



*Wild, Natural & Sustainable*  
Halibut/Sablefish Committee  
Wednesday, November 11, 2020  
Beginning 8:00AM AKDT

Dial-In Information  
Call in number: +1 253 215 8782  
Meeting ID: 838 7061 4285

*Draft minutes*

I. Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 8:00am by Chair Peggy Parker.

**Members present:** Peggy Parker, Jessica Keplinger, Kendall Whitney, Jim Lagucik, Bob Barnett, Mark Callahan, William Sullivan

**Absent:** John Jensen, Jim Hubbard

Quorum was met.

**Others present:** Arianna Elnes, Jeremy Woodrow, Sarah Cannard, Allan Kimball, Alice Ottoson McKeen, Ashley Heimbigner, Garret Evridge, Jes Hathaway, Julia Ying, Linda Kozak, Michael Kohan

Ray Ruitta gave a message in honor of Veteran's Day.

II. Approval of Agenda

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

III. Approval of minutes from October 8, 2019

- A. There were no corrections to the minutes.

**A motion was made by Lagujik, seconded by Callahan to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.**

IV. Chair Remarks

- A. There were no chair remarks.

V. Public Comment

- A. Introductions were made.
- B. There was no public comment.

VI. New Business

A. Seafood Technical Project Update – Michael Kohan; ASMI Seafood Technical Director

1. Last year there was talk of the need for support materials on Halibut and Sablefish
  - a. Now have a Chalky Halibut fact sheet, and a halibut species fact sheet available soon.
  - b. There have been quality handling videos made for salmon; however, halibut and sablefish are harvested differently. There has not been a lot of interest in creating separate videos from industry, but Kohan asked the committee for feedback on creating quality handling videos for harvesting halibut and sablefish.
    - i. Barnett thanked Kohan for a great job with the nice new materials. Regarding quality handling materials on halibut/sablefish, he said that fishermen are held to high quality standards, and know that if they don't deliver a quality product they are not going to get paid. It may be better to either not produce the same for halibut and sablefish, or produce reminder materials, rather than how-to's.
    - ii. Jes Hathaway echoed in the chat that a good use of video would be to show

consumers how well halibut and sablefish are handled.

- iii. Clampitt offered that it looks like there is going to be a raise in sablefish quota, and we may begin seeing a drop in quality because there won't be time to take care of it. It may actually be good to have quality reminders for fishermen.
  - iv. Callahan asked about pot versus longline caught sablefish quality.
  - v. Clampitt talked about the efficiencies of pots, and the learning curve in quality handling. He also mentioned a proposed regulatory change that is up for regulatory approval in April, that would allow for the release of smaller sablefish and for a raise in size grade.
  - vi. Kohan summarized that it may be interesting to create some quality handling materials for pot caught sablefish. Clampitt said that that could be very useful. Callahan said it might be interesting for consumers too, as well as longline care and quality.
2. Barnett asked if there were any studies about bleeding sablefish. Kohan said she would look into it.
  3. Keplinger said there has been an observance of softer flesh. It could be water temperature, but there is also speculation that it is due to handling with pots.
  4. Keplinger also added that this year there was a delivery of mixed fish with halibut and sablefish, and that it caused what's called "stinky fish." It gets rejected by the customer down the road, and she asked if there might be a way to prevent it.
    - a. Callahan said that in the 80s and 90s there was a big issue of mixed fish. It is caused by sablefish scales getting into the gills of halibut.
    - b. Parker asked Kohan what the best avenue for prevention communication would be.

- c. Kohan said that the best avenue would be to work with the processor to expand the message. In terms of material, the best thing would be something tangible and easy to digest, similar to the chalky halibut fact sheet, to make sure there are legitimate places to look for more information if they are interested.
  - d. Clampitt said there are a lot of people who are concerned with volume, so if someone has a small boat with one hold, they are going to mix the fish. The message needs to be from the processors that the fishermen need to do a good job or they're not going to get a good price.
5. Sullivan said that he saw a boat delivering live sablefish, and there could be tremendous opportunity for high quality sablefish.
- a. Callahan said there have been some farmed sablefish that have had some live markets, and that opportunities for markets are definitely there.
  - b. There was discussion about a live market for sablefish. Clampitt said that there is a live market active in California, where fishermen are getting quite a bit money. He said sablefish are tough fish, and can be kept alive for a week in a tank.
  - c. Lagucik said they have not had demand for live sablefish. He likes the idea, if it's a realistic market. He's not sure how many high-end white table restaurants they're going to be visiting in 2021.
  - d. Jeremy Woodrow mentioned there is currently transportation logistics in place for live crab. He's not sure the logistics of live sablefish, but there may be logistics in place to piggy back off of.
  - e. Sullivan said that delivering live on shore is as good as delivering frozen at sea. Lagucik agreed that live is as good as line caught, and that

- people would be willing to pay for it. If we could tell that story, there could be a viable market.
- f. Parker asked if there was anything they would like to pass to the board to work on this subject.
  - g. Kohan said she had looked into this in the past, in terms of live transport of fish, and there are some large regulatory hurdles. She will pass that information onto the committee, which would be valuable before bringing it to the board.
  - h. Callahan said that a long time ago Canada had set up an operation for live, wild halibut. He asked Kohan if there was any material on if that sort of operation could be set up in Alaska. Parker offered to work with Kohan on finding historical information and sharing it with the committee.
  - i. Barnett added that there could be a large market overseas. It could be a huge opportunity to help bounce back from covid. Parker added that Barnett is perfectly positioned, as the Adak plant is 8 hours from Shanghai.
  - j. Sullivan mentioned that in Iceland they are building boats specifically for keeping fish alive.
6. Parker read a question from Jes Hathaway: Why are processors happy to get small sablefish?
- a. Clampitt answered it's because it's a great product and it's cheap. Keplinger added that Japan's demand for sablefish has remained steady during covid, while China's demand has significantly dropped. China was a 5, 7, 7+ market while Japan's was under 5, so it is good to have fish to fill that market.
  - b. Kohan added that the price and portions are amenable to the markets. Hathaway asked about how long it took to shift the market demand. The committee said they started talking about small sablefish about three years ago.
  - c. Barnett agreed that the price point has a lot to do with it. One of the biggest competitors is the

- Patagonia toothfish, but they like the sablefish better, and the lower price point helps.
7. Parker asked about quota, and if anyone could speak antidotally about the survey.
    - a. Clampitt said that the survey is record high. The scientists and statistical committee recommended it could go up as much as 54%.
  8. Sullivan asked about abundance-based management on the federal level for bycatch of halibut.
    - a. Parker said there was some progress at the October meeting of the council. It is now focused only for the bycatch for the Amendment 80 fleet. Though it is now for only 60% of the bycatch in the Bering Sea, that is the majority of it. Now the council is looking at the analysis of their plan on how best to reduce the bycatch. The council will take it up again in April.

#### B. Committee Roundtable

Parker recommended that rather than hold a committee roundtable discussion, the time be used instead to discuss the species committee key questions.

## VII. Key Questions

### 1. What opportunities or trends do you see for your species in international markets?

- There has been a steady increase in small sablefish. The traditional buyer of large sablefish can no longer afford large sablefish, driving demand for smaller fish.
- There is opportunity to push the nutritional benefits of sablefish, particularly Vitamin D, along with high levels of Omega-3 as consumers are much more concerned about fighting the virus and Vit D is recognized as important in that.
- There is going to be a high quota for sablefish, making it “the fish of the future.” Recommend ASMI push sablefish hard both domestically and abroad.

- Sablefish’s main competition is Patagonia Toothfish (also known as Chilean Sea Bass) in Southeast Asia, which is a major market competitor with sablefish.
- With the growing trend of “pantry loading” at retail, it's important to get the right product in the right form at the right price.
- Opportunity for live market sablefish and or/halibut

**2. What opportunities or trends do you see for your species in US domestic markets?**

- Opportunity for smoked sablefish to be a domestic competitor in the lox market
- There is demand for sablefish fillets, and it would be great if national grocery chains could run promotions at retail.
- Sablefish has typically been a “restaurant fish.” Now consumers are going to be getting it differently, through Amazon/home delivery/direct to consumer/retail. Recommend looking for opportunities to hone in on the alternative distribution avenues to consumers.
- Driving the Alaska Seafood brand continues to be important. Need to stress “Alaska halibut” on any product form it comes in.
- Atlantic halibut has a year-round supply, causing challenges for frozen sales of Alaska halibut. Atlantic halibut also recently received MSC certification.

**3. How can ASMI provide technical support to improve health/safety or product types for export to destinations where these issues are a barrier to entry?**

- With the decrease at foodservice and increase in retail, there is an increase of consumers cooking fish for the first time. There is a lot of pressure on consumers in terms of both preparation and safety. Any information that we can provide consumers to give them confidence in food safety and preparation would be helpful.
- Also a need to look at packaging in order to comply with environmental regulations. There is a need for information on packaging that maintains fish quality, complies with both current and future environmental regulations and is cost effective.
- With increase in direct to consumer, there is a need for messaging on “what to look for” (to assure safety, meeting standards in packaging and temperature consistency, etc.) when ordering seafood directly to households

**4. What information/issues/opportunities would you like to convey to the communications program in terms of in-state or industry issues?**

- There has been an uptick in consumer complaints on parasites, and a need for messaging around them. Talking points for industry sales staff would be helpful.
- Would like to see communication on how well the Alaska seafood industry has handled the covid-19 pandemic.
- There is a need to clearly communicate an assurance of the safety of Alaska seafood and its packaging.

**5. What challenges/threats – pandemic related or otherwise – do you anticipate for your species in the next year or beyond?**

- Finding new markets that replace the marketshare of foodservice that is no longer there, is a big challenge.
- There is a need to clearly communicate and assure the safety of Alaska seafood and its packaging to all customers, particularly China.
- A top goal of seafood industry processors and harvesters is to avoid contagion while protecting a fishery. The seafood industry incurred tens of millions of dollars in expenses to keep their staff, the fleet, and communities safe. These costs are going to raise the purchase price. There is concern that the increase in cost would turn away consumers.
- With a vaccine in the works, we would like essential workers in the seafood industry to be acknowledged as among those higher priority groups for initial distribution of the vaccine.
- Driving the Alaska Seafood brand continues to be important. Need to stress “Alaska halibut” on any product form it comes in.
- Atlantic halibut has a year-round supply, causing challenges for frozen sales of Alaska halibut. Atlantic halibut also recently received MSC certification.



VIII. Good of the order

No comments were made.

IX. Adjourn

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

The meeting was adjourned at 10:16am.