



Advisory Announcement

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2024 NORTHERN SOUTHEAST INSIDE (NSEI) SUBDISTRICT SABLEFISH FISHERY ANNUAL HARVEST OBJECTIVE

The 2024 Northern Southeast Inside (NSEI) Subdistrict commercial sablefish fishery annual harvest objective (AHO) is 1,542,444 round pounds. The AHO is based on the sablefish recommended acceptable biological catch (ABC) with decrements made for sablefish mortality in other fisheries. There are 73 valid Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) permits for 2024, the same as 2023. **The individual equal quota share (EQS) is 21,129 round pounds**, an 11% increase from the 2023 EQS of 19,091 round pounds. Permit holders who have any legal overage or underage incurred during the 2023 fishing season will have their 2024 personal quota share (PQS) adjusted accordingly. **The NSEI fishery opens by regulation at 8:00 a.m., August 15, 2024, and will close at 12:00 noon, November 15, 2024.** Permit holders are reminded that they must register for the fishery prior to fishing. **Registrations, PQS forms, and logbooks will be available starting July 8 at ADF&G offices in Southeast Alaska.** Sablefish may be taken in the directed NSEI sablefish fishery by longline and pot gear under a CFEC limited entry C61A permit [5 AAC 28.130 (a) and 5 AAC 28.130 (f)].

The recommended 2024 ABC is 1,809,075 round lb ($F_{ABC} = 0.061$), a 15% increase from the 2023 ABC. The increase in the ABC is attributed to the continued growth and maturation of the strong recruitment events since 2015, highlighted by recruitment in 2018 (the 2016-year class) which is the highest since 1979. The dominant 2016-year class is now over 50% mature and will comprise 32% of the biomass. The new data also indicates that the large recruitments between 2015 and 2019 have been underestimated in past assessments and thus spawning biomass appears larger in the current assessment. This is common in age-structured assessments as it takes multiple years of cohort observations to understand the true size of a recruitment event. There was no mark-recapture experiment in 2023 and CPUE estimates from the fishery and longline survey have declined since last year's assessment. However, both CPUE estimates remain above the long-term average with all model explorations showing an increased biomass and ABC. Fishery catch and ex-vessel value remain depressed from historical levels. Although catches increased in 2023 as the 2013–2018 year classes reach marketable size, the ex-vessel value was down 35% from last year because of poor market conditions. Though recent high catch rates of small sablefish across multiple geographic areas signal increasing trends for sablefish stocks, the department maintains a precautionary approach to setting harvest limits. Estimates from the 2023 stock assessment suggest sablefish spawning stock biomass remains at suppressed levels compared to the 1980s and 1990s.

The ABC determination process uses a statistical catch-at-age model, first implemented in 2020. The model reduces the reliance on the annual mark-recapture project to estimate recruitment, abundance, and spawning stock biomass of NSEI sablefish by integrating multiple indices of abundance and biological data (e.g., catch by age, mark-recapture abundance estimates, longline survey and fishery CPUE, longline survey length and age compositions). As in previous years, maximum ABC is defined by F_{50} , the fishing mortality rate that reduces spawning biomass to 50% of equilibrium unfished levels.

A sablefish marking survey will be conducted in 2025, if funding allows. Three longline vessels and one pot vessel will be chartered for the 2024 ADF&G NSEI sablefish survey, scheduled for August 9–14. Data from the survey will be used to obtain size, age, and maturity information for the 2025 stock assessment.

Area Description 5 AAC 28.105 (a)(2)

The NSEI Subdistrict (Figure 1) consists of all waters of Frederick Sound, Stephens Passage, Lynn Canal, Icy Strait, Glacier Bay, Chatham Strait, and contiguous bays and inlets bordered by a line from Beacon Point to Wood Point, from Point Camden to Salt Point Light, the Cape Decision Light to a point west of Gish Bay at 55°54.53' N lat, 134°12.50' W long to

the southernmost tip of Helm Point to the westernmost tip of Hazy Island to the Cape Ommaney Light, north of 57°30' N lat in Peril Strait, from the westernmost tip of Column Point to the northernmost tip of Soapstone Point and from the southernmost tip of Cape Spencer through Yakobi Rock to Yakobi Island.

Legal Gear

Sablefish may be taken in the directed NSEI sablefish fishery only by longline and pot gear. CFEC limited entry C61A permits can use both longline and pot gear. Groundfish pot gear requires individual tunnel eye openings with perimeters 36 inches or less and a sidewall containing an escapement opening equal to or exceeding 18 inches in length that must be laced, sewn, or secured together by a single length of untreated, 100-percent cotton twine, no larger than 30 thread of which may be knotted at each end only and must be parallel to and within six inches of the bottom of the pot [5 AAC 39.145 (1)].

Collapsible groundfish pots (“slinky pots”) must contain two escape mechanism openings in the mesh with each equal to or exceeding 18 inches in length that must be laced, sewn, or secured together by a single length of untreated, 100-percent cotton twine, no larger than 30 thread of which may be knotted at each end only and must be on opposite sides of the pot. If the escape mechanism is placed on the tunnel side, the opening must be in an area that does not include the pot door and within six inches of the edge of the pot [5 AAC 39.145]. All sablefish pots must have at least two circular escape rings, with a minimum inside diameter of three and three-fourths of an inch, installed on opposing vertical or sloping walls of the pot [5 AAC 28.130 (f)]. King and Tanner crab pots as described in 5 AAC 34.050 (2) and 5 AAC 35.050 (2) may not be used to take groundfish.

Sablefish permit holders operating longlined pot gear in the directed NSEI sablefish fishery must have an attached buoy at each end of a groundfish pot longline marked with the permanent ADF&G vessel plate number of the vessel operating the groundfish longlined pot gear and the buoy must have the letters “LP” to designate the gear as longlined groundfish pot gear. The numbers and letters must be marked in the top one-half of the buoy in numbers and letters that are at least four inches high, one-half inch wide, and in a color that contrasts with the color of the buoy [5 AAC 28.050(b)].

Registration and Logbook Requirements

Fishers must register prior to fishing [5 AAC 28.106 (b)] and are required to keep a logbook during the fishery [5 AAC 28.175 (a–b)]. Registrations, PQS forms, and logbooks will be available starting July 8 at ADF&G offices in Southeast Alaska. Completed logbook pages must be attached to the ADF&G copy of the fish ticket at the time of delivery. Confidential ADF&G envelopes for logbook pages may be requested when registering.

Logbooks must include, by set: the date and time gear is set and retrieved, specific location of harvest by latitude and longitude for start and ending positions, hook spacing, amount of gear used (number of hooks and skates), depth of set, estimated weight of the target species, and the estimated weight of bycatch by species. Indicate for each set if the target species was sablefish or halibut and if there was any lost gear. A permit holder must retain all visibly injured or dead sablefish. Sablefish that are not visibly injured or dead may be released unharmed. The permit holder must record in the logbook, by set, the number of live sablefish released [5 AAC 28.170 (f)], as well as the discard reason (e.g., fish are small, PQS has been met, etc.).

Tagged Sablefish

Fishers are requested to document tagged sablefish. Please record tag number(s) and attach tags directly in the logbook with the corresponding set information. All persons who return an ADF&G sablefish tag will receive a tag reward (e.g., a hat or t-shirt). Tags returned with valid recovery information (the tag, date of capture, latitude and longitude) are entered into an annual random drawing for a cash prize.

Fish Ticket Requirements

Landed weights must be recorded on an ADF&G fish ticket at the time of delivery. If a fisher delivers fish in the round, the total round weight delivered must be recorded on the fish ticket. If a fisher delivers dressed fish, the fish ticket must include the total landed dressed weight as well as the round weight equivalent, determined by using the standard 0.63 conversion rate. There is a 2% allowance for ice and slime when delivering unrinsed whole sablefish. A fish ticket must be completed prior to the resumption of fishing and each permit holder must retain onboard their vessel, copies of all NSEI fish tickets from the current season as well as their updated PQS tracking form. Fishers are reminded that a completed fish ticket must be submitted to ADF&G before fish are transported out of Alaska.

Possession and Landing Requirements

In the NSEI Subdistrict, the holder of a CFEC permit for sablefish may not retain more sablefish from the directed fishery than the annual amount of sablefish EQS specified by the department [5 AAC 28.170 (f)]. However, if a permit holder’s

harvest exceeds the permit holder’s EQS for that year, by not more than 5%, the department shall reduce the permit holder's EQS for the following year by the amount of the overage. If a permit holder's harvest exceeds the permit holder's EQS by more than 5%, the proceeds from the sale of the overage in excess of 5% shall be surrendered to the state and the permit holder may be prosecuted under AS 16.05.723 [5 AAC 28.170 (j)]. If a permit holder’s harvest is less than the permit holder’s EQS established for that year, the department shall increase the permit holder’s EQS only for the following year by the amount of the underage that does not exceed 5% of the EQS [5 AAC 28.170 (k)]. **For the 2024 NSEI fishing season, 5% of the annual EQS is 1,056 round pounds.**

Bycatch Allowances for the NSEI Sablefish Fishery

Percentage indicates amount of bycatch that may be sold on a NSEI sablefish permit and is based on the round weight of sablefish and bycatch species or species group on board the vessel:

Bycatch species	Longline Gear	Pot Gear
All rockfish, including thornyheads	15% in aggregate, of which up to 1% may be DSR	
Lingcod	0%	0%
Pacific Cod	20%	20%
Spiny Dogfish	35%	20%
Other groundfish	20%	20%

CFEC permit holders fishing for groundfish or halibut in NSEI must retain, weigh, and report all rockfish taken including thornyhead rockfish [5 AAC 28.171 (a)]. The demersal shelf rockfish (DSR) assemblage includes yelloweye, quillback, canary, copper, tiger, China, and rosethorn rockfish [5 AAC 39.975 (34)]. All rockfish retained in excess of allowable bycatch limits shall be reported as bycatch overage on an ADF&G fish ticket. All proceeds from the sale of excess rockfish bycatch shall be surrendered to the state. Excess rockfish retained due to full retention requirements may be retained for personal use; however, the pounds must be documented as overage on the fish ticket.

A CFEC permit holder fishing for groundfish must retain all Pacific cod when the directed fishery for Pacific cod is open and up to the maximum retainable bycatch amount (20%) of Pacific cod when the directed fishery is closed [5 AAC 28.070 (e)]. Pacific cod taken in excess of the bycatch limit in areas open to directed fishing for Pacific cod may be landed on a CFEC miscellaneous saltwater finfish permit designated for the gear that was used. Fishers with halibut IFQ in regulatory area 2C and a CFEC halibut permit card must retain all halibut over 32 inches in length, up to the amount of their IFQ.

More information on calculating groundfish bycatch can be found on the groundfish harvest webpage at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareasoutheast.groundfish#harvest>

Sablefish Live Market

The holder of a CFEC or interim use permit for sablefish may possess live sablefish for delivery as live product except that, upon request of a local representative of the department or law enforcement, a permit holder must present sablefish for inspection and allow biological samples to be taken [5 AAC 28.170 (l)].

Prohibitions

The operator of a fishing vessel may not take sablefish in the NSEI area with sablefish from another area on board. Also, the operator of a vessel taking sablefish in the NSEI area shall unload those sablefish before taking sablefish in another area [5 AAC 28.170 (a) and (b)].

A vessel, or person on board a vessel, from which commercial, subsistence, or personal use longline fishing gear was used to take fish in the NSEI or SSEI Subdistricts during the 72-hour period immediately before the start of the commercial sablefish fishery in that subdistrict, or from which that gear will be used during the 24-hour period immediately after the closure of the commercial sablefish fishery in that subdistrict, may not participate in the taking of sablefish in that subdistrict during that open sablefish fishing period. A vessel, or a person on board a vessel, who has harvested and sold their PQS before the final day of the sablefish season in that subdistrict is exempt from the prohibition on fishing longline gear during the 24-hour period immediately following the closure of the sablefish fishery in that subdistrict. In addition, a vessel or a person on board a vessel, commercial fishing for sablefish in NSEI may not operate subsistence or personal use longline gear for groundfish from that vessel until all sablefish harvested in the commercial fishery are offloaded from the vessel.

For additional information, visit: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=commercialbyareasoutheast.groundfish>.

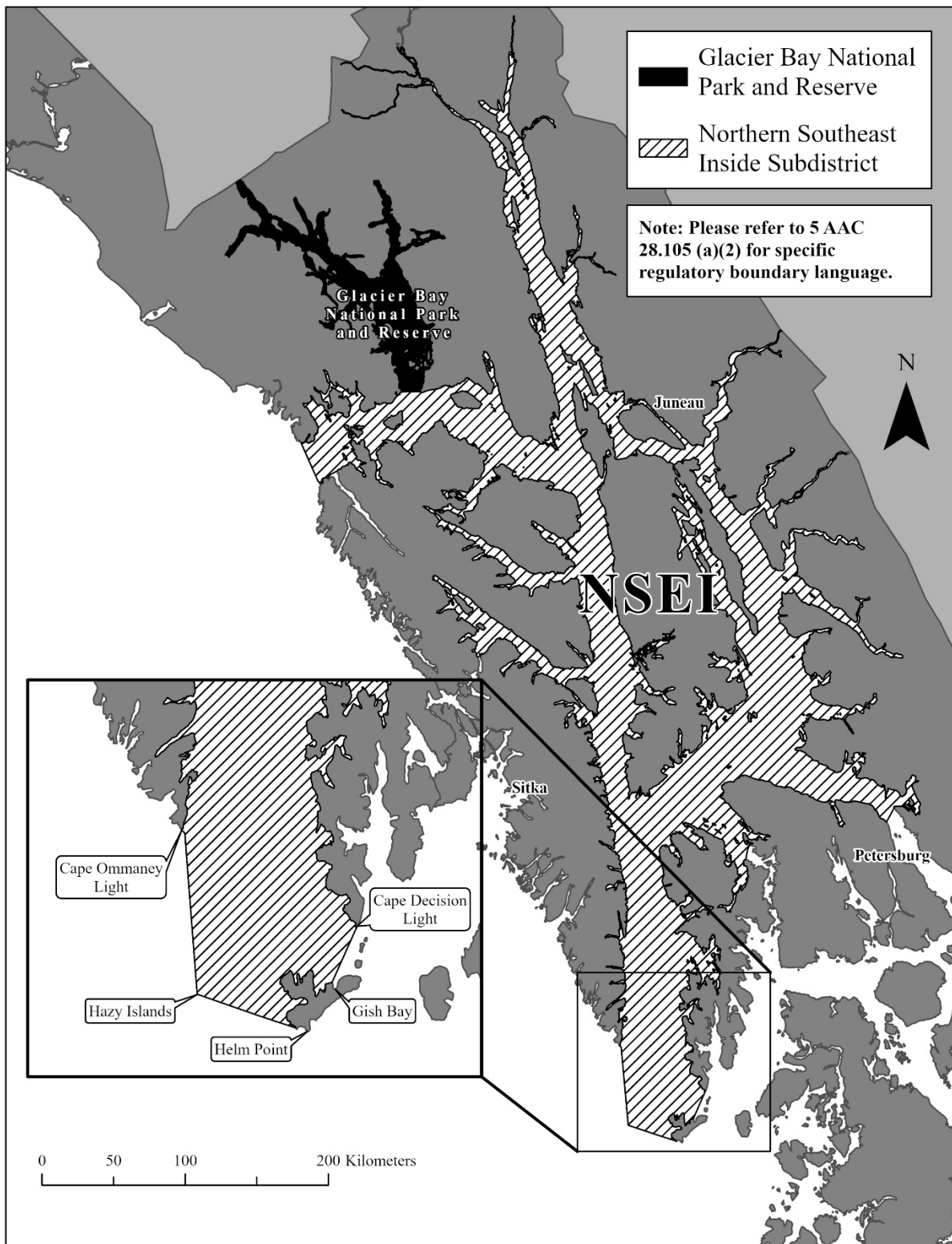


Figure 1.—Northern Southeast Inside (NSEI) Subdistrict. This map is for general information purposes only. For specific area descriptions refer to 5 AAC 28.105 (a)(2).

Advisory Announcement website: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cfnews.main>.

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