

TRAWL CATCH SHARES - GEAR SWITCHING AND TRAWL SABLEFISH AREA MANAGEMENT

During the fishing community hearings that were held at the start of the catch share review and subsequent Council discussion, two issues were identified that might be impacted by gear switching and trawl sablefish area management policies: low attainment of the allocation for many trawl sector species and conflicts between gear-switching vessels and local fleets in the area south of 36° N. lat.

It has been suggested that limiting gear switching might allow increased attainment of the trawl allocation of a number of species, as well as reduce conflict between local fleets south of 36° N. lat. and fixed gear vessels traveling south to catch the southern trawl sablefish allocation. While trawlers take sablefish as part of a multispecies complex, sablefish is the main species taken by fixed gear vessels participating in the trawl catch share program. Limiting gear switching might increase attainment of the trawl allocation of other species, if that attainment is being limited by sablefish. Limiting gear switching might also reduce or prevent a worsening of conflict south of 36° N. lat.

Eliminating the trawl sablefish area management line at 36° N. lat. would increase the amount of sablefish available for the northern fishery (potentially increasing trawl sector attainment of its non-sablefish allocations, to the degree that sablefish is limiting harvest) and eliminate the need for fixed gear vessels to travel south to harvest southern sablefish. Since 2013, there has been close to a million pounds or more of trawl sector sablefish left unharvested in the fishery south of 36° N. lat. The stock is assessed on a coastwide basis, and the 36° N. lat. line is used for allocation rather than conservation purposes.

At its November 2017 meeting, the Council decided not to include the gear switching and trawl sablefish area management issue in the suite of measures moving forward as part of the follow-on package for the five-year review of the trawl catch share program (see Agenda Item H.6). At the same time, Council members expressed concern about waiting for a more urgent problem to develop before moving the issue forward. On that basis, the Council scheduled this agenda item to decide whether and, if so, through what process this issue might be moved forward. If the issue is advanced, Council members also mentioned that some general Council guidance might be provided for whatever group process is charged with developing alternatives. Included in this guidance might be direction to also explore the possibility of addressing the identified problems through reductions in the sablefish annual vessel quota pound (QP) limits.

Analytical background on the gear switching and trawl sablefish area management issue was provided in [Agenda Item F.2, Attachment 6](#) at the November 2017 Council meeting. A discussion of the decision processes and summary of the general approaches to addressing the identified problem were provided in November 2017 [Agenda Item F.2, Supplemental Attachment 7](#), as well as a listing and detailed description of all the alternatives that had been developed by the Council, Community Advisory Board (CAB), and Groundfish Advisory Panel (GAP) to that point ([Agenda Item F.2, Supplemental Attachment 8, November 2017](#)). At this meeting, some additional analysis is provided in Agenda Item H.2, Attachment 1. Included in that attachment is information related

to price differences for sablefish in the northern and southern management areas and information related to the possible impacts of reducing the sablefish annual vessel QP limits.

At its October 2017 meeting, the CAB reached a consensus purpose and need statement for this issue ([Agenda Item F.2.a, Supplemental CAB Report, November 2017](#)). In providing its consensus purpose and need statement, the CAB noted that: “There are participants on the CAB that question whether gear switching is the cause of the lack of availability of sablefish to the trawl fishery in the north.” That CAB report also provided some general principles on which they were in agreement:

- We want to get more sablefish to the trawl fleet.
- We want to consider existing operations/investments.
- We believe that unlimited catch of sablefish through gear switching is not desirable.

With respect to the process for moving this issue forward, the CAB’s report recommended that: “the Council authorize an additional CAB meeting or meetings to specifically address the sablefish area management and gear switching issue.” The GAP concurred with this recommendation ([Agenda Item F.2.a, Supplemental GAP Report, November 2017](#)). The Groundfish Management Team (GMT), on the other hand, recommended “if the gear switching item is moved forward, regardless of the pathway chosen for either issue, that the Council convene the Groundfish Allocation Committee (GAC) and a specially tasked ad hoc workgroup representing the wide range of interested groups (perhaps a modified CAB) to have focused discussions on the purpose, need, and potential alternatives surrounding gear switching.” ([Agenda Item F.2.a, Supplemental GMT Report, November 2017](#)).

There is a September 15, 2017 control date in place for the gear switching issue. If the Council decides not to proceed with development of alternatives, it might want to consider vacating the date in order to maintain veracity of future control dates.

Council Action:

Provide guidance on a future process and schedule.

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item H.2, Attachment 1: Gear Switching and Trawl Sablefish Area Management—Preliminary Data.
2. Agenda Item H.2.b, Public Comment 1.

Agenda Order:

- H.2 Trawl Catch Shares - Gear Switching and Trawl Sablefish Area Management Jim Seger
- a. Reports and Comments of Management Entities and Advisory Bodies
 - b. Public Comment
 - c. **Council Action:** Provide Guidance on Future Process and Schedule