

PROPOSAL 194

5 AAC 01.720. Lawful gear and gear specifications; 5 AAC 28.130. Lawful gear for Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area; and 5 AAC 77.674. Personal use bottomfish fishery.

Reduce the minimum inside diameter of circular escape rings from three and three-fourths inches to three and one-half inches on pots used to take sablefish in the subsistence, commercial, and personal use sablefish fisheries, as follows:

5 AAC 01.720 (5) is amended to read:

(5) in the Northern Southeast Inside Subdistrict and Southern Southeast Inside Subdistrict, a sablefish permit holder’s pot gear must have at least two circular escape rings with a minimum inside diameter of three and **one-half** [THREE-FOURTHS] inches installed on opposing vertical or sloping walls and must have individual tunnel eye openings with perimeters of 36 inches or less.

5 AAC 28.130 (f) is amended to read:

(f) In the Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area, pots may not be longlined, except that pots may be longlined in the Northern Southeast Inside Subdistrict and Southern Southeast Inside Subdistrict sablefish fishery. In a directed fishery for sablefish, pots used to take sablefish must have at least two circular escape rings with a minimum inside diameter of three and **one-half** [THREE-FOURTHS] inches installed on opposing vertical or sloping walls.

5 AAC 77.674 (6)(E)(iii) is amended to read:

(E) a permit holder’s pot gear

(iii) must have, for each pot, at least two circular escape rings with a minimum inside diameter of three and **one-half** [THREE-FOURTHS] inches installed on opposing vertical or sloping walls and must have individual tunnel eye openings with perimeters of 36 inches or less.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Reducing the escape ring size to three and one-half inches would base the ring size on sablefish maturity information. Estimated length at 50% maturity (L_{50}) of sablefish is 63 cm in the Northern and Southern Southeast Inside Subdistricts. Escape rings of three and one-half inches would continue to minimize catch of immature fish, reduce discard mortality, and maximize catch of larger, more desirable fish. The use of properly sized escape rings results in low catches of immature sablefish while maintaining high catch per unit of effort (CPUE) of mature sablefish. Incorporating an escape ring size of three and one-half inches into subsistence and personal use pot gear would also be consistent with the legal description of commercial sablefish pot gear, if all three changes are adopted. The proposed gear modification is a slight reduction from changes made during the previous board cycle.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F24-141)
