

sole would be expected to result in adverse economic and operational impacts. This measure can be interpreted as a displacement of revenue tonnage. A full retention requirement for rock sole would have the greatest effect, and this requirement would result in less than a five percent displacement in revenue tonnage for all catcher vessel classes.

Alternative 3 would delay implementation of IR/IU flatfish rules for up to 3 years. Delaying implementation will postpone the economic consequences discussed under Alternative 1 and will allow the benefits of the economic activity associated with the operation of these vessels to accrue to vessel operators for the period of the delay. A delay in implementation could also provide time for assessment of the potential for

rationalization within the IR/IU flatfish fisheries. These fisheries are characterized by a "race for fish" mode of operation that exacerbates the economic impacts of the IR/IU rules. Rationalization may ease some aspects of the "race for fish", but may not eliminate all aspects because IR/IU flatfish are targeted during specific roe seasons and times of highest quality. However, possibilities for fleet consolidation or cooperative operations that might ease the economic burden of IR/IU flatfish rules could be explored during a delay in implementation. In the past several years, discards of yellowfin sole have been trending downward. Industry sources indicate that they have been doing all that they can to utilize all the IR/IU flatfish that they harvest and are actively attempting to develop markets for smaller fish.

Alternative 4 exempts fisheries from IR/IU flatfish regulations if flatfish discards are less than 5 percent of total groundfish catch. This analysis used two different estimates of the discard rates for determination of the IR/IU exemption. One estimate is based on a weighted average discard rate for 1995–2001, and a second estimate is based on a weighted average discard rate for 1999–2001. Discards exceed 5 percent in most flatfish fisheries and in Pacific cod trawl fisheries in the BSAI. The revenue reductions of this alternative are similar to those of Alternative 1.

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