

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
SABLEFISH GEAR SWITCHING

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) received a report from Dr. Jim Seger and Ms. Jessi Doerpinghaus on an annotated outline for the analytical document that will be used to evaluate alternatives under consideration by the Council on limiting the use of fixed gear in the trawl individual fishing quota (IFQ) fishery (gear switching) ([Agenda Item F.5, Attachment 4](#)). The SSC provided feedback to the analysts.

The SSC was asked to provide feedback on a “baseline” scenario that describes conditions under the No Action alternative (i.e., no changes to current rules regarding gear switching). The effects of each alternative will then be analyzed relative to the conditions under the No Action baseline. The analysts are proposing an historical baseline (e.g., average of 2016-2019) as representative of gear switching that would be expected in the future under a No Action alternative. Multiple factors, including changes in sablefish recruitment patterns, changes in annual catch limits, production, and market disruptions due to the global pandemic, and changes in export market conditions, make it unlikely that recent years will be an accurate estimate of future conditions. Rather than using an average of recent years (e.g., 2016-2019) as a baseline, it may be useful to use several individual years as baselines of comparison. Each historical year evaluated would represent the No Action alternative under different assumptions regarding future conditions and the amount of gear switching that would occur. These comparisons might include recent years that were considered unusual.

The SSC also had several other recommendations for the analysts in the development of the analytical document. The SSC recommends that the analysts choose appropriate metrics to evaluate the effects of each alternative. The annotated outline uses attainment for multiple groundfish species and gross revenues, among other metrics. The analysis should evaluate effects on net revenue as well. While there is evidence that reducing gear switching may increase gross revenues, the different cost structures for the different gear types suggests that reducing gear switching may not necessarily increase net revenue. The Economic Data Collection program at the Northwest Fisheries Science Center has cost and revenue data for trawlers and gear switchers that can be used to estimate net revenue and how it may be affected by changes in prices, costs, and species composition in trawl fisheries. The SSC also notes it is important that the analysis evaluate tradeoffs from each alternative. While limiting gear switching may increase attainment of some species, it may have negative income effects on participants that would prefer to gear switch and on the value of quota shares. Finally, the analysis should address whether and why the current market-driven allocation of sablefish quota pounds is undesirable, and what problems the proposed alternatives are trying to correct by constraining the market. This context is important for evaluating whether the alternatives under consideration are meeting their desired objectives or may result in unintended consequences.