

The Wheel Watch

a newsletter of the

Fishing Vessel Owners' Association

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Dear Members and Supporters,

This June newsletter will bring you up on the June North Pacific and Pacific Council meetings, market updates, and a host of other issues.

NPFMC

Sitka Meeting

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting was in Sitka June 8 to June 11. I want to thank Paul Clampitt and Bernie Burkholder for accompanying me to the meeting. Their company and testimony were greatly appreciated.

Pending implementation of previously approved Council actions

The Council approved removing the vessel CAPS for Halibut IFQ caught in Area 4 (all areas of 4). The comment period ended June 12 and should be implemented late July or early August.

The Council passed the Abundance Based Management Action (ABM) to better control Halibut bycatch in the Bering Sea and Aleutians this past December 13, 2021. This action was scheduled for implementation this summer by July. Implementation has been set back due to a letter from the Amendment 80 trawl fleet objecting, as the Halibut Commission does not have a survey scheduled for 2022 in the Bering Sea.

While in attendance at the June meeting, it became evident that the Amendment 80 trawl fleet will sue against the Council's ABM proposed action. Below is the ABM action being considered.

Council Motion
C2 Halibut ABM
December 13, 2021

The Council recommends the following preferred alternative. PSC limit is determined annually based on the most recent survey values. In the case of mid-year implementation, the PSC limit should be set using the most recent survey index values and applied to the lookup table in the preferred alternative.

		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)	1,745 mt (current limit)
	Medium 8,000 – 10,999	1,396 mt (20% below current)	1,571 mt (10% below current)
	Low 6,000-7,999	1,309 mt (25% below current)	1,396 mt (20% below current)
	Very Low < 6,000	1,134 mt (35% below current)	1,134 mt (35% below current)

With this action the Amendment 80 bycatch level will be reduced 25% as both the NMFS trawl and IPHC surveys are recording low and low, respectively. FVOA has been invited to file an intervention on behalf of the U.S. government with other fixed gear groups. The U.S. government will defend the action.

Release of Small Sablefish

After three years of testimony, we may have developed a path forward on this debate. The Council will begin analysis of the following suggested actions on release of small sable fish. Option 2 is the preferred industry request.

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.*

Observers

The Council has scheduled one of its observer committees this fall to look at options other than the federal contract to fund the partial coverage observer program. The current cost with the federal contract is \$1492 per day. The cost per day, including debriefing and transportation, was \$400 per day for factory ships that pay on their own; \$600 a day for the Pacific Council Trawl Program which is pay their own, and for observers in the tiered sablefish program it is also \$600 a day; and the feds estimated their own cost with federal employees would be \$1100 per day. So, does this beg the question, why so much reluctance to dump the federal contract?

The proposed partial coverage rates for 2023 will be:

Trawl 23%

Hook & Line: 18%

Pot: 17%

If observer market rates could be achieved, there would be no need to increase observer fees and coverage rates could be increased on the trawl fleet. The total fees collected in 2022 were as follows for the following fisheries:

Halibut	Sablefish	Pacific Cod	Pollock	All species
1,809,472 (42%)	1,219,659 (28%)	693,941 (16%)	567,791 (13%)	4,313,661

IFQ Report to the Fleet, April 2023

The Council will begin a five-year review of the current IFQ fishery (halibut/sablefish). A committee has not yet begun to look at the possible changes. Below is some updated information on hired skippers.

Table 2.30 Total Halibut Hired Skipper Activity (HS) 2018-2022

	Landings	Landings by HS	% HS	HS Delivering	HS with QS
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
2018	15,379,833	4,687,774	30.5%	186	107

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

Table 2.31 Total Sablefish IFQ by Hired Skipper (HS) 2018-2022

	Landings	Landings by HS	% HS	HS Delivering	HS with QS
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
2018	16,999,047	6,300,483	37.1%	108	56

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

Figure 3.10 Halibut IFQ Held by Initial Issues

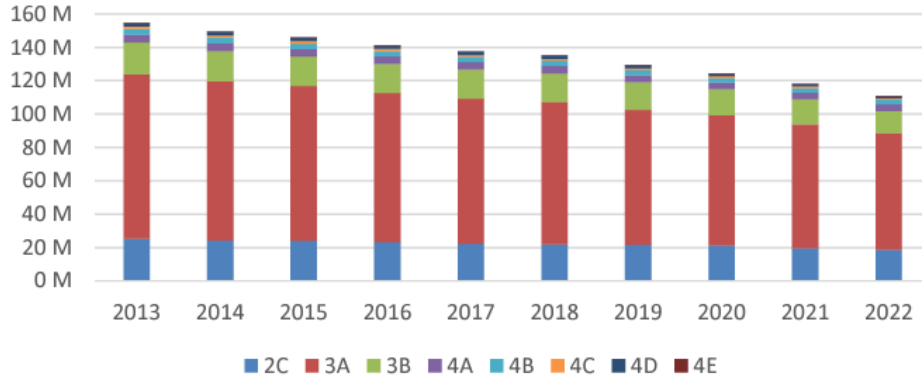
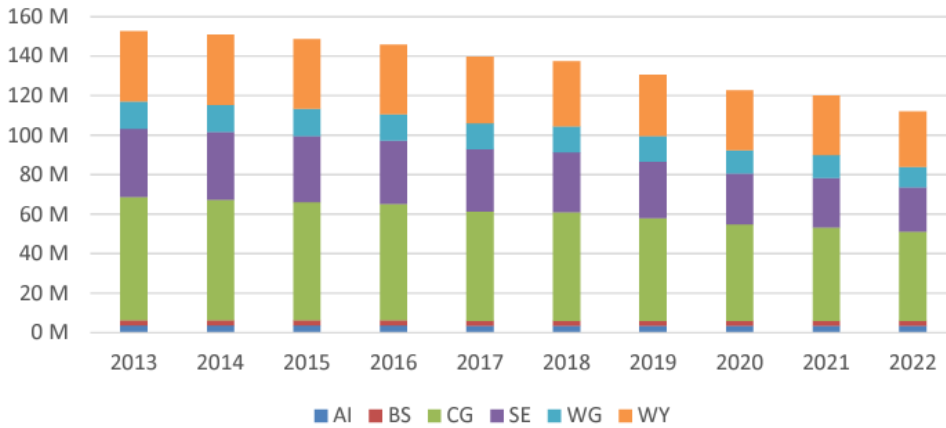


Table 3.11 Sablefish IFQ Held by Initial Issues



Markets

Halibut

Halibut prices have wobbled this season. Prices seemed to firm up during June. An FVOA vessel delivered into Bellingham from off the coast of Washington mid-June getting \$6.30/\$6.50 head on pieces. A delivery into Seward in June prices were \$6.25/\$6.50/\$6.75.

Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Allocations and Landings

Area	Species	Vessel Landings	Total Catch Pounds	Allocation Pounds	TAC	
					Remaining Pounds	Percent Landed
2C	halibut	481	1,710,861	3,410,000	1,699,139	50
3A	halibut	732	3,035,729	7,840,000	4,804,271	39
3B	halibut	106	900,434	3,090,000	2,189,566	29
4A	halibut	23	104,488	1,410,000	1,305,512	7
4B	halibut	8	127,069	976,000	848,931	13
4C/4D	halibut	***	***	1,080,000	***	***
Total		1,354	5,898,216	17,806,000	11,907,784	33

Sablefish

1/3 of the quota is landed. Prices are reflecting the reality of the collective increase in harvest limits over the last four years. Harvest limits in 2015 were 14,500 MT and this year it is 41,000 MT. Bellingham prices for sable fish off the coast of Washington mid-June were 1-2s: \$0.50 / 2-3s: \$1.40 / 3-4s: \$1.80 / 4-5s: \$2.70 / 5-7s: \$6.50 / 7 ups: \$7.70. Seward prices were very similar.

Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Allocations and Landings

Area	Species	Vessel Landings	Total Catch Pounds	Allocation Pounds	---- TAC ---- Remaining Pounds	Percent Landed
AI	sablefish	13	546,109	11,164,094	10,617,985	5
BS	sablefish	49	1,526,379	7,050,311	5,523,932	22
CG	sablefish	291	6,734,161	17,495,706	10,761,545	38
SE	sablefish	445	6,180,876	12,350,169	6,169,293	50
WG	sablefish	58	2,557,139	7,888,059	5,330,920	32
WY	sablefish	203	3,601,843	6,095,719	2,493,876	59
	Total	1,059	21,146,507	62,044,058	40,897,551	34

SK Grant

Eat on the Wild Side was awarded a 2023 Saltonstall-Kennedy marketing grant to help develop product awareness of black cod among U.S. restaurant customers. The project will partner sablefish harvesters and processors with restaurants. It includes chef recipe development, digital training for restaurant owners and servers on how best to inform customers about the fishery, and digital marketing assets to promote FVOA vessels as sustainably caught seafood producers. FVOA members will also be able to use this in marketing fish. EOWS is set to partner with some high-profile Seattle restaurant groups owned by local chefs Tom Douglas and Renee Erickson, and there have been some helpful conversations with the restaurant chain Bonefish Grill. More to come as the project develops.

Second Watch

AQUAA

US Senators Wicker (R – Mississippi) and Schatz (D - Hawaii) re-introduced the “Advancing the Quality and Understanding of American Aquaculture (AQUAA) Act to ease the way for corporations trying to construct industrial offshore aquaculture facilities. Lobbyists behind the AQUAA Act are Cargill, Sysco and Merck, the same groups that have locked up land-based field and agriculture.

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court is set to hear a challenge to NOAA’s requirement that vessels pay monitoring fees without congressional approval. Some New Jersey fisherman have challenged government attempts to force them to pay monitoring fees (May 1, 2023). Also, a three-panel set of judges from the Fifth U.S. Circuit in Louisiana threw out a rule that would require charter boats to be equipped with EM to report fish catches.

PFMC

Meetings

The Pacific Fishery Management Council met June 20th to June 27th in Vancouver, Washington. They discussed several possible amendments to the tiered sablefish program and limitations on gear switching.

Tiered Program

The following action regarding the tiered permit fishery was moved by the Council. Initial action on these changes could take place in September or November.

H.4 LEFG Follow-on and Fixed Gear Marking - Scoping

The following recommendations considers the recommendations of the GAP, GMT and EC, NMFS Reports and separates the actions into two packages

FIXED GEAR PACKAGE

Recommendation: Move these items forward in a separate regulatory package than the LEFG follow-on actions

Gear Marking

- Develop gear marking requirements holistically for all fixed gear sectors (Option 2), Federal limited entry -fixed gear, directed open access, and IFQ gear switchers.
- Analyze the following range of line marking requirements: 5, 20, 50 fm
- Consider prohibiting marks required by other fisheries (e.g., Dungeness crab).
- Analyze different types of line marking methods such as unique line, tape, paint, etc
- Consider a phased approach if unique sector specific line is required that could include interim gear marking (e.g., tape or paint) during the transition to sector specific line.

LEFG FOLLOW ON

Allow longline endorsed permits to use slinky pots

Move this measure forward and include in the ROA an alternative that removes the specific gear endorsements allowing vessels to use the most efficient type of fixed gear for the target species (i.e. single LEFG permit) and an alternative that the gear allowance is extended to all legal non-trawl gear. Consider the recommendation to define collapsible pots (e.g., slinky pots) separately from non-collapsible pots due to differences in how the escape panels are applied. Consider referencing the definition used in the Federal regulations off Alaska (50 CFR 679.2) to align requirements for biodegradable thread.

Allow cumulative non-sablefish limits by primary tier vessels

Remove this item from the LEFG follow on package and recommend that increased trip limits for all LEFG vessels are analyzed in the 2025-2026 harvest specifications cycle.

Fourth Sablefish Permit Stacking

Move this measure forward for analysis.

- Presume no changes to the 3-permit ownership limit and that the fourth permit would be held by a person complying with the owner-on-board provision.

Gear Switching

The Council has worked for six years on trying to reduce efforts on gear switching. The Council has endorsed two analyses: first for no action and second Alternative 2 which restricts gear switching.

Groundfish Management

Sablefish Gear Switching – Initial Preliminary Preferred Alternative

The Council adopted two initial preliminary preferred alternatives: No Action and Alternative 2 (gear-specific quota pounds [QP] distributed based on individuals' status as legacy/non-legacy participants). At its November meeting, the Council is scheduled to select a preliminary preferred alternative and, if Alternative 2 is selected, will need to make refinements in order to fully specify its provisions. Selection of a final preferred alternative is scheduled for the March 2024 Council meeting.

In addition to selecting Alternative 2 as one of its initial preliminary preferred alternatives, the Council eliminated two options from the alternative: QP Distribution Option 3 (which would have allocated any-gear QP only to legacy participants) and legacy Qualification Option 2 (which, in addition to ownership of quota shares and a permit with qualifying gear-switching history, would have required ownership of a vessel with gear-switching history).

FVOA has testified many times trying to preserve the gear switching provisions. There seems to be five Council member who support no action and maybe seven who think something should be done. I want to thank Paul Clampitt for his testimony at the meeting.

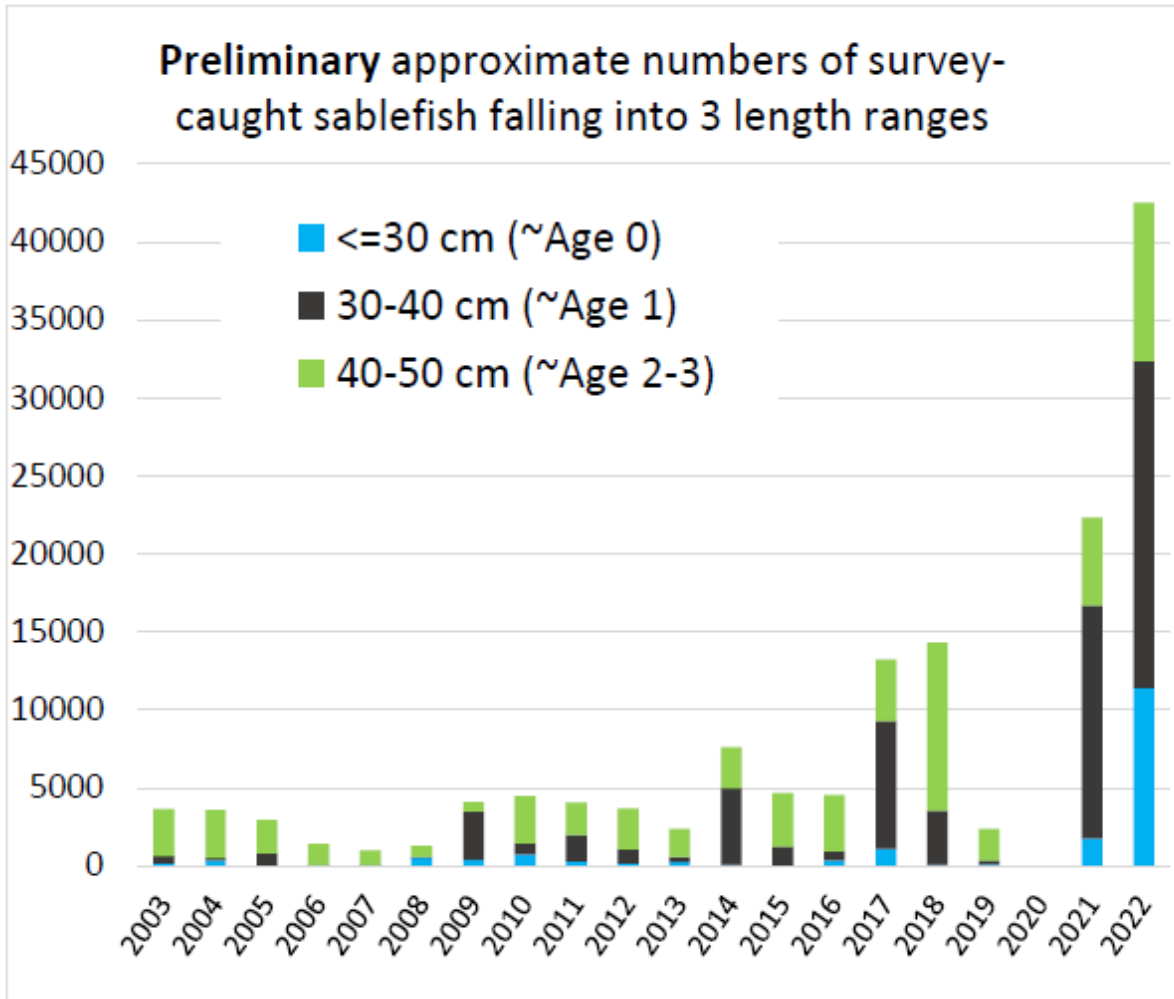
Sablefish Abundance off the Lower Coast

Below is a preliminary report on the abundance of sablefish from the NMFS shelf-slope trawl survey off WA/OR/CA. The 2014 year class, which was considered very large, as well as the 2017 and 2018 year classes seem to be completely outdone by the 2021 and 2022 year classes. This new information will impact the 2025 and 2026 harvest limits. The 2024 harvest levels will be similar to 2023. The Pacific Council sets harvest limits two years at a time.

Preliminary summary of small sablefish caught in the NWFSC shelf-slope survey

	Number of age-0 recruits, from 2021 assessment	Approx. numbers of survey-caught sablefish falling within length ranges			
		<=30 cm	30-40 cm	40-50 cm	<=50 cm
		~Age 0	~Age 1	~Age 2-3	
2003	2,277	164	491	2,996	3,652
2004*	7,244	367	164	3,028	3,559
2005	500	19	803	2,098	2,919
2006	2,107	6	49	1,353	1,408
2007	768	5	80	928	1,013
2008	41,726	512	51	725	1,288
2009	2,030	386	3,086	610	4,082
2010	16,187	748	717	3,016	4,481
2011	6,446	283	1,704	2,054	4,041
2012	2,759	155	884	2,630	3,669
2013*	34,308	263	321	1,771	2,355
2014	6,709	82	4,882	2,645	7,610
2015	18,011	34	1,197	3,438	4,669
2016	55,595	362	563	3,618	4,543
2017	10,689	1,064	8,232	3,915	13,211
2018	8,151	43	3,491	10,781	14,315
2019*	6,274	92	232	2,033	2,357
2020		No Survey, due to COVID			
2021	2021/largest	1,751	14,949	5,638	22,338
		1.6	1.8	0.5	1.6
2022	2022/largest	11,393	20,959	10,158	42,510
		10.7	2.5	0.9	3.0

*Only 2 vessels used in 2019 and 3 in both 2013 and 2004.



The F/V Vansee, picture courtesy of FVOA president Per Odegaard