



Black Cod Almanac

MESA Program, Auke Bay Laboratories, NMFS, Juneau, AK

February 2014

Greetings!

To help improve communication and increase dialogue between scientists and members of the industry, we have started this informative newsletter. We hope to include any relevant research, links to new literature, summarized highlights of both Groundfish Plan Team and NPFMC meetings, and general news that may have an effect on those involved with the sablefish fishery. Please feel free to pass on, or send us email addresses of others who may appreciate receiving these newsletters.



Crew members on the longline survey net a sablefish to be tagged.

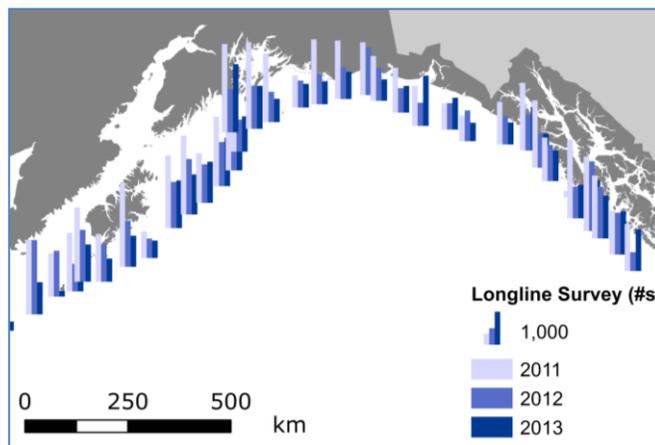
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2013 NMFS Longline Survey

The 2013 NMFS longline survey sampled waters throughout the entire Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea, June 2013 – August 2013. During the longline survey catch is recorded, a subset of sablefish otoliths are collected for age reading, all sablefish are lengthed, and sablefish are tagged for movement research. The results of this survey are used as one of the abundance indices used in the sablefish assessment model which estimates spawning biomass and is used to set harvest limits.

- Survey Relative Population Numbers (RPNs) were consistent for the western GOA, the Aleutian Islands, and the Bering Sea combined, and down in the central and eastern GOA which are at time series lows



Catch in number of fish at each station of the longline survey in the GOA for years 2011, 2012, and 2013.

- Killer whale depredation was up slightly in the Bering Sea, and sperm whale depredation was similar to 2012
- Total tagged fish: 2,589 sablefish, 1,125 shortspine thornyheads, 17 Greenland turbot, 6 spiny dogfish with pop-off satellite tags (PSATS), 27 sablefish with PSATS, & 4 lingcod with PSATS

This information has not been formally disseminated by the National Marine Fisheries Service and should not be construed to represent any agency determination or policy.

2013 November Groundfish Plan Team Meeting Highlights

<http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/npfmc/membership/goa-bsai-plan-teams.html>

The November 2013 North Pacific Groundfish Plan Team meeting was held at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center in Seattle, WA, November 18 – 22, 2013. Dana Hanselman presented the sablefish assessment.

The 2014 assessment included the following new data:

- 2012 final catch and new catch for 2013
- Relative abundance for the 2012 longline survey, the 2013 longline survey, the 2013 GOA trawl survey, and for the sablefish logbook index
- Ages from the 2012 longline survey and fishery
- Lengths for the 2012 longline fishery, the 2013 longline survey, the 2012 trawl fishery, and the 2013 GOA trawl survey

Summarized results:

- **Abundance indices have dropped** from peak levels: the domestic RPN is down 20%, the IFQ fishery down 15%, and the GOA trawl survey down 65% from the respective long-term means. All three indices are at their lowest levels.
- Authors investigated **possible causes of these declines** such as fish moving out of survey depths, temperature changes, prey density, bad bait, and whale depredation, but **none seemed likely**.
- With the exception of the 2008 year class, year classes between 2001 and 2010 have been **below average which contribute to the low abundance levels**.
- **Model results:** biomass has been decreasing since 2003; the above average 2000 year class comprises about 20% of the spawning biomass, and the slightly above average 2008 year class comprises about 10% which isn't as strong as expected; **2014 ABC (quota) was recommended to be 13,722 t**.

- The Plan Teams recommended following the authors' approach for apportionment of ABC as an interim measure (-15% across all areas to reduce overall variability). The Teams also recommended that the standard approach (used in previous year's assessments) be presented to the SSC and Council and noted that work is underway to select an improved apportionment approach.

December 2013 NPFMC Meeting Highlights

<http://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/newsletters/news1213.pdf>

The December 2013 North Pacific Fisheries Management Council meeting was held in Anchorage, AK, December 9 – 17, 2013.

2014/2015 GOA Groundfish Specifications

The Council approved the GOA Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report and recommended final catch specifications for the 2014 groundfish fisheries. Sablefish overfishing limits (OFL), acceptable biological catches (ABC), and total allowable catches (TAC) by area for 2014 are below:

Area	OFL (t)	ABC/TAC (t)
Gulf of Alaska	12,500	10,572
Western		1,480
Central		4,681
W. Yakutat		1,716
SE Outside		2,695
Bering Sea	1,584	1,339
Aleutians	2,141	1,811

IFQ Proposals

<http://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/halibut/FLLuseCaps1013.pdf>

- 1) The Council took no action on revising sablefish A share use caps, and instead requested that the IFQ fleet work together to develop alternatives and options to revise halibut and/or sablefish vessel caps in all or some regulatory areas.
- 2) The Council requested an analysis to amend when maximum retainable amounts (MRAs) are calculated.

- 3) The Council took no action on the IFQ clean-up fishing proposal, recognizing that it would be included in a Feb. 2014 discussion paper on numerous proposals to amend the restructured observer program.

GOA Pot Gear for Sablefish

<http://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/halibut/D1bSupplemental.pdf>

The Council adopted a problem statement and alternatives, with elements and options for analysis to be scheduled for initial review in 2014. The analysis will address a wide range of issues that have been covered in the discussion paper and identified by the Council's Sablefish Gear Committee.

Ongoing Research

- A Ph.D. student at UAF is working on a sablefish spatial model to evaluate apportionment strategies which will maximize spawning biomass, minimize volatility, and consider economic yield.
- Sablefish assessment authors are continuing analysis of whale depredation on the longline survey and during fishery operations. A revised longline survey index that accounts for whale depredation and uses updated area sizes is expected soon.
- A post-doctoral researcher aided in developing methods to better utilize fishery catch rates in the stock assessment.

<http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/Publications/AFSC-TM/NOAA-TM-AFSC-269.pdf>



2013 SABLEFISH TAG PROGRAM RECAP

2013 NUMBER OF TAGS RETURNED:

- 750 sablefish
- 20 shortspine thornyheads
- 4 Greenland turbot

OF THOSE TAGS:

- Greatest time at liberty: 12,701 days (~35 yrs)
- Shortest time at liberty: 7 days
- Greatest distance traveled: 2,117 nmi (tagged in the Bering Sea and recovered off the West Coast)

For a look at the "Report to Industry on the Alaska Sablefish Tag Program, 1972-2012," please go to the following address:

<http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/Publications/AFSC-TM/NOAA-TM-AFSC-254.pdf>

Please remember to get those tags sent in on time to be included in the 2013 Sablefish Tag Reward drawing, to be held in March. Look on the following page for an address and information requested.

Have an artistic side just waiting to be exposed to the world? The tagging program is always looking for new hat designs. Please contact Katy Echave (katy.echave@noaa.gov) if you have a design you'd like to submit.



CONTACTS

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SABLEFISH TAG REWARD DRAWING

TED STEVENS MARINE RESEARCH INSTITUTE, JUNEAU, AK
MARCH 3, 2014 @ 10:00 AM

Drawing held from all of the 2013 sablefish tag returns for cash rewards: 1st place - \$1,000; 2nd place - \$500; 3rd and 4th place - \$250. Do not need to be present to collect reward.

NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL MEETING

ANCHORAGE, AK
APRIL 7-15, 2014

KODIAK AREA MARINE SCIENCE SYMPOSIUM 2014

KODIAK HARBOR CONVENTION CENTER
KODIAK, AK
APRIL 22-25, 2014

2014 SABLEFISH IFQ FISHERY OPENS

MARCH 8 – NOVEMBER 7, 2014
SEASON FOR SABLEFISH AND HALIBUT FOR IFQ HOLDERS

REWARD

FOR TAGGED SABLEFISH



The U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service Auke Bay Laboratory in Juneau, AK tags sablefish (blackcod) in the Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands in order to study distribution and migration.

Tags may be yellow, red, or orange and are usually located below the first dorsal fin on the left side of the fish. In addition, sablefish are being tagged with $\frac{3}{4}$ inch diameter x $2\frac{1}{4}$ inch long electronic tags placed inside the fish with a 3 inch long fluorescent green and pink tag located near the dorsal fin of the fish. The external tag reads – “Reward for Depth Sensor Inside Fish.” These electronic tags are worth monetary rewards of up to \$500 if returned.

Postage-paid envelopes are available in most areas. Please send tags with as much of the following information as possible:

Name of vessel
Location of recovery
Fork length (from tip of snout to fork in tail)
Depth fished

Date of recovery
Sex of the fish
Round weight
Type of gear

A reward and information on the history of the fish will be sent for each tag returned to:



Sablefish Tag Program
NOAA/NMFS Auke Bay Laboratories
17109 Pt. Lena Loop Rd.
Juneau, AK 99801