



*Wild, Natural & Sustainable*

Halibut/Sablefish Committee  
Wednesday, November 10, 2021  
8:30-11:00 AM AKDT

*Draft Minutes*

The meeting was called to order at 8:30am by Chair Peggy Parker.

**Members present:** Chair Peggy Parker, Vice-Chair William Sullivan, Mark Callahan, Bob Barnett, Kendall Whitney, Jessica Keplinger, Jim Lagucik, Hank Baumgart

**Absent:** John Jensen, Jim Hubbard

Quorum was met.

**Others present:** RFM- Jeff Regnart and Susan Marks. ASMI staff- Ashley Heimbigner, John Burrows, Jeremy Woodrow, Leah Krafft, Michelle Kaelke

**Approval of Agenda**

A motion was made by Barnett, seconded by Lagucik to approve the agenda as written. The motion passed unanimously.

**Approval of minutes from November 11, 2020.**

There were no corrections to the minutes. A motion was made by Callahan, seconded by Lagucik to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Sustainability/Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) Certification Update- Jeff Regnart  
RFM Program Manager and Susan Marks Certification Advisor**

RFM certification program covers 28 species and 9 fisheries.

RFM is now under new ownership. From 2010 to 2020 ASMI provided oversight and financial support for RFM. As of 2021 RFM is a stand-alone 501(c)3 non-profit foundation- Certified Seafood Collaborative (CSC) Foundation with 10 board members who are familiar with Alaska fishing industry.

RFM is reliable as the standards are based on United Nation's FAO reference docs that are stable and evolve with science.

As of 2022 RFM will be fully mature and will continue to work on market acceptance.

Through ASMI's support over 10 years, the RFM program has spent \$1 million on halibut and sablefish fisheries. RFM now needs to be funded by the seafood industry to cover admin/staff and certification costs.

The cost is calculated:

For FY23 and beyond...

\*Program cost are apportioned by ex-vessel values (5-year average)

\*One time "buy-in fee" of \$5k with annual fees of no less than \$5k

\*Current overhead every \$50 million of ex-vessel value = approximately \$9

Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification is on based on logo use and RFM is a flat rate and not based on logo use.

Callahan: what is the need for another certification program?

RFM charges no logo fees and is focused on responsible sustainably managed fishery and the seafood's origin. RFM is the first organization to be recognized by Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI).

Chair Parker: Is Iceland fisheries covered under RFM certification?

Yes, RFM is collaborating with Iceland. We share the same standard (assessors), but not the same logo. Norway is also interested.

Sablefish is requesting for MSC coverage in Chatham Strait, however, sablefish in Chatham Strait is already covered by RFM certification.

Most halibut are primarily sold in the domestic market and most sablefish goes to China and Japan, where certification is still emerging. RFM has good coverage in Japan.

**RFM Request:** A commitment from the fishing industry is needed within the next four months to stay with the RFM certification. Consider going only with RFM and save certification and logo fees. Do you want to continue with MSC as there are no guarantees that they won't change the playing field in the future?

Crab only has RFM certification and never went with MSC.

Keplinger: Retailers need to be educated.

Marks: Many companies are not yet making use of the free RFM logo use. RFM has a one-page information sheet available.

Riley: Is RFM certification cover Clarence Straits fisheries?

Regnart: All halibut and sablefish certification have statewide coverage.

Barnett: ASMI is pulling financial support for RFM program?

Regnart: RFM has a MOA with ASMI to continue assistance in promoting RFM (website, trade booths, pay for Susan's sustainability efforts).

Lagucik: Sustainability is important to consumers. Encouraged with RFM's future and promoting Alaska as the origin.

**Communications Update: Ashley Heimbigner, ASMI's Communication Director**

ASMI has combined our two websites (industry and consumer content) to one site: [alaskaseafood.org](http://alaskaseafood.org) which makes it less confusing and easier to access for all parties. New Resource Library (i.e. nutrition, species fact sheets, recipes) is available on the site with easy access in the footer and a Search feature.

Communication support for Whitefish during Oct 2020-Sept 2021 was very successful in the domestic market with media and influencers.

75% of consumer want more info: Where the seafood product comes from and how to cook it, so ASMI is working on telling "a story."

Photos are available on ASMI's Alaska Seafood Media Library

Committee viewed the new *Sea to Table* halibut video showing the complete process from catching to processing, to cooking and eating it.

**Question/Ask:** ASMI needs this committee's help in getting footage (photos/video) of the sablefish harvesting method—pot caught or long line and which region should this footage come from? Covid has been a challenge to get footage.

Callahan: Chatham Strait has 52 sablefish permits and inside waters.

Keplinger: Suggested to talk to Glacier Seafoods. More vessels are moving to pot caught, so provide footage of both methods or just pot caught.

Baumgart: Can assist with obtaining footage this spring.

**Old Business**

**Follow up technical program update with John Burrows, ASMI's Seafood Technical Director.**

Seafood technical program's goal is to align with the industry and position the program as the lead technical and scientific information source for seafood quality, safety, nutrition and health benefits, sustainability and science and regulatory efforts.

Outreach and Resource Development

\*Revamped the Alaska Seafood guide 101 brochure that provides intro and overview of AK species and terminology

\*Pacific Halibut and Sablefish fact sheets are now available

\*New consumer guide/fact sheet for use of whole salmon is now available. Halibut and Sablefish consumer fact sheets are in the works.

\*Other technical fact sheets: Chalky Halibut and Jellied Sablefish (internal education use only)

- \*New Quality of Alaska Frozen Seafood—fact sheet and video
- \*Nutrition video coming
- \*Website overhaul and moving technical material and species fact sheets to new website is complete

#### Applied Investigation and Research

NOAA SK Grant for nutrient and contaminant database for Alaska seafood

\$300k awarded for a 2-year project through August 2023

Progress to date: Advisory Committee formed, labs are identified and species have been chosen. Halibut will be included. Sablefish is likely to be included in the project.

Database info will include: prep/storage, product form (fillet, round), harvest/handling (bleed), quality (skin color) and various harvest area.

Goal: 60 samples per species to go to DEC and contract labs

Foundation for Food Agriculture Research (FFAR) Seafood By-Product utilization grant

Assess nutritional content of protein isolates from seafood

Oregon State University

3-year project \$667k grant from multiple sources and ASMI will contribute \$10k

Chair Parker: When will the final results be available?

Burrows: 2024

Another research OSU project under the SK grant is in progress to determine shelf life of frozen seafood stored in different freezers and has a Jan 2023 completion date. ASMI Technical is serving on the advisory committee and Alaska Coho and Sablefish will be studied.

Another OSU project is Chef Sensory Evaluation of Frozen Alaska Seafood with chefs and their understanding of quality advantages.

Coordinate with Culinary Institute and will start in early 2022.

#### Trade Education and Regulatory

Developing collaborative technical topic sheets with Sea Grant for industry use such as: Nematodes (parasites) fact sheet completed. Will be working on other fact sheets such as shelf life, mercury and environmental issues.

Wrote an article for National Fisherman (Sept issue) on Alaska's fish ticket/eLanding system in context of traceability.

Have submitted various comments to regulatory agencies and authorities on issues such as supply chain constraints, plant based products, wild fish being certified as organic, China's new import/export regulations, and live fish transport.

Callahan: Regarding wild fish being labeled organic. We don't know what wild fish eat?

Burrows: The labeling of wild fish as organic is not likely going anywhere.

Alaska Research Consortium: Supporting education and workforce training for Alaska's seafood industry. ASMI is providing support through partnership, outreach, and curriculum development.

**Other efforts**

Worked on behalf of industry on health certification and trade barrier issues with NOAA and other authorities.

Updated talking points on radionuclides from Japan's Fukushima nuclear disaster and fall out.

Sustainable packaging options.

**Status of (1) quality issues in small sablefish and (2) handling materials for pot-caught sablefish**

Chair Parker: Last year there was a concern about small sablefish being introduced into the market. The Council did not take action on allowing small sablefish to be released.

Callahan: Small fish are cyclical.

Has the quality of pot-caught sablefish improved? The move to pots was to get away from whale predation of long line gear.

Baumgart: Have not seen any quality difference between pot and long line caught fish. The length of the trip seems to have more of an impact.

Chair Parker: Committee discussed issue and no need to move forward.

**Interest in live sablefish marketing**

Lagucik: Don't see a lot of demand of live sablefish.

Sullivan: Not a lot of interest in new products this year due to Covid.

**NPFMC (North Pacific Fishery Management Council) Report by Chair Parker**

April meeting: The council declined to act on the request to allow the release of small sablefish.

June meeting: Council and scientists were criticized for declaring Alaska Sablefish as one stock, and not two stock. Council increased that cap of sablefish bycatch for the trawl fishery. This was a big hit to our industry.

October meeting: Pacific caught trawl dropped halibut bycatch by 25%. Good news.

Upcoming December 7<sup>th</sup> meeting: Looking forward to final action on Halibut Abundance Based Management and by-catch in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands.

**IPHC Report (International Pacific Halibut Commission)-Update on halibut landed, new staff members, etc. by Chair Parker**

90% of Alaska halibut has been caught coast wide caught this year and there 3 million pounds of halibut quota still available to be caught. The halibut season has been extended to Dec 7<sup>th</sup>.

IPHC staff changes: Barbara Hutniczak is the new Branch Manager of the Fisheries Policy Branch. Keith Jernigan, Assistant Director has left and currently there is no replacement.

Piera Carpe, statistical researcher has left and currently has no replacement.

Callahan: Questioning the extension of the halibut season.

Due to major storms this fall it's good for the fishing fleet to be able to fill the quota, however, it may not be practical for AK processors to stay open for few deliveries and falling prices.

Also, there is an incoming of farmed fish, Norway wild fish and East coast year-round fisheries steadily flowing product into the market.

Canadians are strongly in favor of a year round fishery. Current IPHC ED is open to the idea of year round fishery.

### **New Business**

NPFMC and IPHC actions concerning incidental trawl bycatch are relevant to the various sustainability certifications.

Chair Parker: The councils and scientists don't see bycatch as a conservation issue or a threat to the resource. Bycatch is a primary use and taken off the top of the quota before other allocations.

Chair Parker: Discussion of the trawls staying out of the nursery areas.

**Suggestion:** See if RFM can put pressure on the regulating bodies to promote sustainable and scientifically based decisions?

**Action:** Chair Parker will discuss with Regnart/RFM

### **Executive Director's Questions for the Halibut-Sablefish Committee**

#### **I. What are the top 3 opportunities you see for your species in international markets?**

With current pricing relatively low on sablefish, we see one great opportunity for international markets and that is to increase awareness of Alaska sablefish in general, but particularly in China. For halibut, Norway/Russia product and their price points are set at a level that will undercut our efforts, so while we find value in current ASMI programs that increase awareness of the availability and distinction of Alaska halibut, we don't see a need to expand the budget on those now.

## **II. What are the top 3 opportunities you see for your species in the US domestic market?**

Given the likelihood of increased sablefish catches in the coming year, and that sablefish prices remained steady this year among many other Alaska species that increased, the best opportunity for expanding and strengthening that market is in the U.S. domestic retail sector. We see three areas to focus on.

1. Retail/club/direct to consumer focus. Price is key in these sectors, and programs should focus on value, taste, nutrition. Midwest and mountain states would be a good place to start, where ASMI has had successful promotions in the past.
2. Brand recognition — taste, preparations, nutrition (Omega 3s) and value of Alaska sablefish needs much higher awareness nationally, east of the West Coast. It is currently used in small volumes in ethnic regions across the country, i.e. Asian and or Jewish markets, and momentum can build on that.
3. Explore ready to eat options for sablefish. We know challenges of developing new products at the processor level, but understanding more about market demand for a heat-and-eat frozen retail package at different retail sectors, what recipes are working in which markets, etc. may help to expand markets for new ready to eat products made from sablefish.

## **III. Please identify any areas where ASMI may be able to provide technical support for your species: i.e. quality, products, packaging, health, safety, nutritional.**

The committee is satisfied and extremely grateful for John Burrow's work on these issues. The committee is especially appreciative to hear about two of the OSU studies that are currently using sablefish and halibut.

## **IV. For your species, what issues or topics (if any) can ASMI help with messaging and or outreach?**

Development of new how-to-cooking videos for sablefish for consumers.

## **V. What challenges/threats do you anticipate for your species in the next year or near future?**

Staying on message with regards to nutritional benefits, sustainability, taste and availability given the swings in price over time with both sablefish and halibut.

## **Election of new Chair and Vice Chair for 2-year term**

Peggy Parker-Chair

Bill Sullivan-Vice Chair

The members of the committee appreciate the broad knowledge and representation on other committees that Parker brings to this committee.

**Good of the order**

A list of committee member terms and contact information will be distributed by ASMI staff.

**Adjourn**

Motion was made by Sullivan, seconded by Callahan to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 am.