

# Species Fact Sheet: Alaska plaice



\*MSC certified May 2015

- **Latin Name:** *Pleuronectes quadrituberculatus*
- **Location:** Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI) – primarily on the eastern Bering Sea continental shelf.
- **Fishing Gear:** Bering Sea flatfish gear. This modified gear principally uses sweeps raised off the seafloor by bobbins spaced at 30 meter intervals to herd flatfish into relatively small nets where the fish are captured. Research by NMFS scientists has shown that use of elevated sweeps dramatically reduces effects of fishing on seafloor habitat and associated species such as crab and structure-forming animals called epifauna. This gear will be required for all Bering Sea flatfish fishing in 2011, and may be used voluntarily in the GOA.
- **Season:** January 20 - December 31
- **Catch/TAC:** 2014 catch = 19,449 metric tons / 2015 TAC = 19,500 metric tons.
- **Products:** H&G (headed and gutted) and whole round
- **Size:** Length to 62 cm. (General H&G size: 350-1,000 grams)
- **General Information:** Since implementation of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), Alaska plaice generally have been lightly harvested as no major commercial target fishery exists for them. Harvest of Alaska plaice occurs as bycatch in other higher valued fisheries. However, in the BSAI, management changed significantly in 2008 with the implementation of Amendment 80 to the BSAI Fisheries Management Plan. The Amendment directly allocated fishery resources among BSAI trawl harvesters in consideration of their historic harvest patterns and future harvest needs in order to improve retention and utilization of fishery resources by the non-AFA trawl catcher/processor fleet. This was accomplished by extending groundfish retention standards to all vessels subject to Amendment 80 and also by providing the ability to form cooperatives within the newly formed sector. The partitioning of TAC and PSC (prohibited species catch) among cooperatives has significantly changed the way the annual catch has accumulated. Alaska plaice retention has increased and new markets have been developed.
- **Management:** In 1976, the U.S. established management for Alaska plaice stocks out to 200 miles. Federal fishery management plans, adopted through an open and transparent public process and based on sound science, govern the harvest of Alaska plaice. The plan has been amended numerous times to achieve continuous improvement in the performance of the fishery. Fishery managers and scientists follow a precautionary, ecosystem-based approach.
- **Improvements:** Industry participants have worked with NMFS scientists to develop Bering Sea flatfish gear. Research by NMFS scientists has shown that use of this gear, which incorporates elevated sweeps, dramatically reduces effects of fishing on seafloor habitat and associated species such as crab and structure-forming animals called epifauna. Research showed that gear modification resulted in a substantial decrease of the trawl sweep contact with seabed and was effective in reducing trawl sweep impact effects to basketstars, sea whips, sponges, and siphons. Additionally, using the modified sweeps reduced estimates of mortality for *C. bairdi* and *C. opilio* crabs from 5 percent with conventional sweeps to nearly zero for the modified sweeps.