

SABLEFISH MANAGEMENT AND TRAWL ALLOCATION ATTAINMENT COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT TO THE COUNCIL (NOVEMBER 2019)

The Sablefish Management and Trawl Allocation Attainment Committee (SaMTAAC/committee) met October 9-10, 2019 in Portland, Oregon and

- adopted a revised purpose and need statement;
- reviewed analytical work products;
- refined alternatives, reducing the overall number of alternatives while adding a new alternative;
- provided for public comment; and
- set dates for its next meeting.

This report focuses on those results.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) provided further guidance on the construction of purpose and need statements and, based on previous committee work, offered a proposed statement for committee consideration. Working from the NMFS guidance and offered language, the committee developed the following statement.

This action is needed because the Shorebased Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program has underattained most of its allocations since the inception of the program in 2011. The underattainment for some northern stocks may be due to the allowance to use fixed gear to harvest shorebased IFQ, declining trawl vessel participation, and the lack of market and infrastructure. Specifically, participants engaging in gear-switching are acquiring northern sablefish quota that may otherwise be used by trawl gears; this may lead to uncertainty in trawl access to sablefish, thereby affecting the development of markets and infrastructure. Working within the guidance and authority provided by the MSA (§303A(c))¹ and the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) goals and objectives, the purpose of this action would be to keep northern sablefish gear switching from impeding the attainment of northern IFQ allocations with trawl gear, while considering impacts on current operations and investments.

This action is also needed because the Shorebased IFQ Program has underattained several of its southern allocations, specifically sablefish south of 36° N. latitude. Sablefish is managed under a coastwide overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) but the annual catch limit (ACL) is split into two management areas, north and south of 36° N. The Shorebased IFQ allocation and ACL for sablefish south of 36° N. latitude are underattained due to declining gear switching vessel

¹ Section 303(A)(c) of the MSA sets forth elements defining the creation of limited access privilege programs, including the promotion of fishing safety; fishery conservation and management; and social and economic benefits.

participation in this area since rationalization,² limited DTS trawling in this area,³ and lack of market and infrastructure.⁴ The purpose of this action would include encouraging utilization of sablefish south of 36° N. latitude within the current management area and exploring mechanisms that would allow a portion of that allocation to be caught in areas north of 36° N. lat.

These separate underattainment issues result in the Shoreside IFQ Program being unable to meet Management Goals 2 and 3 of the FMP which respectively seek to maximize the value of the groundfish resource as a whole and to achieve the maximum biological yield of the overall groundfish fishery. Additionally, this action would seek to improve the program towards the goal of Amendment 20 to the FMP, which created the Shorebased IFQ Program, of providing for full utilization of the trawl sector allocation.

The following statement covers the scope of the committee charge:

Identifying obstacles to achieving the goals and objectives of the catch share plan related to under attainment of non-sablefish trawl allocations and unharvested sablefish quota pounds (QP) south of 36° N. latitude. As appropriate to overcome identified obstacles, the committee will discuss and develop options, including but not limited to, actions that may modify rules for gear switching by trawl permit holders and QP leasing to vessels using fixed gear, as well as options that may encourage increased utilization of sablefish QPs south of 36° N. latitude.

Initially, the committee examined the issues associated with sablefish consistent with the scope of the committee charge. The range of alternatives originally included two alternatives that would have allowed some of the southern sablefish allocation to be used in the north. Those two alternatives were tabled at the committee's May 2019 meeting. The committee has focused its efforts on development of a range of alternatives related to attainment of allocations in areas north of 36° N. lat. After the committee completes work on these initial range of alternatives for the northern area, it intends to evaluate whether any of the tabled alternatives regarding southern sablefish should be added to the alternatives brought forward to the Council for its consideration. In addition, the committee may need to revise its purpose and need statement if the committee chooses not to include alternatives for the area south of 36° N. lat.

When the committee initially scoped its work in 2018 there were up to 24 alternatives that had been suggested ([Supplemental Information Report 6, November 2018](#) and [Information Report 2, June 2019](#)). The committee has progressively consolidated the alternatives such that three alternatives now cover the range with respect to the issue of attainment of northern trawl allocations constrained by sablefish.

² See page 163 of the Trawl Rationalization Program 5-Year Review (PFMC/NMFS 2017).

³ See page 151 of the Trawl Rationalization Program 5-Year Review and Table 68 (PFMC/NMFS 2017).

⁴ See page 249 of the Trawl Rationalization Program 5-Year Review (PFMC/NMFS 2017).

Alternative 1: Gear Specific QP. Issue trawl-only and unrestricted-gear QP to all quota share (QS) accounts each year (with some opportunity for QS accounts to opt-out and receive all their QP as unrestricted, depending on gear switching history associated with the account or a related vessel). Toward the end of the summer, the QP issued as trawl-only at the start of the year would convert to unrestricted (one option would not include this conversion).

Alternative 2: Gear Switching Endorsement. Allow higher levels of gear switching by any vessel operating with a limited entry permit that has a gear switching endorsement and lower levels for vessels without such permits. The endorsements would be issued based on either vessel or permit gear switching history and would be attached to a limited entry permit. Options are provided for whether the basis for issuing the endorsement would be the vessel or permit, for the amount of gear switching required to qualify, and for limiting transferability of the endorsement, as well as other elements of the alternative.

Alternative 3: Active Trawler Requirement. To be eligible for gear switching in a particular year a vessel would be required to have a certain level of trawl landings earlier in that year or the previous year. Exemptions to this requirement would be provided for vessels that have some minimum amount of gear switching history. These exemptions would be non-transferable and expire over time with changes in ownership. The level of gear switching allowed by those with exemptions would be tied to the amount of QS owned by the vessel owner but would not be less than some base amount, likely 0.6 percent. Provisions are included for year-to-year to adjustments to the level of gear switching allowed for active trawlers and exempt vessels, in order to keep those vessels within a particular cap (“back-stop”).

The committee scheduled its next meeting for January 22-23 and expects to have a range of alternatives for Council consideration at its March meeting, as specified in the following schedule.

Time	Activity
November 2019	Council Meeting: Progress report
January 22-23, 2020	SaMTAAC Meeting
March 2020	Council Meeting: Select range of alternatives
September 2020	Council Meeting: Select preliminary preferred alternative
TBD	Council Meeting: Select final preferred alternative

PFMC
10/22/19