

PROPOSAL 196

5 AAC 28.130 Lawful gear for Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area.

Reduce the minimum inside diameter of escape rings in commercial sablefish pots to three and three-eighths inches, as follows:

5 AAC 28.130 (f) is amended to read:

(f) In the Eastern Gulf of Alaska Area, pots may not be longlined, except that pots may be longlined in the Northern Southeast Inside Subdistrict and Southern Southeast Inside Subdistrict sablefish fishery. In a directed fishery for sablefish, pots used to take sablefish must have at least two circular escape rings with a minimum inside diameter of [THREE AND THREE-FOURTHS] **three and three-eighths inches** installed on opposing vertical or sloping walls.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Escape ring size for sablefish pots:

The ADFG has conducted escape ring studies aimed at minimizing bycatch of small immature sablefish to reduce discard mortality and maximize catches of larger, more economically desirable fish. From this research, ADFG has identified 3 and ½ inches as biologically optimal. While we prefer a 3 and ½ inch escape ring specification over the existing regulation, from an economic perspective 3 and ½ inches is not small enough. Both the existing regulation and the size proposed by the Department still allow too many sablefish to escape, given the current size composition of the resource and state of the sablefish markets, to maintain the economic viability of the fishery. By way of background: strong year classes from the late 90s are aging out of the population and three (possibly four) historically large year classes now comprise 75% of the sablefish spawning stock biomass (fishery wide). Rapid increases in coastwide sablefish quotas (quadrupled since 2016) based on these large year classes of small fish have collapsed the sablefish market, reducing prices paid to fishermen across all size categories. To maintain the economic viability of the fishery, fishermen want to retain some sablefish smaller than will remain in a pot with a 3 ½ or 3 and ¾ inch escape rings. Since current regulations allow hook and line fishermen to release or retain sablefish at the surface without specifying a release or retention length, it seems rational and equitable to allow pot fishermen to also self-identify the appropriate release size via escape ring specifications. ALFA and SEAFSA request consideration by the Board of the smaller escape ring size while the population is composed of small fish and market conditions are weak.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain. Yes-- The proposal was requested by a group of fishermen who participate in the State waters sablefish fishery and discussed with representatives from other Southeast AK fishermen organizations. After considerable vetting and discussion with ADFG, ALFA and SEAFSA decided to submit the proposal and we will discuss the proposal with local ACs at upcoming meetings.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association and Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Alliance (EF-F24-062)
