

F/V CHALLENGE

Mike Pettis
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Newport, OR 97365

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Dear Jim and Council members;

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My name is Mike Pettis and I am writing today to express my interests for the future of the fixed-gear sable-fish fishery.

It seems these days that safety at sea is at the top of the list when it comes to what the government thinks is important. We have several requirements such as: EPIRBs, EMERSON SUITS, LIFE RAFTS, HYDROSTATIC RELEASES, FIRE EXTINGUISHERS, DATED BATTERIES, FLARES, HORNS, BELLS, CPR TRAINING, FIRST-AID TRAINING, CREW DRILLS ETC..... All of these are required by the federal government, at considerable annual expense to the fisherman, in an attempt to improve safety for fishermen at sea. AND I AGREE WITH ALL OF IT.

On the other hand, when it comes to scheduling fishing seasons, the federal government seems to put safety on the back burner. I would give as an example of this, the west coast fixed-gear directed sablefish season. With a federal ban on "individual fishing quotas" (IFQs) Fisheries managers are forced to inact season lengths that ensure a certain portion of the fleet will not catch their allowed poundage. This "OVERHEAD" is required so that the fishery does not resemble to closely an IFQ. What you end up with, is the majority of the fleet engaged in a derby fishery. Working as fast, as hard and as long as they can, trying not to be part of the "overhead".

So where does safety fit into this situation? The U.S. Coast Guard has repeatedly refered to the derby style fishery as an unsafe undesirable option for fisheries management. With a portion of the fleet (15 to 25%) expected to not reach their allowed catch. How many days can you "take off" due to bad weather? Probably none! So the working long, hard, fast as you can, takes place weather be damned. Does this seem consistent with the long list of safety requirements at the top of the page???

There is no way to predict what the weather will be for the season that is scheduled months in advance.

It is my sincere hope that congress will relax or eliminate the ban on IFQs so that more reasonable-safer seasons can be scheduled. This fishery, this fleet, would benefit greatly from a longer season. Bad weather could be avoided. Safety would be greatly increased by better weather, crews that were rested, hooks or pots being hauled at a slower, safer pace. There would be fewer gear conflicts, since not everyone would be there at once. The overall value of the fishery would increase due to a better ability to negotiate price.

It is hard to imagine that the perceived benefits of this ban on IFQs is worth putting the majority of the fixed-gear sablefish fleet and other fleets in a similar situation around the country in increased physical and financial peril.

Please do what you can to provide a longer-safer season for us to fish.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for considering our situation.

Sincerely, *rp*
Michael Pettis

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