

Sablefish

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)

PROPOSAL 195

5 AAC 28.110 Sablefish fishing seasons for Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area.

Change the Southern Southeast Inside (SSEI) Subdistrict sablefish fishery season opening and closing dates to be concurrent with the federal Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) sablefish fishery season dates.

5 AAC 28.110 (2) in the Southern Southeast Inside Subdistrict would amended to say, Clarence Strait Black Cod will be opened and closed the same time as the Federal IFQ Black Cod in the ocean.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Would like to see Clarence Strait Black cod season open up as the same time as the Federally operated Black cod in the ocean. This would allow a bigger market for fresh local Black cod to the tourism industry.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. No

PROPOSED BY: John Johanson

(EF-F24-164)

PROPOSAL 196

5 AAC 28.130 Lawful gear for Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area.

Reduce the minimum inside diameter of escape rings in commercial sablefish pots to three and three-eighths inches, as follows:

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 THREE-FOURTHS] **three and three-eighths inches** installed on opposing vertical or sloping walls.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Escape ring size for sablefish

pots: The ADFG has conducted escape ring studies aimed at minimizing bycatch of small immature sablefish to reduce discard mortality and maximize catches of larger, more economically desirable fish. From this research, ADFG has identified 3 and ½ inches as biologically optimal. While we prefer a 3 and ½ inch escape ring specification over the existing regulation, from an economic perspective 3 and ½ inches is not small enough. Both the existing regulation and the size proposed by the Department still allow too many sablefish to escape, given the current size composition of the resource and state of the sablefish markets, to maintain the economic viability of the fishery. By way of background: strong year classes from the late 90s are aging out of the population and three (possibly four) historically large year classes now comprise 75% of the sablefish spawning stock biomass (fishery wide). Rapid increases in coastwide sablefish quotas (quadrupled since 2016) based on these large year classes of small fish have collapsed the sablefish market, reducing prices paid to fishermen across all size categories. To maintain the economic viability of the fishery, fishermen want to retain some sablefish smaller than will remain in a pot with a 3 ½ or 3 and 3/4 inch escape rings. Since current regulations allow hook and line fishermen to release or retain sablefish at the surface without specifying a release or retention length, it seems rational and equitable to allow pot fishermen to also self-identify the appropriate release size via escape ring specifications. ALFA and SEAFA request consideration by the Board of the smaller escape ring size while the population is composed of small fish and market conditions are weak.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. Yes-- The proposal was requested by a group of fishermen who participate in the State waters sablefish fishery and discussed with representatives from other Southeast AK fishermen organizations. After considerable vetting and discussion with ADFG,

ALFA and SEAFSA decided to submit the proposal and we will discuss the proposal with local ACs at upcoming meetings.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association and Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Alliance (EF-F24-062)

PROPOSAL 197

5 AAC 01.714. Limitations on participation in subsistence finfish fisheries; 5 AAC 28.180. Prohibitions for Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area; and 5 AAC 77.674. Personal use bottomfish fishery.

Clarify and amend existing regulations regarding subsistence, personal use, and commercial groundfish fisheries in the Northern Southeast Inside Subdistrict and the Southern Southeast Inside Subdistrict, as follows:

5 AAC 01.714 (b) is amended to read:

(b) A vessel or a person on board a vessel from which **subsistence fishing gear** [A LONGLINE] is used to take groundfish for subsistence uses in the Northern Southeast Inside Subdistrict or the Southern Southeast Inside Subdistrict, described in 5 AAC 28.105, may not operate commercial **fishing** [LONGLINE] gear **to take groundfish for commercial uses** [FOR GROUND FISH] from that vessel until all subsistence-taken groundfish are offloaded from the vessel **and is subject to the restrictions in 5 AAC 28.180.**

5 AAC 28.180 (a) and (b) are amended to read:

(a) A vessel or a person on board a vessel from which commercial, subsistence, or personal use [LONGLINE] fishing gear was used to take **groundfish** [FISH] in the Northern or Southern Southeast Inside 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 that vessel or person's entire equal quota share 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.

(b) A vessel or person on board a vessel commercial fishing for sablefish in the Northern or Southern Southeast Inside Subdistricts may not operate subsistence or personal use **fishing** [LONGLINE] gear for groundfish from that vessel until all commercial sablefish are offloaded from the vessel.

5 AAC 77.674 (4) is amended to read:

(4) A vessel or a person on board a vessel from which **personal use fishing gear is** [A LONGLINE] WAS] used to take bottomfish for personal use in the Northern Southeast Inside Subdistrict or the Southern Southeast Inside Subdistrict, **described in 5 AAC 28.105, may not operate commercial fishing gear to take groundfish for commercial uses from that vessel until all personal use-taken bottomfish are offloaded from the vessel** and is subject to the restrictions in 5 AAC 28.180;

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? This would prohibit operation of all subsistence groundfish and personal use bottomfish gear from vessels that are commercial fishing for groundfish until all commercially harvested groundfish are offloaded from the vessel and would prohibit operation of commercial gear from vessels that are subsistence groundfish or personal use bottomfish fishing until all subsistence or personal use fish are offloaded from the vessel. The language is updated to include all allowable gear types under subsistence, personal use, and commercial groundfish fisheries given recent regulatory gear changes. Current regulations are designed to prevent subsistence and personal use-caught fish from being commercially sold by requiring that groundfish taken with longline gear for subsistence and personal use purposes be offloaded from a vessel before that vessel is used to take groundfish in a commercial fishery with longline gear. In recent years there has been an increase in the use of groundfish pot gear including slinky pots, in subsistence, personal use, and commercial groundfish fisheries. Current regulations allow subsistence and personal use groundfish, caught with gear other than longline gear, to be onboard a vessel engaged in commercial groundfish fisheries. By removing the word “longline” from these regulations, the regulations would accurately include all forms of legal gear. Legal gear for the subsistence sablefish fishery includes pot, longline, and mechanical jigging machines; legal gear for the personal use sablefish fishery includes pot, longline, and handheld line; and legal gear for the commercial fisheries includes pot and longline. The department would like to provide clarification to prevent overlap in retention of groundfish species among fisheries and to improve management of groundfish by extending regulatory restrictions to all legal gear types in these fisheries. This proposal also streamlines regulatory wording for consistency among all three fisheries.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-24-142)

PROPOSAL 198

5 AAC 47.020. General provisions for seasons and bag, possession, annual, and size limits for the salt waters of the Southeast Alaska Area.

Increase the daily bag limit for sablefish in the sport fishery, as follows:

Increase daily bag limit by two from four to six fish per day.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Black Cod/Sablefish harvest: Increase black cod/Sablefish harvest for residents from 4 fish to 6 fish per day for resident sport fishing. The populations of this species has been increasing while halibut has been decreasing. This would allow local resident rod and reel sport fishers to target a more sustainable resource while the halibut is at a 30 year low.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. Yes, multiple local rod and reel sport fishers have been agreeable to this proposal.

PROPOSED BY: Kurt Mattle (EF-F24-177)
