

The Wheel Watch

a newsletter of the

Fishing Vessel Owners' Association

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Dear Members,

Here is your summer newsletter. We had a flurry of activity in April, June, and July from the NPFMC and PFMC. We got some updates on Washington DC issues and some interesting market movements for Pacific halibut and Sablefish.

NPFMC

The Council met in Anchorage in April and June. With regards to the release of small sablefish, the Council adopted the actions listed below. As you can see, for some reason freezer longline vessels are permitted to release fish and apparently always have. We will continue to lobby for this for the catcher vessel fleet. This has been an 8-year effort and it was felt by most industry people that this compromise was better than no allowance for catcher vessels to release small sablefish.

Alternative 2: Allow Release of Sablefish in the IFQ/CDQ Fisheries

This alternative would modify the regulatory restrictions that prohibit release of sablefish caught by sablefish IFQ and CDQ vessels as well as the FMP provision prohibiting discarding. The Council recommends NMFS use Inseason Management authority to prohibit discarding in the sablefish IFQ/CDQ fisheries when an area-wide sablefish discard allowance (SDA) is reached.

CVs: Require retention of sablefish 22 inches total body length or longer (provides for voluntary release of sablefish under 22 inches total body length) on catcher vessels fishing sablefish IFQ/CDQ.

CPs: Allow catcher processors fishing sablefish IFQ/CDQ to carefully release sablefish of any size.

This action should be enacted for the 2026 season. NMFS has indicated that due to government layoffs, they are down 30% in personnel. This may delay a number of activities at NOAA.

Future IFQ changes

The Council passed a motion to look into amending who is a bona-fide crewmen by allowing time at sea to include tendering fish. Additionally, the Council will consider changing the legal age to own IFQ's from 18 years old to 16 years old. This has been an issue as first-generation holders pass and leave their QS to children or grandchildren.

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.

Interesting note, those who have 100% coverage and hire directly from observer companies have a daily rate of \$405. The cost per day for the partial coverage fleet is a big problem. Coverage rates for fixed gear for 2025 are in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) are 6% and 15% for trawl. These are very low rates. Below are coverage rates for 2024 and 2025.

Table 1-1-- Sampling strata and selection pools in the partial coverage category from 2013 to the present. The partial coverage selection rates set through the Annual Deployment Plan are noted and the realized coverage rates evaluated in each Annual Report are noted in parentheses. PreIm = Pre-implementation, prior to a fully regulated program; CP = catcher/processor vessel; CV = catcher vessel; GOA= Gulf of Alaska; BSAI = Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands; H&L = hook-and-line gear; LOA = vessel length overall.

Year	Observer Trip Selection					Fixed-Gear EM trip selection pool EM required on randomly selected		Trawl EM	
	Trip-selection across all ports Observer coverage required on all randomly selected trips				Port-based Trip Selection*				
2025	Fixed-gear BSAI: 20%	Fixed-gear GOA: 6%	Trawl BSAI: 40%	Trawl GOA: 15%	n/a	Fixed-gear EM GOA: 11%	Fixed-gear EM BSAI: 48%	GOA and BSAI: 100% shoreside monitoring + 100% at-sea EM	
2024	Fixed-gear BSAI: 44% (48%)	Fixed-gear GOA: 13% (12%)	Trawl BSAI: 72% (80%)	Trawl GOA: 21% (22%)		Fixed-gear EM GOA: 24% (23%)	Fixed-gear EM BSAI: 74% (49%)		

New Washington Representative to NPFMC

We were informed Mr. Bill Tweit will be retiring as the Washington representative from Olympia to the NPFMC. He has served for 20 years on the Council. He will be replaced by Nathan Pamplin. Previous to working at WDFW, Nathan worked as a wildlife biologist for the San Carlos Apache Tribe in Arizona and marine mammal biologist for the Makah Tribe. We will be meeting with him in August.

PPMC

The tiered sablefish fishery was amended at the June Council meeting. The Council took action to allow those who have tiered permits to use any legal non-trawl groundfish gear with their permit. So, if you have a hook and line endorsed permit you can use pot gear or vertical longline. This should be law for the April 1st season in 2026. The action they took is as follows as well as new trip limits for the open access season.

The Council adopted the following as the final preferred alternative:

- Gear Endorsements: Alternative 3 with sub-option a. Create a single limited entry nontrawl endorsed permit. Vessels registered to a permit with this endorsement would be permitted to use any legal non-trawl groundfish gear, except entangling nets, to harvest their quota.
- Base Permit Designation: Alternative 1, Remove the base permit designation and associated regulations at [50 CFR 660.25\(b\)\(3\)\(iii\)\(C\)](#).

Fishery	Area	Recommended Trip Limit
LEFG	North of 36° N. Lat.	5,500 lbs./week not to exceed 11,000 lbs./2 months
	South of 36° N. Lat	3,000 lbs./week
OA	North of 36° N. Lat.	4,000 lbs./week not to exceed 8,000 lbs./2 months

	South of 36° N. Lat	2,500 lbs./week not to exceed 7,500 lbs./2 months
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- Removal of Start/End Time: Alternative 1, Remove the start and end times (i.e., hours of the day) in groundfish regulations for the dates on which the sablefish primary season opens (April 1) and closes (December 31).
- Cost Recovery: Alternative 1, sub-option a: Develop a cost recovery program for the limited entry fixed gear tier program in which the vessel owner or authorized representative pays the cost recovery fee.

The Council elected to take no action on permit price reporting and therefore no permit price information for limited entry fixed gear-endorsed permit will be collected. Additionally, the Council adopted the proposed FMP amendment as shown in [Agenda Item E.2.a, Supplemental Attachment 2, June 2025](#).

In-season Management-Final Action

The Council recommended trip limit increases for limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) and open access (OA) sablefish North and South of 36 degrees N. lat., as described in [Agenda Item E.3.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2](#) and shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Council recommended LEFG and OA sablefish trip limits for north and south of 36° N. lat.

Color Coded Buoy Lines

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 will be discussed at the September 2025 Council Meeting. The Council may bring it down to be in line with the 2025 stock assessment, but maybe not.

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

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

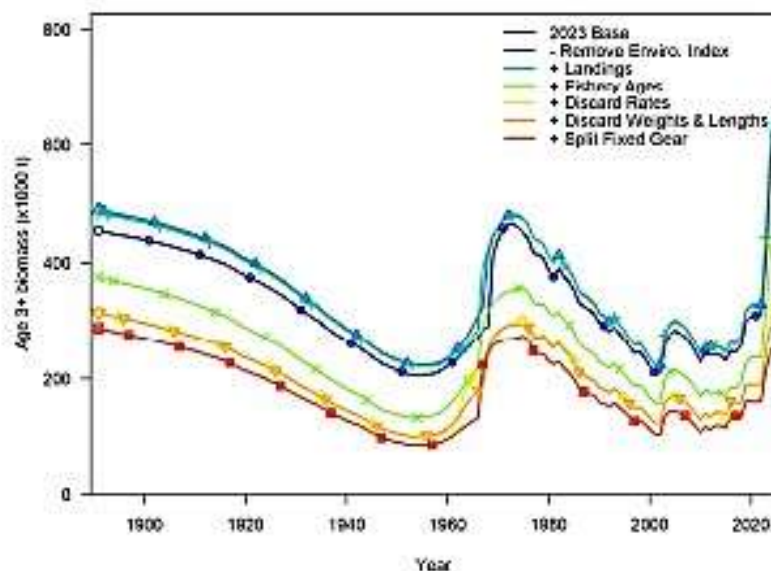


Figure 53: Comparison of estimated summary biomass for ages 3+ when adding new data.

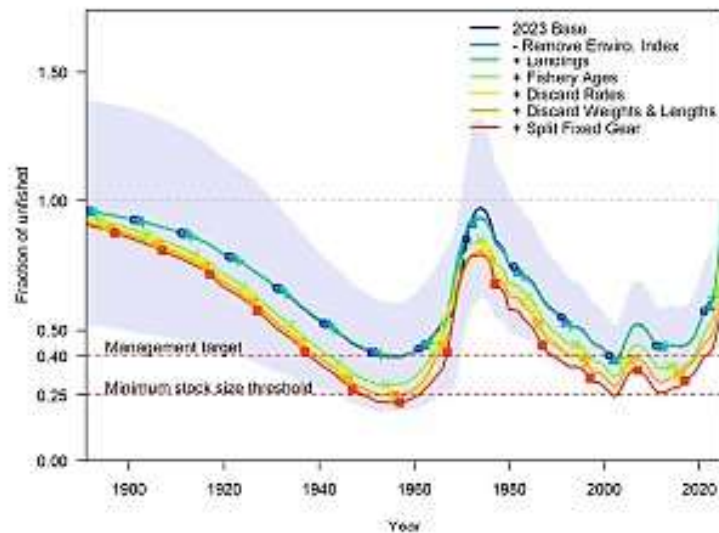


Figure 54: Comparison of estimated fraction unfished (i.e., stock status) when adding new data.

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%

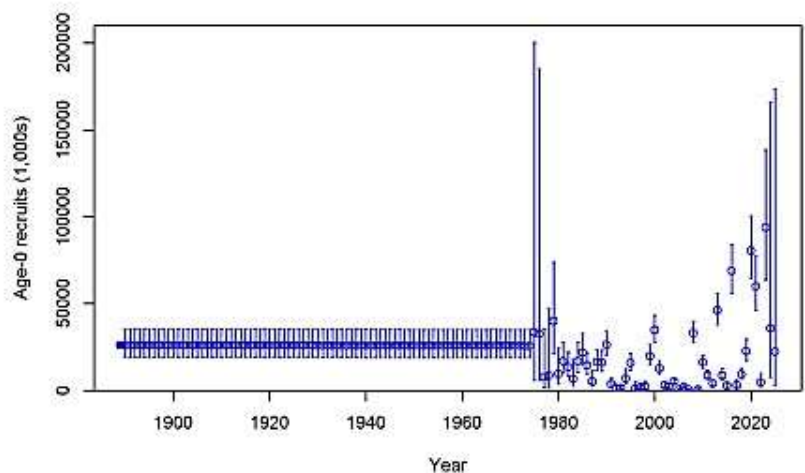


Figure iv: Estimated time series of age-0 recruits for the base model.

Markets

Sablefish

Markets have improved from 2024. Sablefish demand domestically and internationally has increased providing some relief. Japan is still the primary market. The nation of Japan over the last three years has devalued their currency by 50%. By devaluing their currency, they make the products of Japan appear internationally cheaper. You may have heard that Japan auto prices are being slashed. Even with the Trump 25% tariffs on Japan, Japan has another 25% to be more competitive on the U.S. market. However, if you sell sablefish, salmon roe, pollock roe, or pollock surimi into Japan, you are getting hit hard as the Japanese consumer sees our products as costing 100% more.



Sablefish prices to catcher vessels

Location	1/2	2/3	3/4	4/5	5/7	7 + up
Kodiak Prices in May	\$0.50	\$1.85	\$2.50	\$2.85	\$4.00	\$6.85
Seward Prices in June	\$0.50	\$1.85	\$2.65	\$2.90	\$4.00	\$6.80

Last year, the fleet landed 80% of the quota available in the GOA. It would appear you are on track to catch that and more. Currently, you have landed 39% of the sablefish excluding the Aleutians, you are closer to 50%. The fleet is reporting the average size of sablefish has improved as well. The recent agreement with the EU should help all fish heading to Europe, including sablefish.

Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Allocations and Landings

2C	halibut	546	1,843,032	3,070,000	1,226,968	60
3A	halibut	724	2,959,318	5,890,000	2,930,682	50
3B	halibut	127	1,021,608	2,470,000	1,448,392	41
4A	halibut	27	247,457	1,000,000	752,543	25
4B	halibut	***	***	720,000	***	***
4C/4D	halibut	***	***	900,000	***	***
	Total	1,434	6,113,551	14,050,000	7,936,449	44

AI	sablefish	6	152,442	10,502,714	10,350,272	1
BS	sablefish	35	1,481,799	7,491,231	6,009,432	20
CG	sablefish	251	7,805,116	17,184,857	9,379,741	45
SE	sablefish	420	7,156,733	12,478,036	5,321,303	57
WG	sablefish	92	3,389,530	8,370,866	4,981,336	40
WY	sablefish	143	2,903,422	5,002,237	2,098,815	58
	Total	947	22,889,042	61,029,941	38,140,899	38

--- TAC ---						
Area	Species	Vessel Landings	Total Catch Pounds	Allocation Pounds	Remaining Pounds	Percent Landed

HOT, HOT, HOT is the halibut market! Prices at \$8.50 to low \$9.00 in Seward depending on supply, and \$6.50 to \$6.75 in Dutch. The price was \$29.99 at my local QFC. The Seward price last year was around \$6.50/lb. for halibut. Your price is beginning to match the price paid to Canadians in Eastern Canada at \$10/lb. The Eastern Maritimes of Canada now have a quota of 10 million plus for halibut.

Second Watch

AIS

Senator Cantwell and Senator Sullivan have teamed up to get us a four year-long exemption to the FCC rules on AIS usage on your gear. The provision is part of the U.S. Coast Guard Bill which passed the Senate and this month was approved in rule making on the House Side. It will need to go to a Senate/House conference meeting or need to be voted on by the Senate again as there were some changes from the Senate version by the House. I am hoping for a September vote and final action. This one will help and next time maybe we get a permanent exemption. This exemption will be for 4 years instead of 2 years. This is good news.

Meeting the New Administrator of NOAA-NMFS

Paul Clappitt and Bob Alverson met with Eugenio Pineiro Soler at Fishermen's Terminal and encouraged quick passage of the release of small sablefish off Alaska and quick passage of the Pacific Council's action to allow pots or hook & line for tiered permits. It was a good meeting. The New AA was on the Caribbean Council and also a commercial fisherman.

**Some pics
from this
season on
the FV
Seymour!**

**We hope you're
staying safe,
fishing smart,
and finding
good markets.
If you have
questions,
updates, or
photos from
the field, don't
hesitate to
reach out—
we'd love
to share them!**

