net pounds	35,000 net pounds
	.5% OF ALL HALIBUT IFQ TAC	17,296,000 net pounds	86,480 net pounds
Sablefish	1% OF SE SABLEFISH IFQ TAC	11,728,472 round pounds	117,285 round pounds
	1% OF ALL SABLEFISH IFQ TAC	60,794,049 round pounds	607,940 round pounds

The New Report to the fleet is available—here are some interesting tables and graphics.

Table 2-1 Total Halibut IFQ Landings and Participation 2019-2023

Area	Total Harvest	TAC	%Harvested	Vessels	Permits
2023	15,125,658	17,805,947	84.9%	690	1791
2022	17,573,383	20,297,912	86.6%	732	1891
2021	17,253,108	18,569,500	92.9%	729	1725
2020	15,003,309	16,079,152	93.3%	746	1751
2019	16,481,748	17,709,979	93.1%	806	2092

Source: NMFS Restricted Access Management (RAM) division sourced through AKFIN

Table 2-2 Total Sablefish IFQ Landings and Participation 2019-2023

Area	Total Harvest	TAC	%Harvested	Vessels	Permits
2023	37,436,394	62,040,419	60.3%	275	644
2022	42,108,671	56,401,864	74.7%	273	685
2021	32,715,915	43,444,034	75.3%	271	625
2020	22,736,966	31,707,405	71.7%	266	599
2019	21,550,802	25,967,982	83.0%	280	730

Source: NMFS Restricted Access Management (RAM) division sourced through AKFIN

Table 2-3 Total Halibut Hired Skipper Activity (HS) 2019-2023

	Landings	Landings by HS	% HS	HS Delivering	HS with QS
2023	14,697,704	3,632,406	24.7%	144	95
2022	17,054,052	4,505,656	26.4%	151	100
2021	16,743,437	4,380,905	26.2%	149	102
2020	14,548,488	4,014,817	27.6%	162	117
2019	15,969,513	4,643,240	29.1%	178	109

Source: NMFS Restricted Access Management (RAM) division sourced through AKFIN

Table 3-1 Year over Year Change in Halibut and Sablefish Initial Issues QS

Year over Year	Change in Halibut Initial Issuee QS	Change in Sablefish Initial Issuee QS
2022 to 2023	-2,210,677	-1,624,117
2021 to 2022	-7,131,799	-8,083,662
2020 to 2021	-6,495,788	-2,617,644
2019 to 2020	-4,971,565	-7,945,554
2018 to 2019	-5,827,545	-6,666,510
2017 to 2018	-2,308,230	-2,341,060
2016 to 2017	-3,678,562	-6,120,594
2015 to 2016	-4,631,348	-2,840,551
2014 to 2015	-3,497,095	-2,350,921

Source: NMFS Restricted Access Management (RAM) division sourced through AKFIN

Table 2-4 Total Sablefish IFQ by Hired Skipper (HS) 2018-2022

	Landings	Landings by HS	% HS	HS Delivering	HS with QS
2023	29,023,231	8,997,234	31.0%	89	52
2022	33,334,712	11,350,330	34.0%	94	55
2021	26,349,396	9,146,559	34.7%	101	69
2020	18,296,041	6,866,576	37.5%	99	62
2019	17,592,651	6,414,921	36.5%	104	53

Source: NMFS Restricted Access Management (RAM) division sourced through AKFIN

Below is the performance of the charter boat halibut allocations.

Charter Halibut CSP Long-Term Performance: Weighted Comparison of Charter Allocation vs. Actual Harvest								
Area 2C					Area 3A			
Year	Allocation	Charter Harvest	Difference	Pct.	Allocation	Charter Harvest	Difference	Pct.
2014	0.83	0.78	-0.05	-6.0%	1.78	2.03	0.25	14.0%
2015	0.81	0.77	-0.04	-4.9%	1.89	2.07	0.18	9.5%
2016	0.84	0.79	-0.05	-6.0%	1.81	2.00	0.19	10.5%
2017	0.92	0.90	-0.02	-2.2%	1.89	2.08	0.19	10.1%
2018	0.81	0.66	-0.15	-18.5%	1.79	1.87	0.08	4.5%
2019	0.82	0.66	-0.16	-19.5%	1.89	2.04	0.15	7.7%
2020	0.78	0.46	-0.32	-41.0%	1.71	1.55	-0.16	-9.4%
2021	0.81	1.13	0.32	39.5%	1.95	2.44	0.49	25.1%
2022	0.82	0.81	-0.01	-1.2%	2.11	1.73	-0.38	-18.0%
2023	0.80	0.81	0.01	1.3%	1.89	1.76	-0.13	-6.9%
Total	8.24	7.77	-0.47	-5.7%	18.71	19.57	0.86	4.6%

Source: ADFG final charter and sport halibut catch estimates presented to NPFMC

Sablefish Survey 2024

Due to the price drop of sablefish in Alaska it is likely that the sablefish survey will not be done in 2024. This survey, like the IPHC surveys, have been funded by the catch of the fish being surveyed.

NOAA

NOAA pulled a bottom trawl study in the Northern Bering Sea after an outcry from Alaska native leaders. It was referred to as the NETS project. It was to look at the effects of commercial bottom trawling on the seafloor and the animals that live there. The native leaders, a group known as the Association of Village Council Presidents, which thought the project potentially devastating to the bottom dwelling species. The study would have been helpful and the political pressure to call the survey off is shortsighted. We need to have some visual impacts of damage to the habitat.

PFMC

Logbooks for this year 2024

Paper logbooks are no longer acceptable for fishing off of Washington, Oregon, and California for vessels homeported in Washington and California. Fixed gear vessels out of Oregon have one more year to use paper logbooks, fixed gear vessels out of Washington or California must use the electronic logbook.

As of January 1, 2024, paper logbook forms are no longer accepted and all non-trawl vessels fishing for groundfish in federal waters must enter logbook data for any trips taken in 2024 through the electronic logbook application. The relevant regulations are here: [50 CFR 660.13\(a\)\(3\)](#).

The authorized representative of the vessel must complete and submit entries in the non-trawl electronic logbook application within 24 hours of the completion of offload. Information on how to access the electronic logbook and where to get assistance are provided here: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/bulletin/transitioning-groundfish-federal-non-trawl-logbook-full-electronic-usage>.

The Non-Trawl Logbook electronic application can be downloaded at [this website](#).

The Compliance Guide for the Federal Groundfish Non-Trawl Logbook can be found under the "Non-Trawl" heading on the [West Coast Groundfish Compliance Guide](#) website. A user guide for the electronic logbook application is also available on the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission's [website](#).

Gear Marking

Since 1982, there have been five instances of whale entanglement with sablefish pot gear. In 50% of the entanglements of all whales with fishing gear, the gear is not identifiable by fishery. The Center for Biological Diversity won a lawsuit that will require certain markings on your fixed gear,

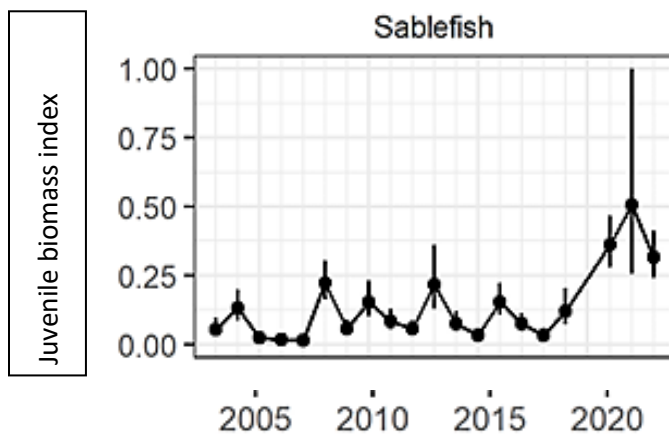
both pot and hook & line. This action will likely be finalized this June. The current alternative is as follows: all the buoys on the surface gear will have a tag, zip tied to the buoy. The tag will have your vessel USCG number or state number. The surface gear will be less than 10 fathoms long. The buoy line will be marked for 20 fathoms down. Markings are yet to be determined with a color code for pot gear and a different color for hook and line gear. This will likely be operational in the 2025 season.

Gear Switching

Potential restrictions on gear switching will be made at the April Council Meeting, April 4-11 in Seattle. The current action up for final action includes the following:

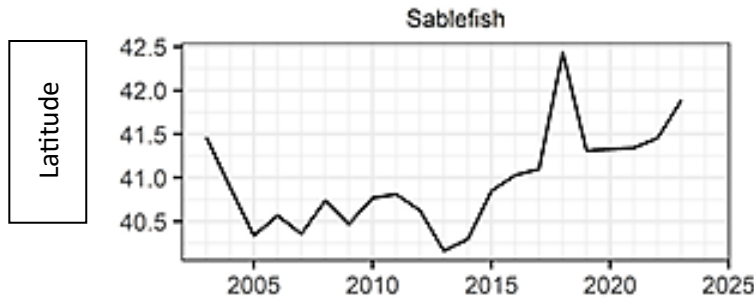
1. When the northern Allowable Catch Level (ACL) is less than 5000 MT – 10,000 MT (poundage to be determined). There will be no restrictions on gear switching.
2. When the ACL drops below a level yet to be determined, gear switching will be limited to 29% of the trawl sablefish allocation.
3. Certain legacy ownerships in a vessel that landed Northern sablefish QP with non-trawl gear totaling 30,000 lbs. / year in at least three years between January 1, 2011 and September 15, 2017 (the control date) and had some ownership interaction of northern sablefish quota shares (any amount). Folks meeting these rules will be issued any gear when the ACL is low enough to trigger restrictions. Otherwise QP will be issued 29% any gear, 71% trawl only.

FVOA is still supporting no action or status quo.



Above is the sablefish index of juvenile fish off Washington, Oregon, and California.

Center of gravity of biomass of sablefish 42 degrees latitude, which is about Port Orford, Oregon.



At the start of 2023, the proportion of the population in terms of biomass for fish 0-7 years old was 62%. In terms of number of fish, the proportion at the start of 2023 was 80% as 0-7 years old (NWSC).

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

Year	Recruitment (1,000s)	Lower Interval	Upper Interval	Recruitment Deviations	Lower Interval	Upper Interval
2013	37,796.8	21,711.8	65,798.2	1.700	1.500	1.900
2014	7,268.4	3,612.7	14,623.0	0.053	-0.441	0.547
2015	27,643.7	15,611.4	48,949.6	1.400	1.100	1.700
2016	66,059.4	37,936.7	115,029.6	2.300	2.000	2.500
2017	13,137.7	6,584.6	26,212.5	0.645	0.172	1.100
2018	3,955.7	1,547.0	10,114.4	-0.561	-1.393	0.272
2019	13,835.9	6,433.0	29,757.9	0.681	0.080	1.300
2020	154,839.0	82,091.7	292,052.8	3.100	2.700	3.400
2021	208,277.0	98,698.5	439,513.4	2.900	2.400	3.400
2022	9,122.3	1,396.4	59,593.2	-0.687	-2.975	1.600
2023	18,302.3	2,302.0	145,516.7	0.000	-2.744	2.700

These numbers of juvenile sablefish are year classes for off WA/OR/CA.

1.) Sablefish tier limits 2024

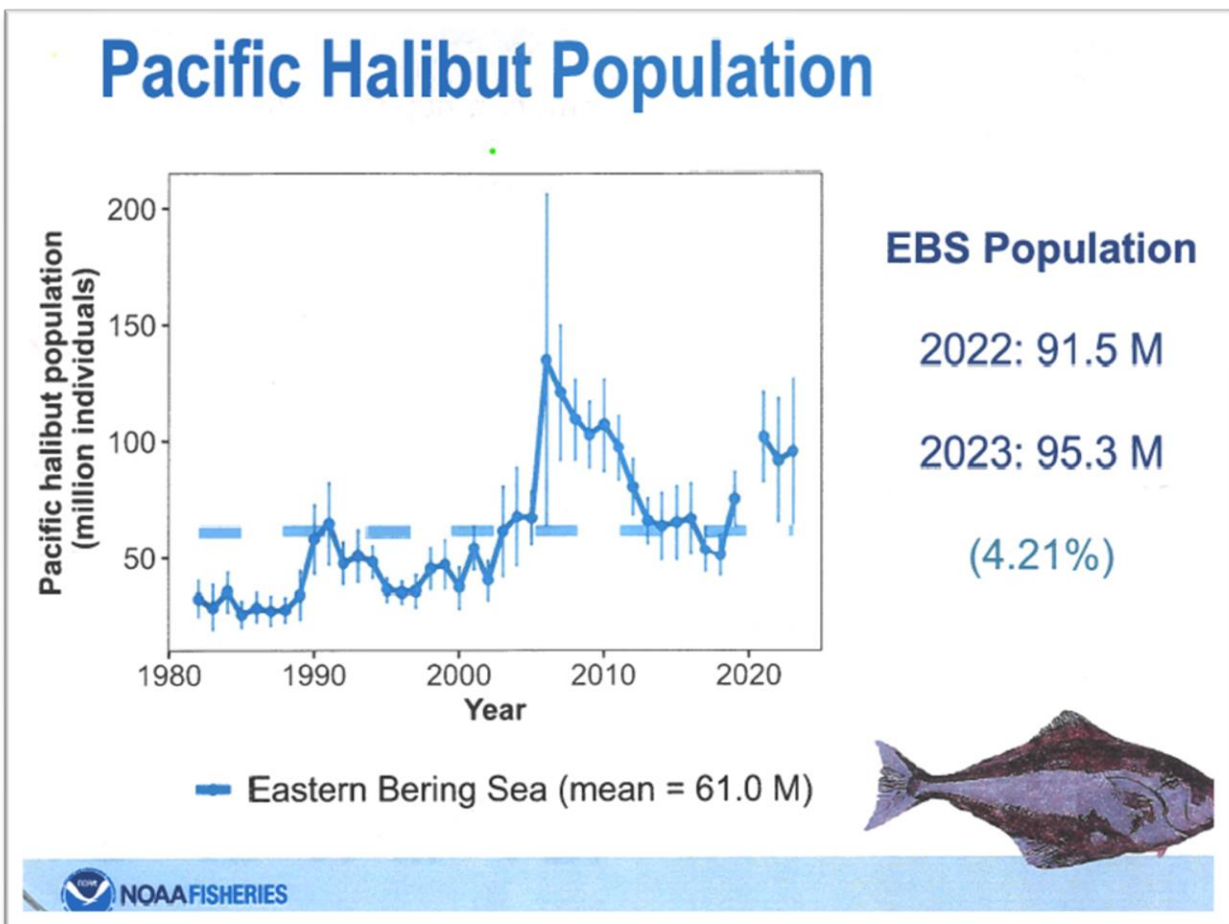
- Tier 1: 66,805 lbs.
- Tier 2: 30,366 lbs.
- Tier 3: 17,352 lbs.

2.) Halibut bycatch north of Chehalis will be 130 lbs. of halibut /1,000 dressed lbs. sablefish, this year.

IPHC

The Commissioners authorized surveys in Areas 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B and 4C-D-E. Due to the density of halibut being low, the ability to fund more surveys is not financially within reach. We have been told that the U.S. Congress may be providing additional funds to expand surveys in 2025, however supplemental funding was not available for 2024.

The NMFS trawl survey from 2021–2023 has shown perhaps evidence of a new year class, potentially the 2016 and 2018 year classes. Hopefully the ABM new trawl bycatch restrictions, will save some of these year classes.



Markets

Halibut

Early expectations for halibut were positive. Expectations were \$6 to \$7 per pound in Seward. However, major buyers such as OBI told FVOA they would not likely be open until May 15 and close September 15. Peter Pan operations appear shuttered by their bank. Trident, the backbone of shore-based processing, has plants for sale. As you can see below, there have been few halibut deliveries. Prices in Seward seem to be between 6.25 to 6.50. I had fresh halibut from Haggen's in Woodinville for \$30 / lb.

Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Allocations and Landings

Area	Species	Vessel Landings	Total Catch Pounds	Allocation Pounds	TAC		Percent Landed
					Remaining Pounds		
2C	halibut	64	259,472	3,500,000	3,240,528		7
3A	halibut	31	247,755	7,560,000	7,312,245		3
3B	halibut	***	***	2,980,000	***		***
4A	halibut	***	***	1,280,000	***		***
4B	halibut	***	***	872,000	***		***
4C/4D	halibut	***	***	1,104,000	***		***
Total		96	512,946	17,296,000	16,783,054		3

Sablefish

The following were the prices received in Yakutat to FVOA vessels at the start of the season in Alaska: 2-3's - \$1; 3-4's - \$1.5; 4-5's - \$2.00; 5-7's - \$4.00; 7 ups - \$7.00

AI	sablefish	***	***	11,164,094	***	***
BS	sablefish	***	***	7,050,311	***	***
CG	sablefish	8	79,209	17,021,717	16,942,508	0
SE	sablefish	43	871,030	11,728,472	10,857,442	7
WG	sablefish	***	***	8,287,091	***	***
WY	sablefish	7	302,518	5,542,364	5,239,846	5
Total		58	1,252,757	60,794,049	59,541,292	2

One of the factors affecting the markets has been the yen versus the dollar. Japan has intentionally manipulated their currency to stimulate their poor local economy. Japan has announced after many years of negative interest rates, they intend to increase their



interest rates to positive. The US federal reserve is supposed to reduce interest rates by .75 over the next year. Both of these actions will increase the value of the yen versus the dollar, but will likely have little effect until September, however these changes in interest rates could strengthen the yen by 15-20% by fall.

Second Watch

Petersburg Vessel Owners

Attorneys presented oral arguments in a long-running dispute over fishing rights on Alaska's only native reservation on Thursday. Metlakatla Indian community sued Gov. Mike Dunleavy and his administration in 2020, claiming the states fishing permit system infringes on rights guaranteed to the tribe by Congress.

Lawyers from the tribe, argue that Metlakatla fishermen should not be required to purchase limited-entry permits to fish in waters near Ketchikan and Prince of Wales Island. The tribe argues that the 1891 federal law that created Metlakatla's reservation implicitly guarantees tribal members the right to fish outside its boundaries.

The state disputes, arguing that allowing members to fish off-reservation without state permits, would hamper efforts to manage fisheries sustainably. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals sided with Metlakatla and revived the case last year after it was dismissed in 2021, sending it back to district court. The appeals court tasked the lower court with determining the scope of the tribes right to fish outside the reservation's boundaries. The Biden administration joined the case with a friend-of-the-court-brief, siding with Metlakatla.

-from Politico Magazine

China has 6,500 fishing vessels on the high seas. Much of the reprocessing of frozen Chinese fish is done with Uyghur labor in violation of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act passed in 2021. However, the US government is among the largest buyers of seafood purchasing 400 million pounds from China in 2022. Politico investigations found a portion of the spending goes toward importers that source fish from processing plants using Uyghur labor.

EPA

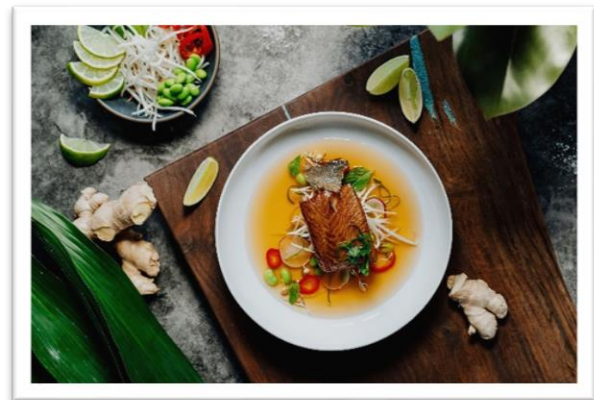
On January 30, 2023, the EPA issued a clean water determination effectively stopping Pebble Mine in the Bristol Bay area. Governor Dunleavy of Alaska attempted to reverse the decision but the Supreme Court dismissed the governor's lawsuit.

A friend has passed...

Many of you will remember the FV Nancy K, operated by Jake and Nancy Phillips of Sitka, Alaska. Jake passed in February 2024, he was 90 years old. He was there in the Council fight in 1984 to move the foreign fleets out of S.E. Alaska and the Gulf when targeting sablefish. He was one of the first to begin catching sablefish in federal waters. He also was there to remove trawling from S.E. Alaska. He will be missed, a true Alaska pioneer.

Sablefish marketing grant update

We've been putting the marketing grant funds to work in creating some beautiful media assets and the first batch from the food photoshoot is completed. It presents three unique sablefish recipes developed by the chef from Mischief Distillery in Seattle.



Coming up...

We filmed two short restaurant video vignettes in February, starring Northwest chefs working with sablefish -- these are in the final editing stages. In March, the production crew spent a day filming interviews with fishermen describing the industry's challenges and triumphs. All of these short films will be used in social media posts and on the sablefish information website that will begin development in April 2024. We have one more Seattle-based restaurant/chef filming scheduled for April with the James Beard Award winning chef Victor Steinbrueck from Local Tide. Stay tuned!



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