

sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis, WA (46°53'18" N. lat.) with appropriate IPHC licenses may retain incidental halibut landings up to 150 lbs (68 kg) (dressed weight) of halibut for every 1,000 lbs (454 kg) (dressed weight) of sablefish landed and up to two additional halibut in excess of the 150 lb (68 kg) per 1,000 lb (454 kg) ratio per landing. Halibut may not be on board a vessel that has any gear other than longline gear on board (e.g., pot or trawl gear).

Voluntary "C-shaped" Closure off Washington for the Sablefish and Salmon Troll Fisheries

In 2003, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife developed and NMFS implemented a "C-shaped" Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area (YRCA) to protect yelloweye rockfish, an overfished species (see 50 CFR 660.304 (d)). An area off Washington, which is either closed or requested as an area to be avoided, has been adjusted each year since 2000 in an effort to protect yelloweye rockfish. For 2003, the "C-shaped" YRCA is a mandatory closed area for recreational groundfish and Pacific halibut fishing. To further protect yelloweye rockfish, the Pacific Council has recommended that the "C-shaped" YRCA in the North Coast subarea (Washington Marine Area 3) also be designated as an area to be avoided (a voluntary closure) by commercial fixed gear (longline) sablefish fishermen and salmon trollers to protect yelloweye rockfish. Much of the YRCA is already closed to commercial groundfish hook-and-line access, including the fixed gear sablefish fishery, by the non-trawl RCA.

South Of 40°10' N. Latitude

Based on the new observer program information on bycatch rates in the trawl fishery for groundfish, the Pacific Council recommended changes to the boundary lines for the trawl RCA along with trip limit changes. In particular, new estimates of bocaccio rockfish bycatch in the trawl fishery south of 40°10' N. lat. are higher than previously estimated. At this higher bycatch rate, the OY for bocaccio rockfish would be reached before the end of the year. In order to slow the rate of bocaccio rockfish interception and align the RCA with the area where bocaccio are predominately intercepted, the offshore trawl RCA boundary will be shifted (see next section).

While most of the trawl trip limits will remain as previously scheduled, the trip limits for DTS complex and petrale sole will be increased. The trip limit for the DTS complex will be

increased to allow access to more abundant groundfish stocks in times and areas where bocaccio rockfish are less likely to be intercepted. The petrale sole sublimit with flatfish will be increased to allow retention of petrale sole caught in flatfish trawls that is currently being discarded. For the DTS complex, periods 3 (May-June), 5 (September-October) and 6 (November-December) will all be increased and period 4 (July-August) will increase above the revised limits for these other periods. Period 4 (July-August) limits are increased because the trawl RCA is shifted during period 4 to between 200 fm (366 m) and the shoreline, further reducing the likelihood of intercepting bocaccio. These higher period 4 limits follow a management strategy of using less restrictive limits when conservation areas are more restrictive or more conservative. The sublimit for petrale sole in the flatfish trip limit will be increased for May-October while the overall flatfish limit will remain as previously scheduled. The previously scheduled 10,000 lb (4,536 kg) per 2 month sublimit for petrale sole was not allowing vessels to retain all of the petrale sole taken in flatfish trawls, resulting in petrale sole discard. By increasing the petrale sublimit while the overall flatfish limit remains the same, more petrale sole may be retained per fishing trip, resulting in less petrale sole discard and earlier attainment of the overall flatfish limit. By allowing earlier attainment of flatfish limits, total trawl hours will be reduced, thereby also lowering the likelihood of intercepting bocaccio rockfish. Incidental catch of bocaccio rockfish is expected to remain neutral or decrease slightly as a result of the increased sublimit for petrale sole. In addition, language was added to period 6 (November-December) to allow the trawl RCA to be modified to incorporate petrale sole fishing grounds. These petrale sole areas have not yet been developed, but will be announced in the **Federal Register** once they are available.

Trawl RCA Restrictions South of 40°10' N. lat.

For May-June, the trawl RCA will remain as previously scheduled for the May-June cumulative limit period until coordinates for a new 200 fm (366 m) boundary line are announced in a future **Federal Register**. The Pacific Council's GMT recommended moving the trawl RCA in order to better match the depths where bocaccio are found. However, NMFS cannot implement a new 200 fm (366 m) boundary line until coordinates have been developed and reviewed by the State of California and enforcement.

NMFS estimates that this new trawl RCA boundary will be implemented in mid-May 2003.

In addition, measures to slow the incidental catch of bocaccio rockfish inshore of the trawl RCA are being implemented by prohibiting trawling inshore of 200 fm (366 m) during period 4 (July-August). Currently, the offshore line is at 250 fm (457 m) between 40°10' N. lat. and 38° N. lat. and at 150 fm (274 m) from 38° N. lat. to the US/Mexico border. For May-June and September-December, the inshore boundary line in the trawl RCA south of 40°10' N. lat. will remain the same (60 fm (110 m) between 40°10' N. lat. and 34°27' N. lat., 100 fm (183 m) from 34°27' N. lat. to the US/Mexico border), while the offshore boundary line will move to 200 fm (366 m) as soon as announced in a future **Federal Register**. In addition, language was added to period 6 (November-December) to allow the trawl RCA to be modified to incorporate petrale sole fishing grounds. These petrale sole areas have not yet been developed, but will be announced in the **Federal Register** once they are available.

Limited Entry Trawl Gear Limits for DTS South of 40°10' N. lat.

For May-December, the 2-month cumulative limits for the DTS trawl fishery occurring south of 40°10' N. lat. will be increased from the May-June period as follows: Dover sole will be increased from 25,000 lb (11,340 kg) to 31,000 lb (14,061 kg) for May-June and September-December and 35,000 lb (15,876 kg) for July-August; shortspine thornyhead will be increased from 2,400 lb (1,089 kg) to 2,800 lb (1,270 kg) for May-June and September-December and 3,100 lb (1,406 kg) for July-August; longspine thornyhead will be increased from 9,000 lb (4,082 kg) to 14,000 lb (6,350 kg) for May-June and September-December and 16,000 lb (7,257 kg) for July-August; and sablefish will be increased from 7,000 lb (3,175 kg) to 10,000 lb (4,536 kg) for May-June and September-December and 12,000 lb (5,443 kg) for July-August.

Limited Entry Trawl Gear Sublimits for Petrale sole South of 40°10' N. lat.

For May-October, the 2-month cumulative sublimit for petrale sole landed with the 'all other flatfish' category south of 40°10' N. lat. will be increased from 10,000 lb (4,536 kg) to 20,000 lb (9,072 kg).

Corrections

There are errors in the final rule (68 FR 11182, March 7, 2003) that need correcting and paragraphs that need clarification, including: a correction to