

PROPOSAL 129

5 AAC 28.171. Rockfish possession and landing requirements for Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area.

Reduce the trip limit in the East Yakutat Section and clarify trip limits in the Southeast District and East Yakutat Section commercial demersal shelf rockfish fishery, as follows:

5 AAC 28.171(d) and (e) are amended to read:

(d) In the Southeast District east of 137° W. long., a vessel or CFEC permit holder may not **catch, take or possess on board the vessel, or sell from that vessel** more than 6,000 pounds [(BLED WEIGHT)] of demersal shelf rockfish (**as delivered, whole or bled weight**) in any five-day period. All demersal shelf rockfish taken in excess of 6,000 pounds (**as delivered, whole or bled weight**) by a vessel or CFEC permit holder in any five-day period must be weighed and reported on an ADF&G fish ticket **as a trip limit overage**. All proceeds from the sale of demersal shelf rockfish in excess of 6,000 pounds (**as delivered, whole or bled weight**) shall be surrendered to the state.

(e) In the East Yakutat Section, a vessel or CFEC permit holder may not **catch, take or possess on board the vessel, or sell from that vessel** more than **8,000** [12,000] pounds [(BLED WEIGHT)] of demersal shelf rockfish (**as delivered, whole or bled weight**) in any five-day period. All demersal shelf rockfish taken in excess of **8,000** [12,000] pounds (**as delivered, whole or bled weight**) by a vessel or CFEC permit holder in any five-day period must be weighed and reported on an ADF&G fish ticket **as a trip limit overage**. All proceeds from the sale of demersal shelf rockfish in excess of **8,000** [12,000] pounds (**as delivered, whole or bled weight**) shall be surrendered to the state.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The annual commercial guideline harvest level (GHL) available for the EYKT directed DSR fishery has been greatly reduced since the trip limit was established in 1991. The department has successfully managed the fishery under the current trip limit however; there is an increased risk of GHLs given the declining trends in DSR biomass and current level of effort in the fishery.

The current regulatory language leaves room for interpretation that is not necessarily consistent with the original intentions of the trip limit restrictions. The directed DSR fishery has been operating as a high quality, high value fishery targeting yelloweye rockfish that are iced and sold to the domestic fresh market. The proposed regulatory modifications serve to clarify and expand on the mechanics of the trip limit in order to improve fishery manageability and maintain accepted fishery quality standards.

The five-day restriction was originally instituted as a means to control the pace of the fishery. Current regulatory language limits how often a vessel may sell a DSR trip limit but does not require a waiting period before returning to fishing operations. Generally, it takes a couple of days for a vessel to turn around after an offload and get in position to resume fishing operations; therefore the five-day period has typically expired before the vessel returns to port. Recently, motivated individuals have been able to return to fishing on the day following an offload, caught another trip limit, and then had to wait out the remainder of the five-day period before they can legally offload.

The proposed change restricts vessels from taking or possessing more than a trip limit of DSR within the five-day period and will prevent unnecessary delays to offloads which helps ensure that fish of the highest quality are delivered to the marketplace. Fishery managers will also be able to more accurately predict how much DSR has been caught based on what a vessel may catch and possess within the trip-limit period.

The proposed change ties the sale of fish to being offloaded from that vessel. Current language is vague regarding the sale of fish and these changes clarify that DSR cannot be documented on a fish ticket at sea and then considered sold. This update helps clarify that a vessel may not possess more than one trip limit during the five-day period.

The current regulation bases the trip limit on the round weight of DSR. The standard for this fresh market fishery is bled rockfish; the process of bleeding rockfish accounts for a two percent loss in weight. In order to allow permit holders to sell a full trip limit of landed product, the Alaska Board of Fisheries adjusted this regulation to allow a trip limit of bled rockfish to be landed. A trip limit of bled rockfish when converted to round (whole fish) weight is equal to 6,122 or 12,245 pounds. The proposed language change serves to clarify recent questions as to whether vessels that do not bleed their catch can sell an additional 122 or 245 pounds of DSR to match the equivalent bled weight of rockfish. This was never the intention of the previous regulatory change.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

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