

GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON INCIDENTAL CATCH
RECOMMENDATIONS: OPTIONS FOR SALMON TROLL AND FINAL ACTION ON
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIXED GEAR SABLEFISH FISHERIES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the briefing book materials on incidental Pacific halibut catch ([Agenda Item F.2, Situation Summary, March 2023](#) and [Attachment 1](#)) and provides a recommendation and comments on the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis, WA. The GMT notes that the incidental Pacific halibut allocation to the primary sablefish fishery will increase from 50,000 lbs. in 2022 to 70,000 lbs. in 2023 due to respective increases in the Fishery Catch Exploitable Yield from 1.49M lbs. to 1.52M lbs.

The current incidental Pacific halibut landing limit in the primary sablefish fishery is 150 lbs. of Pacific halibut dressed weight per 1,000 lbs. of sablefish dressed weight, plus an additional two (2) Pacific halibut outside of the landing ratio. The landing ratio was a minimum of 200 lbs. in 2019, 2020, and 2021, the most recent three years in which the allocation was 70,000 lbs. While this may suggest increasing the 2023 landing ratio to a minimum of 200 lbs., **the GMT recommends continuing to use a landing limit of 150 lbs. of Pacific halibut dressed weight per 1,000 lbs. of sablefish dressed weight, plus two additional Pacific halibut.** Continuing the limit of 150 lbs. maintains the reduced incentive for vessels to seek out grounds that are productive for both sablefish and Pacific halibut. Effort in the primary sablefish fishery has been recovering to pre-Covid levels, and 2023 effort may be more similar to 2019, when the 70,000 lb. allocation was exceeded, than 2020 or 2021. In addition, higher sablefish allocations and an extended season through December 31 will increase the opportunity to catch incidental halibut and could create a risk of exceeding the 70,000 lb. allocation under a landing ratio higher than 150 lbs. The GMT notes that the final date in 2023 for retention of incidental halibut in all commercial fisheries, as specified by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), is December 7. Yet, this is still well after the October 31 season end date in 2022 and prior years.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will continue to monitor incidental landings of Pacific halibut by the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis, WA, and provide weekly landings updates to IPHC and National Marine Fisheries Service throughout the season.