



Halibut-Sablefish Committee Meeting

December 3, 2024

2:49 – 5:00 PM AKST

Adventure Room, lower lobby level, Hotel Captain Cook, Anchorage

Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82593010945?pwd=aUgowhptoY91hPLTFrCgabQk1ITFWz.1>

Meeting ID: 825 9301 0945

Passcode: 150790

Approved Minutes (on 11/6/25)

I. Call to Order

Chair Keplinger called the meeting to order at 2:49 pm.

a. Roll call & Introduction of guests

Osorio did roll call. A quorum was established.

Committee Members

Jessica Keplinger	Alaska Home Pack/Alaska Glacier Seafoods	Present
Kendall Whitney	Seafood Producers Cooperative	Present
Jim Hubbard	Harvester	Present
Hank Baumgart	Icy Strait Seafoods	Present
John Jensen	Harvester	Present
Peggy Parker	HANA	Present
William Rogers	Wild Alaskan Company	Present
William Sullivan	Kachemak Bay Seafoods	Present
Todd Greenwood	North Pacific Seafoods	Present
Marc Taylor	Trident Seafoods	Present
Keith Singleton	Alaskan Leader Seafoods	Present
Bob Barnett	Harvester	Present

Guests

Allen Kimball	Chair, ASMI Board of Directors	Present
Duncan Fields	ASMI Board of Directors	Present
Mike Eriksonn	ASMI Board of Directors	Present
Leah Krafft	ASMI Domestic Marketing Manager	Present

Nicole Alba	ASMI International Marketing Director	Present
Megan Rider	ASMI Senior Director of Domestic Marketing and Strategy	Present
John Burrows	ASMI Seafood Technical Program Director	Present
Matthew Arnoldt	ASMI Accountant	Present
Tim Welsh	ASMI SE Asia OMR	Present
Tricia Sanguinetti	RFM Certification Program	Present
Yakata Akiko	ASMI Japan OMR	Present
Mark Jones	ASMI Retail Consultant, Domestic Marketing	Present
Merle Knapp	C.Star	Present
Stephen Rhoads	Seafood Producers Cooperative	Present
Rebecca Monagle	ASMI Finance Director	Present
Scott Sandvig	Alaskan Leader Seafoods	Present
Tom Sunderland	RFM Certification Program	Present
Simon Marks	McKinley Research Group	Present
Sam Friedman	McKinley Research Group	Present
Greg Ness	OBI Seafoods	Present
Jeff Grannum	Peninsula Seafoods	Present
Keith Brunell	Nordstrom	Present
Peter Wakeman	E&E Foods	Present
Kerry Wilkins	Rising Tide Communications	Present
Thea Thomas	Harvester	Present

b. Approval of Draft Agenda

Vice Chair Parker moved to approve the draft agenda. Barnett seconded. None opposed. Motion passed.

c. Approval of Draft Minutes from Nov 2, 2024

Jensen moved to approve the draft minutes from Nov 2, 2024. Greenwood seconded. None opposed. Motion passed.

d. ASMI Antitrust Statement

Keplinger read the abbreviated version of the ASMI Antitrust Statement. The full version was provided to committee members in their meeting packets.

Krafft included the full version in the chat for virtual attendees.

e. Chair Remarks

Keplinger thanked members for having participated in the pre-meeting November 2.

f. Vice Chair Remarks

Parker welcomed new committee members and thanked ASMI staff for setting up the pre-meeting.

g. Public Comment

None made.

II. Old Business

None was addressed.

III. New Business

a. Halibut species updates by Committee members, roundtable

Greenwood reported the situation was better than last year; not enough raw material to work with; fresh market keeping prices consistent; limited frozen availability setting for positive outlook.

Parker inquired about Atlantic halibut. Greenwood replied pricing is consistent. Taylor stated that Atlantic is not a competitor, but other origins of Pacific halibut are. Hubbard explained that Canadian halibut makes price drop when available in Seattle. Keplinger added the species is a strong competitor in terms of quota (will increase by 11%) and being a year-round fishery, although their price structure constantly fluctuates. Sullivan added that Atlantic is not frozen but sold until it's all gone. Barnett highlighted the positive side of halibut staying on the menu, regardless of it being Pacific or Atlantic, since it contributes to recognition by consumers.

Regarding product differentiation, Sullivan proposed promoting halibut as not being trawl-caught to differentiate it in the market. Singleton highlighted that value-added production is limited due to low halibut volumes, unlike sablefish. Keplinger emphasized that the market can absorb more fresh halibut which is being effectively pushed. Greenwood pointed out market limitations due to logistics, while Taylor noted regional segregation of the market beyond major hubs.

Turning to fishery health and management, Hubbard stressed sustainability requires a healthy resource base. Keplinger added that responsible practices are in place. Greenwood expressed concern over the lack of comprehensive surveys (only done in Southeast Alaska), making it hard to assess fishery health and bycatch accurately. Barnett and Hubbard noted a lack of larger fish, with dominant size classes being below the legal limit. Sullivan and Greenwood discussed challenges in catching quota due to weather and market conditions. Taylor added that 20% of quota was left uncaught.

In terms of market conditions, Greenwood noted the increasing value of frozen, although fresh sales have historically driven value, and added that Canadian imports and Russian supply bans are affecting market dynamics. Taylor said leaving some quota uncaught can strengthen the market. Hubbard noted that the market appears to have stabilized despite the lack of volume.

Parker and others acknowledged the quota is at historically low levels, with the IPHC facing significant pressure. Keplinger stressed the need for proactive communication planning and noted the fact that ASMI is shifting messaging to emphasize sustainability and preparing for potential negative press.

Committee members described the species having declined gradually (a "slope" not a "cliff"), in opposition to crab, which saw a sudden collapse. Barnett referenced studies showing increased carbon footprint due to longer trips and more gear needed.

Sensory testing has only included sablefish so far; there's interest in adding halibut (fresh and frozen). Jensen and Hubbard discussed limitations in current survey data and the IPHC's reliance on official statistics over anecdotal industry reports.

b. Sablefish species updates by Committee members, roundtable

Barnett discussed the importance of Circana data for understanding market trends, while Baumgart and Keplinger expressed gratitude for the domestic team's work, particularly around the Costco promotions.

Greenwood raised concerns about the limited price increases, asking whether the market would be able to sustain higher prices moving forward. Singleton emphasized the value of holding off on launching new products, as Costco had done. He suggested that product launches should align with careful market timing.

Greenwood noted that the domestic market is trending positively, and sablefish is gaining acceptance, with the Japanese market historically having absorbed much of the volume. There is a growing effort to promote smaller sizes in other markets to diversify from Japan. Singleton highlighted that domestic food service is seeing success with sablefish, with demos as the most effective sales tool. Keplinger added that ASMI could help with distributor outreach, especially for smaller foodservice operations. Krafft added there is unmet demand in Texas and Maine.

Hubbard raised concerns about the number of boats going out of business due to prices being too low for the resource, which is hurting the industry overall.

Keplinger and Taylor shared that selling larger sablefish (7-ups) remains difficult, with prices not reflecting the resource's potential, although only 3-5% fall within that category. Greenwood emphasized the importance of continuing to promote smaller fish to avoid over-reliance on one market or country. Erikson added that demos are crucial to engaging consumers and getting them to try sablefish, as they can quickly be convinced of its value.

Baumgart noted that sablefish is being marketed in the EU, particularly to Japanese restaurants, while there is a strong emphasis on ready-to-cook products in the U.S. He suggested that introducing new recipes beyond traditional miso could be a way to boost demand, noting that recipes could be scaled. Keplinger mentioned pre-marinated sablefish options, and Singleton added that portion-controlled products are doing well in the U.S., though not everything needs to be pre-marinated. Greenwood urged the industry to keep it simple and not overwhelm consumers with too many product types, while Keplinger emphasized the versatility of sablefish and the importance of informing consumers on the many ways to prepare it, which can be very simple.

Hubbard discussed the long-term resource issues, noting that prices were higher in the past when the fishery was larger. However, the current resource size and pricing are not supporting higher prices, even though the resource has somewhat stabilized. Rhoads mentioned a significant shift in fish sizes, with expectations that 40% of the catch in the fall will be 4-5 pound fish, which could make the industry more profitable if quotas increase. Rhoads also noted that there was no survey this year, making it difficult to confirm these expectations.

Barnett raised the question of how to compete internationally, specifically targeting chefs at high-end chains to push out Canadian sablefish, which has the advantage of no tariffs in the EU. Singleton and Hedlund discussed the importance of the MSC certification and how it's not as prominent as it used to be but still relevant for sustainability and consumer trust.

Rogers mentioned e-commerce efforts, particularly focusing on cold-smoked sablefish and exploring the potential for hot-smoked varieties. He emphasized that once customers try the product, they tend to keep coming back. Parker supported the idea of online demos as an effective marketing tool, with Rogers suggesting that they take place regularly to boost consumer engagement.

Ness shared a personal perspective, noting that while he grew up eating halibut, he never had much exposure to sablefish. Singleton mentioned the challenges of continuing a family fishing business, as it's no longer financially viable for many due to low prices and high operating costs.

c. Discussion and answers to Board's Species Questions for the Halibut-Sablefish Committee

Keplinger asked committee members to suggest direct action items for ASMI.

- Domestic opportunities:

In-store demos, reach out to smaller and medium distributors.

Continue with current outreach for halibut.

Promote high omega content of sablefish, back up claims with ASMI's technical program assets.

Tourism outreach about Alaska seafood and the importance of the harvesting and processing industries.

- International opportunities:

Continue foodservice outreach.

Continue direct work with high-end chefs and restaurants. Do demos.

Come up with strategies to get consumers to try sablefish. More ready-to-eat products are needed in the domestic and international markets.

- Challenges and threats:

Biomass, supply and East coast biomass.

Farmed halibut coming from Norway.

West coast fisheries quotas and MSC fishery certification.

Increase in Bering Sea quota. However, biomass isn't reproducing fast enough.

Recruitment of younger generations. Aging fleet.

- ASMI messaging:

Positive stories about halibut catching methods, regulation, and the long history of fishery management.

Promote omega 3 content in sablefish.

Promote convenience and ease of preparation of sablefish.

Replicate Nathanael article about sablefish.

- Technical:

Burrows reported on sensory tests on sablefish and how halibut will be included in the future.

Availability of halibut assets for industry. Krafft explained there are many on Netx (digital library).

Need for more footage of sablefish and harvesting, especially, slinky pots. Keep shots clean and away from child labor context.

Henneguya in halibut, ADFG needs samples to test it.

IV. Good of the Order

Kimball weighed in on the tourism discussion and suggested keeping educational the component and adding where prompts and information on where to buy the species/products presented on. Sullivan noted the importance of addressing the issue of bulk sourcing by tourism operators from origins other than Alaska.

V. Adjourn

Keplinger moved to adjourn. Barnett seconded. None opposed. Motion passed.
The meeting adjourned at 5:00 pm.