

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON EMERGENCY ACTION TO
CONSIDER A SEASON EXTENSION FOR THE 2020 LIMITED ENTRY FIXED GEAR
PRIMARY SABLEFISH FISHERY – FINAL ACTION

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed the documents under this agenda item, discussed the issue, and offers the following comments regarding an emergency rule to extend the limited entry fixed gear tier program beyond the primary season in 2020.

The season end date currently in regulation is October 31; the industry is requesting an extension to December 31, 2020.

As we reported in [Agenda Item D.2.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1](#), the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on this fishery, and season extension would allow for improved attainment in this sector. Some of the vessels in this fishery also fish in Alaska and they are late returning to the West Coast. Without an extension, much of their tier allocations will be unattained.

We include the details from our Agenda Item D.2.a report that explain the necessity of an emergency rule here, with some modifications:

“The GAP is supportive of this request. Limited entry fixed gear representatives on the GAP reported that only about 35% of the tiered sablefish harvest limit has been caught for 2020. Many of the vessels that participate in landing this fish have been delayed due to COVID related developments in Alaska.” – from [GAP report on D.2.a](#)

The GAP notes the GMT verified in its [report 4 to the Council](#) on September 15 that only 32.9 percent of the tiered fishery to date has been landed. [GMT report 4](#) also states that by September 13, 60 to 70 percent had historically been delivered. The report also verified in Tables 1 and 2 that a considerable number of vessels that normally have participated by September 13 have not yet participated.

The [D.2.a GAP report](#) continues with these points that also support the emergency action:

1. State of Alaska requires all catcher vessels, particularly coming from out of state, to quarantine their crews and develop a COVID-19 safety protocol for each vessel operating in Alaska. For participants in the West Coast tier program that also participate in Alaska fisheries, the start of their Alaska operations was delayed to meet the State of Alaska requirements before/upon entry.
2. COVID-19 has had a large impact on the restaurant sector, where much of the fixed gear sablefish is destined. The fleet for sablefish, off Washington, Oregon, and California, and in Alaska, started later, hoping the effects of the mandatory shutdown of restaurants in the coastal states would mitigate. The effects have not abated, resulting in many vessels from the fleet that participates in the tiered fisheries off the West Coast being delayed from returning from Alaska beyond the normal closing of their season for the tiered fishery (October 31).

3. These delayed vessels and their crews account for 20 to 25 percent of the tiered sablefish fishery landings in a normal year, and much of that will not occur unless the closing time of October 31 is extended.

There are at least a dozen vessels representing 40 to 45 crew that the tiered fishery represents 20-25 percent of their income. Due to the short time frame in addressing this issue there are likely other vessels not yet identified. Many of these vessels have payments coming due on West Coast permits they have purchased and need the income from the fishery to continue to meet their business payments. The landing of this fish helps shorebased communities keep coastal jobs. Much of the fish will be destined for export which affects the U.S. trade imbalance. In addition, some vessels are concerned about COVID-19 protocols for the 30 percent observer coverage in their fishery, and the devastating impacts the virus could have on the fleet. A season extension could ensure more time for quarantines and protocols to be safely followed, without rushing to complete harvest prior to the current end date. For example, if a crewmember or observer exhibit COVID-19 symptoms and need to be tested and/or quarantined, at best, the vessel operations could be shut down for two weeks. Additionally, turnaround time on COVID-19 testing in rural communities has been as long as 8 days.

For the reasons above, the GAP supports moving forward with an emergency rule for the fixed gear sablefish tier fishery.

PFMC
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