

REVIEW OF THE 1990
CENTRAL REGION GROUND FISH FISHERIES

REPORT TO THE ALASKA
BOARD OF FISHERIES



by
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INTRODUCTION

Groundfish, or bottomfish, means all marine finfish excluding halibut, herring, salmonids, and osmerids. Management jurisdiction of the state of Alaska generally includes waters extending three miles from shore (specific descriptions are available in the Alaska Statutes). Federally managed waters, also called the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ; previously called the Fishery Conservation Zone, or FCZ), extend from 3-200 miles offshore from the State of Alaska.

During the 1988 winter meeting of the Alaska Board of Fisheries, state waters of the Gulf of Alaska, excluding waters inside Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet, were redesignated as the Eastern Gulf of Alaska if east of 147° W. long., as the Central Gulf of Alaska if between 147° and 159° W., and as the Western Gulf of Alaska if between 159° and 170° W. long. However, while the Kodiak office of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) issues Emergency Orders for state waters of the Central Gulf of Alaska, and the Petersburg ADF&G office issues Emergency Orders for state waters of the Eastern Gulf of Alaska, the Homer ADF&G office monitors area registration and groundfish harvest for state waters between Cape Suckling (144° W. long.) and Cape Douglas (58°52' N. lat.). For harvest data reported below, state waters of the Central Gulf of Alaska include state waters located between Cape Suckling and Cape Douglas, and excluding waters inside Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet (Figure 1). Groundfish management areas for Region II (Central Region; Figure 1) include the Cook Inlet Area (waters of Cook Inlet enclosed by a line from Point Adam to Cape Elizabeth to Cape Douglas) and the Prince William Sound Area (waters of Prince William Sound enclosed by lines from Point Whithed to Point Bentinck, from Cape Hitchinbrook to Zaikof Point, and from Cape Cleare to Cape Puget). Data summaries listed below designate groundfish harvested from Region II state waters as originating from Cook Inlet, Prince William Sound, or the Central Gulf of Alaska.

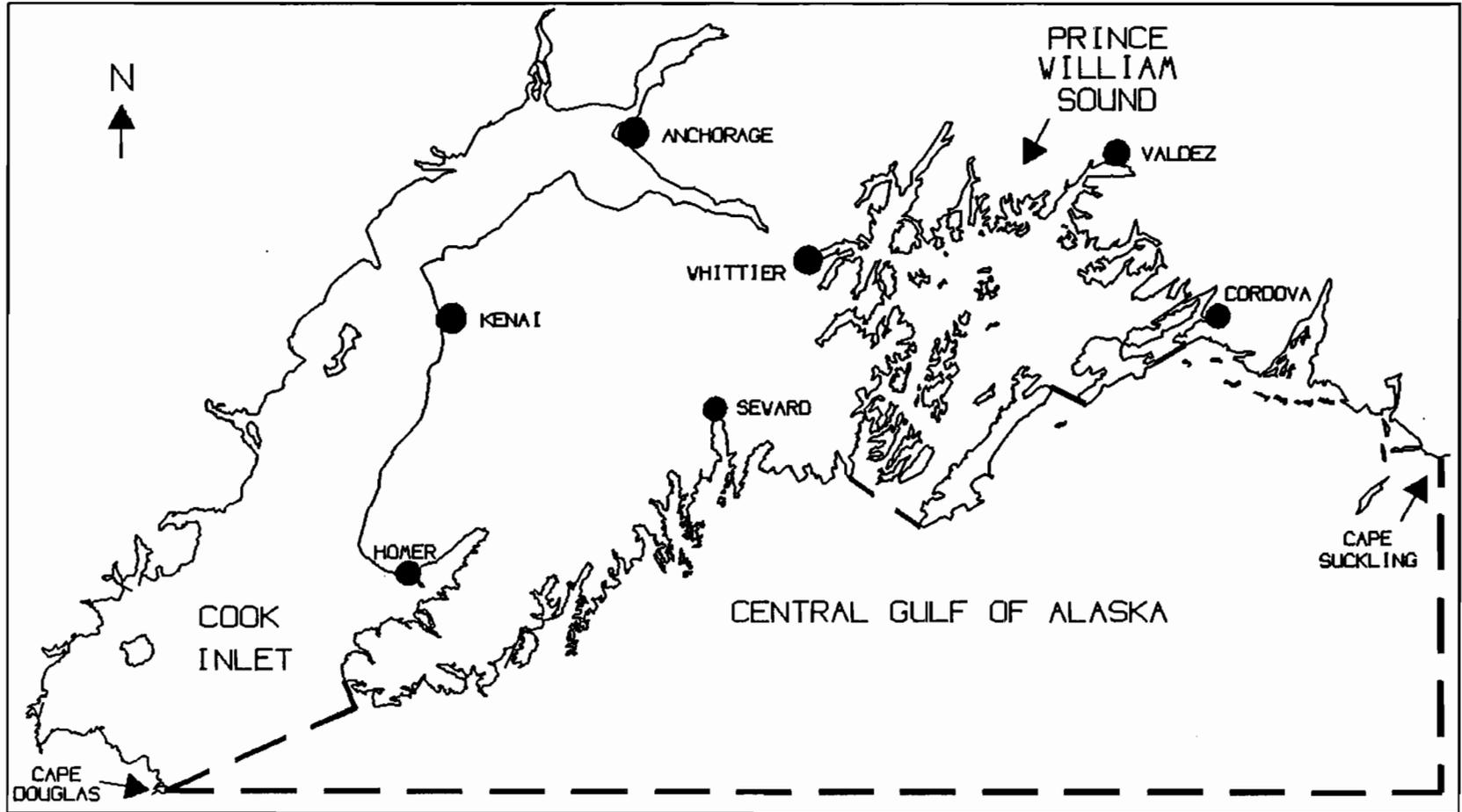


Figure 1. Reporting areas for groundfish harvest from Region II state waters.

FISHING SEASONS AFFECTING REGION II FISHERMEN

The State of Alaska and the Federal Government share management responsibilities for groundfish fishing in Alaskan coastal waters. Therefore openings and closures of groundfish fisheries in state waters are generally similar to openings and closures in the adjacent federal waters. Openings and closures from 1 January through 15 October for groundfish fisheries in state waters of Region II are presented in Table 1. With the exception of sablefish (*Anoplopoma fimbria*), all groundfish fisheries in state waters of Region II were opened for directed fishing at 00:01 Alaska standard time, January 1, 1990. Within state waters of Region II, directed fishing for sablefish only occurs in Prince William Sound and opened by regulation on 1 April.

As prohibited species catch (PSC) limits of halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) were reached in federal waters of the Gulf of Alaska, commercial fishing with both hook-and-line gear and trawl gear was closed on 29 May in federal waters of the Gulf of Alaska, and in most state waters adjacent to the Gulf of Alaska, including the Central Gulf of Alaska and Cook Inlet. At the time of the 29 May closure, federal regulations defined hook-and-line as all gear with hooks attached to line(s). On 14 September, the federal government exempted hand troll and jig gear from PSC limits and, effectively, the hook-and-line closure. In a reflection of federal actions, hook-and-line, hand troll, and jig gears were closed in state waters of the Central Gulf of Alaska on 29 May, and hand troll and jig gears were reopened on 14 September. Prince William Sound is considered internal waters of the State of Alaska and was not closed to hook-and-line gear. As shellfish stocks in Cook Inlet are severely depressed, and because a shift by a large number of fishermen from longline to trawl and pot gears could cause substantial damage (through handling mortality) to the limited crab stocks that do exist, all groundfish fishing in Cook Inlet was closed on 29 May. Cook Inlet was reopened to pots on 27 July under conditions of a permit which specified means to minimize catch of non-target species, and reopened to hand troll and jig gear on 22 August. Because of concerns over severely depressed crab stocks, waters of Cook Inlet located east of a line from Point Pogibshi to Anchor Point and west of a line running from Cape Douglas to a point at 59°20' N. lat., 152°40' W. long., then north

Table 1. Primary openings and closures in Region II groundfish fisheries during 1 January through 15 October 1990.¹

<u>DATE</u>	<u>WATERS</u>	<u>FISHERY</u>	<u>GEAR</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
1/1	ALL	ALL EXC SABLEFISH	ALL	OPENED
1/26	WESTERN GULF	POLLOCK	ALL	CLOSED
1/26	CENTRAL GULF (EXC. SHELIKOF)	POLLOCK	ALL	CLOSED
2/28	SHELIKOF STRAIT	POLLOCK	ALL	CLOSED
3/25	KAMISHAK BAY/KACHEMAK BAY	ALL	TRAWL	CLOSED
4/28	WESTERN GULF	PACIFIC COD	ALL	CLOSED
5/29	CENTRAL/WESTERN GULF	ALL	H&L, BOT. TRAWL	BYCATCH
5/29	CENTRAL GULF	SABLEFISH	H&L	BYCATCH
5/29	COOK INLET	ALL	ALL	CLOSED
5/29	EAST/WEST YAKUTAT	ALL	H&L, TRAWL	BYCATCH
5/30	WESTERN GULF	PACIFIC COD	ALL	CLOSED
6/5-6/6	COOK INLET	ALL	ALL	OPENED
7/1	CENTRAL/WESTERN GULF	ALL	H&L, BOT. TRAWL	BYCATCH
7/12	CENTRAL GULF	SABLEFISH	H&L	CLOSED
7/20	CENTRAL GULF	OTHER ROCKFISH	ALL	CLOSED
7/27	COOK INLET	ALL	POT	OPENED
7/30	CENTRAL GULF	SABLEFISH	TRAWL	CLOSED
8/3	WESTERN GULF	OTHER ROCKFISH	ALL	CLOSED
8/7	PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND	SABLEFISH	ALL	CLOSED
8/16	WESTERN GULF	OTHER ROCKFISH	ALL	OPENED
8/21	CENTRAL/WESTERN GULF	ALL	JIG/HAND TROLL	OPENED
8/22	COOK INLET	ALL	JIG/HAND TROLL	OPENED
8/30-8/31	COOK INLET	ALL	ALL	OPENED
8/31	WESTERN GULF	OTHER ROCKFISH	ALL	CLOSED
9/27	WESTERN GULF	OTHER ROCKFISH	NON H&L	OPENED
9/27	WESTERN GULF	SABLEFISH	TRAWL	OPENED
10/5	WESTERN GULF	OTHER ROCKFISH	ALL	CLOSED

¹ BYCATCH - Means that a fishery is open only to bycatch allowances. For state waters, bycatch is allowed when the incidentally caught species also open for directed fishing.
H&L - Hook-and-line gear.

to a point intersecting the west side of Cook Inlet at 59°58'30" N. lat., were closed to non-pelagic trawl gear on 29 March. These waters represent prime crab rearing habitat and a proposal has been submitted to permanently close these waters to non-pelagic trawl gear.

A federal regulation passed on 29 May permitted fishermen in federal waters to retain (within existing bycatch and prohibited species limits) groundfish incidentally caught by longline gear during the directed fishery openings for halibut. State regulations permit a twenty percent (by round weight) retention of incidentally caught groundfish, providing that the incidentally caught groundfish species are currently open to directed fishing. To allow Cook Inlet fishermen to legally retain groundfish species incidentally caught during commercial halibut openings, Cook Inlet was opened to longline gear for 24 hours during halibut openings on 5 June and 20 August.

Groundfish Area Registration

In addition to other licensing requirements (e.g. Coast Guard permit and ADF&G vessel number), commercial groundfish fishermen must obtain an area registration prior to operating commercial groundfish gear in state waters of Region II. Area registrations request, among other information, the area to be fished, the gear to be used, and the target species. Fishermen may be registered for only one state registration area at a time, but may change areas within a given calendar year. On 15 October, 166 fishermen were registered for Region II waters, with 86 fishermen registered for Cook Inlet, 70 registered for bottomfish in Prince William Sound, and 10 registered for the Central Gulf of Alaska. Fishermen participating in the Prince William Sound sablefish fishery were encouraged to obtain a groundfish area registration for Prince William Sound in addition to the Prince William Sound sablefish permit. Possessing a Prince William Sound area registration and a Prince William Sound sablefish permit, as well as a sablefish interim use (CFEC permit) card and a miscellaneous finfish interim use card (CFEC permit), allows a fisherman to retain both sablefish and miscellaneous groundfish in excess of the 20% incidental catch limits (see State statutes for further clarification).

Area registrations may specify several gear types. Of the 166 fishermen registered to date to fish Region II waters, 136 (82%) fishermen listed longline as a gear type, seven (4%) listed jig gear, five (3%) listed pot gear, five (3%) listed trawl gear, and thirteen (8%) listed a combination of gears.

CENTRAL REGION GROUND FISH HARVEST SUMMARY

While effort will decrease as winter weather intensifies, commercial groundfish fishermen will continue to make landings from Region II waters through the remainder of 1990. Through 15 October, 186 fishermen made 641 landings from state waters of Region II, delivering nearly 1.5 million lbs (round weight; 672 metric tons) of groundfish (Table 2). The majority of the 1990 harvest has been landed in directed fisheries for Pacific cod (836,280 lbs, or 56% of the 1990 total), rockfish (*Sebastes* and *Sebastes* species; 401,910 lbs, or 27% of the total), and sablefish (214,460 lbs, or 14% of the total). Additional groundfish species, primarily caught incidentally to the directed fisheries, include lingcod (*Ophiodon elongatus*; 13,460 lbs), pollock (*Theragra chalcogramma*; 8,920 lbs), flounders (4,400 lbs), and other groundfish (2,600 lbs).

Provided that all applicable licenses and permits are obtained, a single vessel may fish several gear types within a season or at the same time. Through 15 October, longline was the most prominent gear used to harvest groundfish from Region II waters as 178 vessels made 554 landings for 1.3 million lbs (89% of total). Jig and hand troll gear was used by 8 vessels making 15 landings for a total of 66,600 lbs (4% of region total). Four vessels using trawl gear made 67 landings for a total of 67,380 lbs (5% of Region harvest), while pot gear landed 26,206 lbs (2% of Region total).

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND SABLEFISH FISHERY

Fishermen must obtain a Prince William Sound Sablefish Fishery Permit prior to participating in the commercial fishery for sablefish in Prince William Sound.

Table 2. Catch and effort (dressed weight in pounds) in groundfish fisheries of Cook Inlet, Prince William Sound, and state waters of the Central Gulf of Alaska, 1989-1990.

YEAR	VESSELS	LAND- INGS	ROCK- FISH	SABLE- FISH	PACIFIC COD	FLAT- FISH	OTHER	LING- COD	TOTAL
COOK INLET									
1987	173	713	12,879	872	886,069	135,059	56,476	138	1,091,793
1988	59	172	4,193	86,087	216,510	50	636	127	307,603
1989	5	6	166	687	5,812				6,665
1990	55	110	570	2,696	239,554		1,674	112	244,606
1987	322	1,240	280,657	223,737	2,061,880	163,039	69,452	26,254	2,825,019
CENTRAL GULF OF ALASKA									
1987	109	294	168,895	35,925	763,819	867	4,559	25,522	999,587
1988	69	189	200,247	89,161	305,849	2,368	2,467	25,176	625,268
1989	23	54	50,907	10,585	28,928		389	7,026	97,835
1990	51	61	29,546	5,827	44,718		548	5,231	94,170
PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND									
1987	102	234	98,883	186,940	411,992	27,113	8,117	594	733,639
1988	81	277	113,356	218,806	319,728	15,457	13,363	1,338	682,048
1989	39	142	90,257	183,915	65,203	56	3,885	1,280	344,866
1990	102	471	83,621	205,932	552,003	4,403	9,289	8,117	1,143,237
REGION II TOTAL									
1987	322	1,240	280,657	223,737	2,061,880	163,039	69,452	26,254	2,825,019
1988	175	637	317,796	394,054	842,087	17,875	16,466	26,641	1,614,919
1989	59	201	141,600	195,187	99,943	56	4,274	8,306	449,366
1990	186	641	401,909	214,455	836,275	4,403	11,511	13,460	1,482,013

¹ Preliminary data reported through 15 October 1990. See text for area descriptions.

108 fishermen obtained permits in 1990, more than any other year to date. The Prince William Sound sablefish fishery was opened by regulation on 1 April and closed by Emergency Order on 7 August. The 205,900 lbs (100 metric tons; round weight) of sablefish harvested from Prince William Sound in 1990 was within the harvest guideline range of 40-140 metric tons (88,200 to 308,700 lbs; Table 3). The 255 landings recorded by 69 vessels in the Prince William Sound sablefish fishery was the highest on record and may reflect better reporting of landings by fishermen and processors, especially landings with small amounts of sablefish such as during directed halibut fisheries.

The mean price of sablefish paid to the fishermen depends upon fish size (based on one pound size increments), delivery condition (in the round, bled, headed-and-gutted) and quality (#1 or #2) upon delivery. Sablefish are generally delivered to the processor either in the round or as headed-and-gutted Eastern cut, and the price paid by the processor is usually made after converting the fish to dressed weight. The mean price of \$1.00/lb paid to the fishermen for dressed weight converts to a round weight value of \$0.67/lb, resulting in a total ex-vessel value of \$137,970 for the 1990 Prince William Sound sablefish harvest.

OTHER PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND GROUND FISH FISHERIES

Over 1.1 million lbs of groundfish (518 metric tons) were harvested from state waters of Prince William Sound during 1 January through 15 October 1990 (Table 4). While monthly harvest levels peaked at 292,420 lbs in April, many vessels either remained in, or shifted to, Prince William Sound after the 29 May closure of hook-and-line gear in other areas of and adjacent to the Gulf of Alaska. Eighteen percent of all groundfish harvested from Prince William Sound were sablefish (see above). Pacific cod comprised 48% (552,000 lbs; 250 MT) of the Prince William Sound groundfish harvest, reflecting positive market conditions for Pacific cod. Rockfish comprised 32% (363,490 lbs) of Prince William Sound groundfish landings, although rockfish were caught primarily as a bycatch to sablefish and Pacific cod. Other species that were also harvested primarily as a bycatch to Pacific cod or sablefish included lingcod (8,117 lbs), pollock (7,116 lbs), flounders (4,400), and other groundfish (2,170 lbs).

Table 3. Historical harvest (round weight in pounds, with metric tons in parenthesis) and effort in the Prince William Sound sablefish fishery, 1985-1990.¹

YEAR	HARVEST ² (lbs)	VESSELS	LANDINGS	PRICE (\$/lb)	EX-VESSEL VALUE	PERMITS ISSUED
1985	383,285 (173 MT)	29	108			
1986	189,852 (86 MT)	32	36			88
1987	205,345 (93 MT)	71	120	\$0.66	\$135,528	116
1988	220,230 (99 MT)	54	145	\$0.99	\$218,030	76
1989	184,400 (83 MT)	25	95	\$0.80	\$147,520	86
1990	205,230 (93 MT)	69	255	\$0.67	\$137,974	108

¹ Preliminary data.

² Harvest is reported as round weight in pounds.
MT = round weight in metric tons.

Table 4. Catch (round weight in pounds) and effort by Region II reporting area in groundfish fisheries during 1 January through 15 October 1990.

MONTH	VESSELS	LAND- INGS	ROCK- FISH	SABLE- FISH	PACIFIC COD	FLAT- FISH	OTHER	LING- COD	TOTAL
<u>PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND</u>									
JANUARY	**	**	63		55,822		269		56,154
FEBRUARY	**	**	8,522		36,311				44,833
MARCH	6	8	3,898		20,241	40	130	293	24,602
APRIL	47	126	62,863	77,022	140,694	496	7,937	3,407	292,419
MAY	47	91	51,868	47,186	76,004	258	847	3,899	180,062
JUNE	35	85	56,121	45,481	16,140	202		46	117,990
JULY	21	68	76,917	23,068	69,912	266			170,163
AUGUST	26	58	46,411	13,175	100,339	1,968			161,893
SEPTEMBER	17	30	56,830		34,318	1,173	106	472	92,899
OCTOBER	**	**			2,222				2,222
TOTAL	102	471	83,621	205,932	552,003	4,403	9,289	8,117	1,143,237
<u>COOK INLET</u>									
JANUARY	4	13			31,828				31,828
FEBRUARY	**	**			2,134				2,134
MARCH	0	0							0
APRIL	**	**			12,243				12,243
MAY	35	69	133	2,410	172,588		1,674	100	176,905
JUNE	17	18	437	286	12,427				13,150
JULY	0	0							0
AUGUST	4	4			1,314			12	1,326
SEPTEMBER	**	**			7,020				7,020
OCTOBER	0	0							0
TOTAL	55	110	570	2,696	239,554	0	1,674	112	244,606
<u>CENTRAL GULF - "J"</u>									
JANUARY	0	0							0
FEBRUARY	**	**	101		1,903		125		2,129
MARCH	7	11	29,238		5,718		280	3,974	39,210
APRIL	**	**	207	19					226
MAY	18	18	3,550	3,730	20,963		143	193	28,579
JUNE	21	22	2,596	2,078	2,592			266	7,532
JULY	0	0							0
AUGUST	5	5	1,950		253			594	2,797
SEPTEMBER	**	**	204					204	408
OCTOBER	**	**			13,289				13,289
TOTAL	51	61	29,546	5,827	44,718	0	548	5,231	94,170

** - Denotes confidential data as per State of Alaska Statute 16.05.815.

COOK INLET GROUND FISH HARVEST

Over 244,600 lbs of groundfish (111 metric tons) were harvested from state waters of Cook Inlet during 1 January through 15 October 1990 (Table 4). Pacific cod comprised 98% (239,550 lbs; 109 MT) of the Cook Inlet harvest, which primarily reflected positive market conditions for Pacific cod. Other species were harvested primarily as a bycatch to Pacific cod or halibut and included sablefish (2670 lbs), pollock (1340 lbs), rockfish (570 lbs), lingcod (112 lbs), and other groundfish (339 lbs). Monthly harvest levels of Pacific cod peaked at 172,590 lbs (72% of the total Cook Inlet harvest of Pacific cod) in May, then declined sharply following the 29 May closure of hook-and-line fisheries. After the 27 July reopening of Cook Inlet to pot gear, a limited number of fishermen converted to pot gear and will probably continue to target on Pacific cod through the remainder of 1990.

HARVEST FROM STATE WATERS OF THE CENTRAL GULF OF ALASKA

For these reporting purposes, state waters of the Central Gulf of Alaska include waters within three miles of shore located between Cape Suckling (144° W. long.) and Cape Douglas (58°52' N. lat.), and excluding waters inside Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet. During 1 January to 15 October 1990, 94,170 lbs (round weight, 43 metric tons) of groundfish were harvested from state waters of the Central Gulf of Alaska by 51 vessels making 61 landings. Pacific cod comprised 47 percent (44,720 lbs), and rockfish comprised 40 percent (37,850 lbs), of landings from the Central Gulf area. The remainder of the harvest from the Central Gulf was comprised of sablefish (5,830 lbs), lingcod (5,230 lbs), pollock (460 lbs), and other groundfish (80 lbs).

PRODUCT VALUE

Product value was calculated by averaging price paid for product after converting both the price paid and the product weight to round weight equivalents. The ex-vessel value for groundfish harvested from state waters of Region II totals \$476,230 for the 1.5 million pounds delivered from 1

January to 15 October (Table 5). Pacific cod had the greatest total ex-vessel value at \$192,340, paid out at an average of \$0.23/lb. Sablefish deliveries were paid the highest price-per-pound at an average price of \$.67/lb (\$1.00/lb dressed), and generated a total ex-vessel value of \$143,680. Rockfish landings were paid an average of \$0.35/lb for a total ex-vessel value of \$132,630. Other ex-vessel values were \$4,710 for lingcod, \$790 for flounders, and \$2070 for other groundfish.

GROUND FISH FISHERIES OUTLOOK

Fisheries for groundfish, including Pacific cod, should continue to develop as long as market conditions remain strong. With the exception of Prince William Sound, which is considered internal waters of the State of Alaska, openings and closures of groundfish fisheries in state waters of Region II will continue to reflect actions in the adjacent federal waters of the Gulf of Alaska. In 1990, fishermen were surprised by the impact of prohibited species catch limits which resulted in closures of hook-and-line fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska on 29 May. It is anticipated that in 1991, greater efforts will be made in the Gulf of Alaska and other areas to minimize interactions with prohibited species by altering either gear, method fished, or area fished. An example is the pot permit currently in effect in Cook Inlet which encourages fishermen to develop gear which avoids shellfish and halibut capture while harvesting Pacific cod. Another example is the proposal before the 1990 Alaska Board of Fisheries which restricts non-pelagic trawl gear to areas not known as critical crab habitat. Fishing strategies in both federal and state waters might also be severely modified if the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council adopts Individual Transferrable Quotas (ITQ's) for the Gulf of Alaska sablefish fishery, and subsequently for other groundfish fisheries. However, even if adopted in the near future, ITQ's would probably not be implemented in time for the 1990 season.

Table 5. Product value for groundfish harvested from Region II waters during 1 January to 15 October 1990.¹

<u>FISH GROUP</u>	<u>ROUND WEIGHT</u>	<u>AVERAGE PRICE</u>	<u>PRODUCT VALUE</u>
ROCKFISH	401,909	\$.33	\$132,630
SABLEFISH	214,455	\$.67	\$143,680
PACIFIC COD	836,275	\$.23	\$192,340
FLOUNDERS	4,403	\$.18	\$790
LINGCOD	13,400	\$.35	\$4,710
OTHER GROUND FISH	11,511	\$.18	\$2,070
- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -
REGION II TOTAL	1,482,013		\$476,230

¹ Preliminary data for the period 1 January to 15 October 1990. Round weight is calculated in pounds. Average price is based on the average price for the region after converting both the product and the price paid to round weight equivalents.

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