

US Alaska Sablefish Fishery

**2008 Annual Surveillance Report
As Required Under the Marine Stewardship Council Program**

Prepared for:

Eat on The Wild Side and Fishing Vessels Owners Association

Prepared by:

Chet Chaffee, Ph.D., Scientific Certification Systems

General Information

Certified Fishery	US Sablefish Fishery	United States
Fishery Agency	NOAA Fisheries	United States
Species	<i>Anoplopoma fimbria</i>	
MSC Registration No.	SCS-MFCP-F-0019	
Certification Date	10 May 2006	
Certification Expiration Date	10 May 2011	
Certification Body	Scientific Certification Systems, Inc. (SCS)	2200 Powell St., Suite 725, Emeryville, CA 94608
Certificate Holder	Eat on The Wild Side	Room 232 4005 20 th Ave. West Seattle, WA 98199
Surveillance Team	Chet Chaffee, Ph.D. (SCS)	Project Leader
Surveillance Stage	Annual Surveillance	2008

Preface

All facts in this report were provided to SCS by Eat on The Wild Side (ETWS) and Fishing Vessels Owners Association. However, the interpretation, opinions, and assertions made in this report as to the compliance of the fishery with MSC requirements are the sole responsibility of Scientific Certification Systems, Inc.

Executive Summary

This is the 2nd Annual Surveillance Report (2008) prepared by SCS to meet the requirements of the MSC for annual audits of certified fisheries. It is SCS's view that the US sablefish fishery continues to meet the standards of the MSC and to comply with the 'Requirements for Continued Certification'. SCS recommends the continued use of the MSC certificate through to the next annual surveillance audit with no additional corrective action requests other than those still outstanding from the original assessment.

Background

The sablefish fishery off the North Pacific coast of the United States was originally certified on 10 May 2006 by Scientific Certification Systems, Inc. The requirements of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) are that each certified fishery must undergo at a minimum an annual surveillance to ensure the basis of certification is still in place and that the fishery is meeting any conditional requirements from the original certification. Should a fishery fail the surveillance audit, and cannot address identified deficiencies in a reasonable period of time, then the use of the certificate and the MSC logo can be revoked by the certifier.

This report represents the second annual surveillance since the fishery was certified. The issues for the certifier are whether the fishery has sufficiently acted on the required conditions set forth in the original certification report, and whether a random check on the performance of the fishery verifies continued compliance with the MSC standards.

Annual Surveillance

The annual surveillance audit process (as always) is comprised of four general parts:

1. The certification body provides questions around areas of inquiry to determine if the fishery is maintaining the level of management observed during the original certification. In addition, the surveillance team requires that the client provide evidence that the fishery management system has taken the necessary actions to meet all conditions placed on the fishery during the initial certification assessment or any previous surveillance audits.
2. The surveillance/assessment team meets with the client fishery to allow the client to present the information gathered in answer to the questions asked by the surveillance team. The surveillance team can then ask questions about the information provided to ensure its full understanding of how well the fishery management system is functioning and if the fishery management system is continuing to meet the MSC standards.
3. The surveillance team presents its findings to the client fishery at the end of the site visit. The results outline the assessment team's understanding of the information presented and its conclusion regarding the fishery management system's continued compliance with MSC standards. Where indicated, the surveillance team may provide the client fishery with additional time to supplement the information provided if the surveillance team finds that there are still issues requiring clarification.

4. Where appropriate, the client fishery submits final information to the surveillance/assessment team for consideration in the surveillance findings and report. The surveillance team then reviews the final information and submits a final report to the client fishery and the MSC for posting on the MSC website. If there are continued compliance concerns, these are presented as non-conformances that require further action and audits as specified in the surveillance report.

Surveillance Meetings

The surveillance audit for 2008 comprised 3 parts:

1. An exchange of information indicating to the client the areas of inquiry by SCS for the surveillance audit. SCS provided a list of questions to the client.
2. A meeting with the client. This meeting was to discuss the questions put forth by SCS.
3. An exchange of documents from the client to SCS as a follow up to inquiries made during the meeting.

Results

Data Submitted to Assessment Team

ETWS answered questions put forward by SCS both in discussion and in the form of submitted documents. The documents compiled and submitted to SCS are:

- NPFMC Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska SAFE, 3. Alaska Sablefish Assessment for 2008.
- The Distribution of Seabirds on the Alaskan Longline Fishing Grounds: Implications for Seabird Avoidance Regulations
- Council Motion – Seabird Deterrence in IPHC Area 4E, June 1008

1. Stock Status

The first two questions raised by SCS in the surveillance audit are whether the monitoring and assessment to determine the status of the stocks are still being conducted consistent to what was provided to the assessment team in the original assessment, and whether the status of the stock was still consistent with pre-determined reference points.

The indicators in the original assessment that cover monitoring and the status of the stock were 1.1.1.1, 1.1.1.4, 1.1.1.5, 1.1.1.6, 1.1.2.1, and 1.1.2.2, 1.1.2.3, 1.1.2.4, 1.1.3.1, 1.1.3.2, 1.1.5.1, 1.1.5.2, 1.1.5.3, 1.1.5.4, 1.1.5.5, 1.1.6.1, and 1.1.6.2.

The SAFE (Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation) Report on Sablefish (Black Cod) for 2008 reports that annual data collection, monitoring and stock assessments continue to be conducted and that the spawning stock biomass has increased over the past year.

Model changes were “Informative priors for catchability were added for all abundance indices.”

In terms of assessment results, the 2008 SAFE report notes that the fishery is “neither overfished nor approaching an overfished condition”. Specifically, the SAFE Report states: “..... “Projected 2008 spawning biomass is 37% of unfished biomass. Spawning biomass has increased from a low of 29% of unfished biomass during 2000-01 to a projected 37% in 2008. The 1997 year class has been an important contributor to the population but is now fully mature and comprises only 18% of 2008 spawning biomass. The 2000 year class appears to be larger than the 1997 year class, but is only 75% mature and should also comprise 18% of spawning biomass in 2008.”

In addition, the report notes, “ Sablefish are managed under Tier 3 of NPFMC harvest rules. The updated point estimates of $B_{40\%}$, $F_{40\%}$, and $F_{35\%}$ from this assessment are 122,250 t (combined across the EBS, AI, and GOA), 0.093, and 0.111, respectively. Projected spawning biomass (combined areas) for 2008 is 111,607 t (91% of $B_{40\%}$), placing sablefish in sub-tier “b” of Tier 3. The maximum permissible value of F_{ABC} under Tier 3b is 0.084 which translates into a 2008 catch (combined areas) of 18,030 t. The OFL fishing mortality rate is 0.101 which translates into a 2008 OFL (combined areas) of 21,310 t. Model projections indicate that this stock is neither overfished nor approaching an overfished condition.”

The recommend ABC for 2008 was 18,030 t. The SAFE report specifically states – “The maximum permissible yield for 2008 from an adjusted $F_{40\%}$ strategy is 18,030 t. The maximum permissible yield for 2008 is a 10% decrease from the 2007 ABC of 20,100 t. Spawning biomass is projected to decline through 2012, and then is expected to increase assuming average recruitment is achieved. Because of the lack of strong year classes, the maximum permissible ABC is projected to be 16,476 t in 2009 and 15,881 in 2010 (using estimated catches, instead of maximum permissible.”

2. Ecosystem Impacts from Fishing

SCS asked for evidence that the fishery management system is still functioning to keep ecosystem based impacts from fishing at acceptable levels.

The indicators in the original assessment that cover ecosystem impacts were 2.1.1.1, 2.1.1.2, 2.1.2.1, 2.1.2.2, 2.1.3.1, 2.1.3.2, 2.1.3.3, 2.1.5.1, 2.1.5.2, 2.1.5.3, 2.2.1.1, 2.2.1.2, 2.2.2.1, 2.2.3.1, 2.2.5.1, and 2.2.5.2.

The same programs are in place as during the initial assessment to provide data on bycatch. Bycatch continues to be reported, as does lost gear. The numbers for bycatch

indicate a decrease in most bycatch. Of the species deemed sensitive (Grenadiers, spiny dogfish, and unidentified sharks), only grenadiers are still thought to pose a possible concern. According to the 2008 SAFE report, grenadier catch is high but stable with no significant increases.

Seabird bycatch continues to be an issue of concern, although the numbers show a decrease since the deployment of seabird mitigation devices. Monitoring seabird bycatch is still an important function that continues throughout the ground fish fisheries.

Seabird bycatch data is continuing to be collected, and the data have shown that seabird bycatch is decreasing, and that in some areas mitigation devices may not be necessary.

There is also continuing work on ecosystem effects in general through ECOPATH modeling. According to the SAFE report (2008) first order effects for trophic interactions for sablefish have been examined. Prey interactions were examined, and there appears to be some suggestion that additional data may help explain increases and decreases in sablefish abundance. In terms of predator interactions, the report notes that sablefish may not be sufficiently abundant to detect significant impacts or trends in terms of how the abundance of sablefish affects predators. NMFS notes that it will continue the monitoring and data input to the ECOPATH model to see what interactions can be tracked.

The SAFE report also published a table (Table 3.12) that provides a summary of possible ecosystem effects from the fishery. As noted above, the only two areas of possible concern were with grenadier and seabird bycatch, and as noted the seabird bycatch while around 10%, is decreasing. The bycatch of benthic species is low, but that is to be expected as longline gear is not an adequate way to hold onto benthic species that may be affected during fishing.

Based on the evidence presented, SCS is satisfied that the same level of work, or greater, is still occurring within the fishery to monitor and understand issues surrounding bycatch and fishery interactions.

3. Management and Regulation

SCS asked for evidence that the fishery management system is still functioning at the same levels that it was during the initial certification. SCS also asked about any pending litigation, and changes in enforcement.

SCS was told that the NPFMC adopted Alternative 3, Option 1 as its preferred alternative for revised seabird deterrence requirements in IPHC Area 4E.

SCS was instructed that there have been no significant changes in enforcement and compliance.

Based on the evidence presented, SCS is satisfied that the same level of functionality, or greater, is still occurring with regard to the structure and function of the management system for the US Sablefish fishery.

Progress on Conditions for Continued Certification

In addition to the random audit of the management system, SCS checked on the progress toward completing the Action Plan for meeting the Conditions for Continued Certification as stated in the original assessment Report. The table below shows each performance indicator that received a Condition for not scoring at least 80, the 80 Scoring Guidepost that is required to be met by addressing the Condition, and the progress that has been made toward meeting each Condition.

Performance Indicator	Indicator Language	Condition	Action Plan	Progress in 2007
<p>3.3.1.1</p>	<p><u>Performance Indicator</u> The management system provides for internal program evaluation and review.</p> <p><i>[Relates to MSC Criterion 3.3]</i></p> <p><u>80 Scoring Guidepost</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The management system has a provision for an objective system for evaluation of management performance that is conducted periodically as need arises. • The criteria for and results of the on-going evaluation of management performance are made public. 	<p>To improve the deficiencies in performance for this indicator, the fishery must demonstrate the existence of a periodic, candid and authoritative internal review process for black cod fishery management procedures and outcomes and publish the results of such a review process. The client can fulfill this condition by working cooperatively with other North Pacific fisheries that have been certified under the MSC program and are working with NMFS to address this same condition.</p>	<p>In order to meet these conditions, the Fishing Vessel Owners' Association and the Deep Sea fishermen's Union will cooperate with other North Pacific fisheries that have been certified under the MSC program and are working with NMFS to address these same conditions. In addition to this cooperation, the clients will schedule a meeting with NMFS in Seattle within six (6) months of certification to review the MSC conditions and request that NMFS begin an evaluation of the sablefish fishery relative to a Management Strategy Evaluation, which would examine the resource for its robust nature under different regime changes, such as the movement of</p>	<p><u>This Condition is closed out.</u></p> <p>This Condition is closed out. The client has submitted to SCS evidence of two kinds:</p> <p>a) Evidence that the client has been working with APA in terms of gathering information and speaking with NMFS about the Condition;</p> <p>b) Evidence that APA has completed its work on this Condition and been relieved of the Condition by Moody Marine during the surveillance of the BSAI Pollock fishery. According to the Certification Body (CB), Moody Marine Ltd., the Condition requiring that a complete and thorough internal review process be in place is now closed out for the BSAI Pollock fishery.</p> <p>The 2006 BSAI Pollock Surveillance Report by Moody</p>

			<p>the “Aleutian Low” or Pacific Decadal Oscillation. The clients will provide SCS a report following the meeting with the NMFS.</p>	<p>Marine is available at http://www.msc.org/track-a-fishery/certified/pacific/bsai-pollock/assessment-downloads.</p> <p>As the specific management structure in question is identical for both BSAI Pollock and US North Pacific Sablefish, it is contradictory to impose a condition on Sablefish that does not apply to Pollock. TAB-D-015 V2 bullet 2.4 reads, “Where a fishery assessment overlaps with a certified fishery or fishery in assessment that has already been scored, the assessment team shall base their assessment on the rationale and scores detailed in the previously scored fishery...” Since the MSC has accepted evidence given in the Moody Marine 2006 surveillance report that closes this condition for BSAI Pollock, and SCS cannot justify scoring these fisheries differently from one another, SCS closes the same condition as it applies to US North Pacific Sablefish.</p>
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<p>3.3.1.3</p>	<p><u>Performance Indicator</u></p> <p>The management system requires a response to outcomes of internal or external reviews.</p> <p><i>[Relates to MSC Criteria 3.3, 3.7]</i></p> <p><u>80 Scoring Guidepost</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The management system has established objective guidelines for responding to internal and external reviews of management performance. • The management system shows evidence of improved performance based on the results of internal and external reviews of management performance. 	<p>Within the North Pacific groundfish management system there must be objective criteria regarding the responses of the system to internal or external reviews commissioned or sanctioned by the federal government or its agencies (including NPFMC) or courts. The client can fulfill this condition by working cooperatively with other North Pacific fisheries that have been certified under the MSC program and are working with NMFS to address this same condition.</p>	<p>Same as above.</p>	<p>Same as above. This Condition now closed out.</p>
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Summary

SCS finds that the Sablefish fishery management system is still in general compliance with the MSC standard and that the certificate for the fishery should be maintained.