

*\*Corrections to this proposal are highlighted below.*

**PROPOSAL 215 - 5 AAC 28.110. Sablefish fishing seasons for Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area.**

Amend the sablefish fishing season to allow permit holders to participate in stock assessment surveys as follows:

(c) Notwithstanding (a) of this section, sablefish may be taken outside of established seasons in order to provide information on stock condition and other research questions, as provided in this subsection. The commissioner [SHALL] **may** request that permit holders who are interested in fishing outside of established seasons for that purpose notify the department. The commissioner [WILL] **may** randomly select from those permit holders [, AND]. Selecte permit holders shall fish under terms specified by the commissioner.

**ISSUE:** The department is responsible for determining annual harvest objectives and setting annual personal quota shares (PQS) for the Northern Southeast Inside (NSEI) and Southern Southeast Inside (SSEI) sablefish fisheries. The department uses independent survey data to estimate total biomass of sablefish available in each fishing area. The data collected from the surveys represent a historical time series of information and are used by the department to track trends in the population. The surveys impact the total allowable harvest available to the fishery because the estimated survey harvest is deducted from the allowable biological catch (ABC) prior to setting the annual harvest objective (AHO) for each the fisheries.

In an effort to reduce the impact surveys have on the fisheries, the department would like to include eligible sablefish permit holders during surveys and allow them to harvest the catch on their respective PQS. Since surveys occur prior to the start of the fishery, the department must comply with 5 AAC 28.110. Currently, regulation 5 AAC 28.110(c) allows permit holders to take fish out of season, but requires the department to go through a burdensome call for interest process and then randomly select eligible permit holders to fish outside the normal fishing season. In addition, due to state procurement regulations, the effort to include sablefish permit holders is further restricted and may result in unworkable arrangements between permit holders and vessel owners, preventing selected permit holders from being included on the surveys.

This proposal will allow the department to provide a competitive bid process to select and include sablefish permit holders on future department surveys, and for those permit holders to be eligible to sell harvested fish under their respective PQS.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF NOTHING IS DONE?** The department will continue to issue a call for interest to sablefish permit holders to participate in department surveys under guidelines established in 5 AAC 28.110(c). It is possible that due to state procurement regulations, these permit holders may not meet the vessel requirements needed to complete the survey. The department may have to implement to a full competitive bid for vessel contracts only to discover that bid results do not provide an agreeable arrangement to include permit holders, and result in no permit holders participating in the longline survey and no net savings to the fishery.

**WILL THE QUALITY OF THE RESOURCE HARVESTED OR PRODUCTS PRODUCED BE IMPROVED?** No.

**WHO IS LIKELY TO BENEFIT?** Sablefish permit holders will benefit through a reduction in decrements to the AHO and the resultant increase in PQS. The department will benefit from a more streamlined method for contracting vessels for the surveys.

**WHO IS LIKELY TO SUFFER?** No one.

**OTHER SOLUTIONS CONSIDERED?** Administratively split the revenue from the sale of survey fish among all permit holders within the fishery.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F11-272)

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