

Alaska Longline

FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Fishery Conservation Network

Empowering Stewardship Innovation through Research and Collaboration

For the past three years, the seventy commercial fishermen of the Fishery Conservation Network (FCN) have successfully worked together to reduce rockfish bycatch rates and map seafloor habitat.

What They've Done

- Gathered and verified catch and bycatch rate data in the longline halibut and sablefish fisheries
- Collected bathymetric data and mapped areas of the ocean floor
- Compiled detailed maps that help them avoid seafloor structures where rockfish concentrate

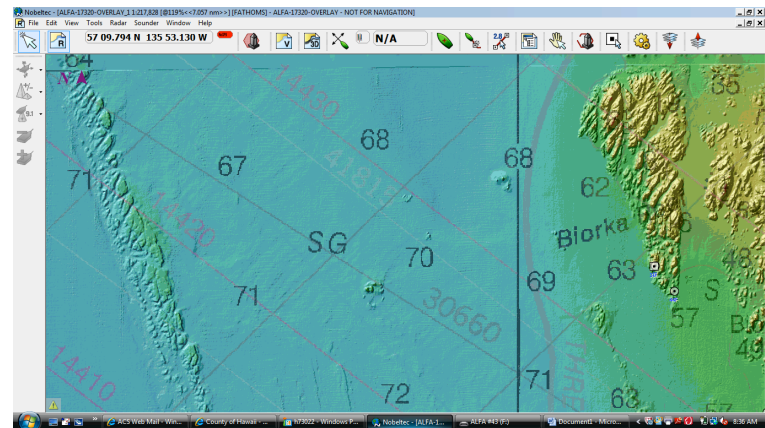
Measures of Success

- Between 2009 and 2010, FCN fishermen reduced their rockfish bycatch to 7.25% (a 20% decrease) in the halibut fishery, and to 1.42% (a 6% decrease) in the sablefish fishery.
- These rates are well below the allowed bycatch rates of 10% in the halibut fishery and 15% in the sablefish fishery.

What's Next

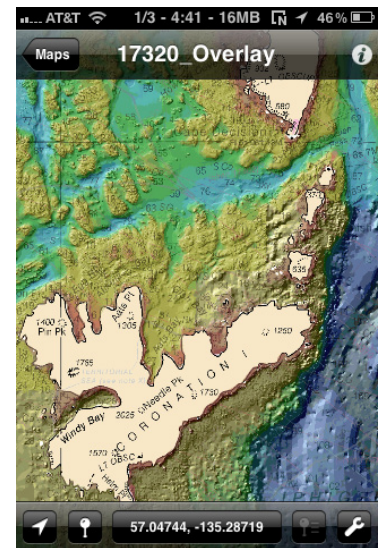
Building on this successful collaboration, the FCN fishermen are also engaged in additional joint efforts:

- Collecting genetic and behavioral data on Gulf of Alaska sperm whales
- Developing strategies and deterrents that minimize marine mammal predation on longline gear
- Operationalizing electronic monitoring on small longline boats
- Exploring fuel-efficiency strategies to reduce the fleet's carbon footprint



"The Fishery Conservation Network demonstrates what fishermen can do when they work together. Continued development of innovative solutions to bycatch issues, such as the FCN, will contribute to successful fisheries management in Alaska."

- Cora Campbell,
Alaska Department of
Fish and Game Commissioner



Stewardship Gains

- More efficient harvesting of halibut, salmon and sablefish
- Reduced rockfish bycatch and habitat impact
- Reduced risk of marine mammals entanglement
- Improved catch accounting
- Increased collaboration among fishermen to protect the resource
- Greater opportunity for additional progress in conservation and sustainable fishing practices

“For us, it’s not just about catching fish, it’s about caring for the resource. It’s our passion, our future.”

- FCN Fisherman Jeff Farvour,
F/V Suunta



Photo by Walter Pasternak



Photo by Dan Evans

Stewardship Challenges

Since 2006, halibut quotas in southeast Alaska have been reduced by 75%. Rockfish stocks are also declining.

Because rockfish bycatch is assigned as a fixed rate against halibut on board, the reduction in the halibut quota has also reduced the rockfish harvested by the commercial halibut fleet.

This reduction, coupled with the FCN fishermen’s achievements, has left a portion of the Southeast commercial rockfish allocation unharvested.

Rockfish remain a valuable component of the multi-species commercial halibut fishery. Rockfish have been taken as limited bycatch in the halibut fishery for thirty years. They are prized by consumers across the nation for their light white meat and firm texture.

Alaska’s community-based commercial fishing families deliver high-quality seafood to local processors for distribution around the world. Commercial fishing provides both a livelihood and a way of life to the fishermen and communities of southeast Alaska.

Supporting Strong Stewardship

When halibut stocks increase, commercial harvest of rockfish will once again increase. By using tools developed by the FCN, commercial fishermen will harvest their valuable rockfish allocation without exceeding specified levels.

The FCN demonstrates what fishermen can do when they work together. Managers can support stewardship collaboration by enhancing opportunities for fishermen who demonstrate a commitment to sustainable resource harvest.



Photo by John Calambokidis, © SEASWAP 2009

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FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Alaska Longline Fishermen’s Association (ALFA) is a non-profit association of independent commercial longline vessel owners and crewmembers who are committed to continuing the sustainable harvest of sablefish, halibut, and groundfish, while supporting healthy marine ecosystems and strong coastal communities through resource stewardship and participation in federal, state, and local forums.