

Sablefish

SPECIES

Sablefish (*Anoplopoma fimbria*)

OTHER NAMES

Black cod, Butterfish

ABOUT

Sablefish belongs to the family *Anoplopomatidae*, a group of fish limited to the North Pacific. Although sablefish resembles cod, it does not belong to the codfish family. Only one stock of sablefish exists in British Columbia (BC) waters.

Sablefish is a sleek, quick growing finfish with dark, almost furry skin and pearly white flesh. The minimum harvest size is 55 cm (22 inches). Most commercially trap-caught fish average between 2.7 kg (6 lbs) and 5.4 kg (12 lbs).

The flesh of sablefish has large velvety flakes and a sweet, rich flavour. Smoked sablefish has a nutty flavour and is a favourite with smoked-fish connoisseurs around the world. Its unique texture and taste are a result of its high oil content.



STOCK STATUS

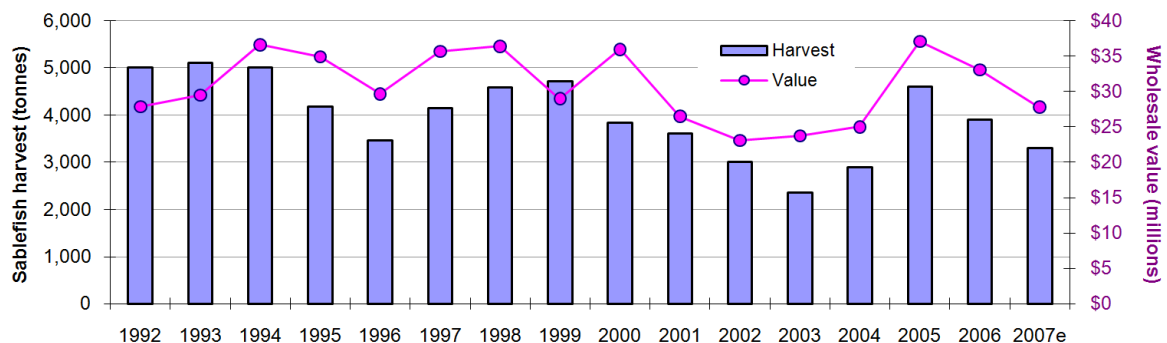
Stocks are reasonably stable and healthy, and recent recruitment has been good by long-term historical standards (*DFO - Fisheries Management*).

MANAGEMENT

BC's sablefish fishery is managed federally by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) under the new Integrated Groundfish program (*See: Integrated Groundfish Information Sheet*) that was put in place April 2006. The objective of the integrated groundfish program is to improve stock management through bycatch monitoring, reduced discarding, and requiring harvesters to be accountable for all catch. There are mandatory hail-out/hail-in requirements, dockside monitoring, and 100% observer coverage. DFO establishes an annual total allowable catch (TAC) that is assigned to all holders of vessel-based "K" licences for sablefish (*DFO - Fisheries Management*).

PRODUCT VALUE

Harvests and wholesale values fluctuate: 2,800 tonnes at \$25 million in 2004; 3,300 tonnes at \$27.8 million in 2007 (*BC Seafood Industry Year in Review*).



e: estimate

LIFE HISTORY

Sablefish inhabit shelf and slope waters to depths greater than 1,500 metres (4,921 feet), from central Baja California to the Bering Sea and Japan. Around BC, most sablefish are found at depths of 200 metres (656 feet) to more than 1,500 metres (4,921 feet) along the northwest coast of Vancouver Island up to the northwest coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Spawning occurs from January to March along the continental shelf. Larval sablefish stay in surface waters over the shelf and slope. Juveniles migrate inshore until ages 2 to 5 when they migrate offshore and recruit to deeper waters. Fish are caught in the offshore longline and trap fisheries at this time. Juveniles can be highly migratory, traveling from the waters of Hecate Strait and mainland inlets to as far north as the Aleutians. Growth is rapid, with mature females reaching an average length of 55 cm (22 inches), and a maximum of 80 cm (31 inches), in 3 to 5 years. Recruitment rates also vary, with infrequent occurrences of very large year classes interspersed with moderate to low year classes.

PRODUCTS

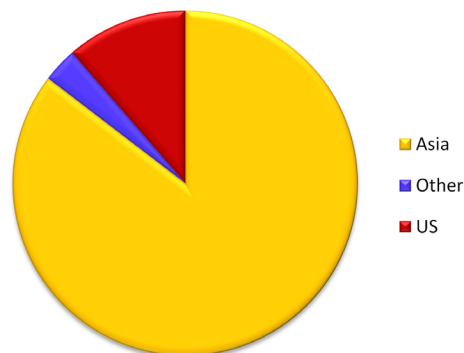
Sablefish is available as fresh and frozen-at-sea (FAS), as whole, fillets or portions. Smoked product is generally available as frozen fillets.

PRODUCT MARKET

Market for frozen-at-sea sablefish is primarily in Japan. Smaller markets exist in China (Hong Kong), the United States and Canada.

MARKET TREND

There is an increased interest in sablefish in the domestic and European markets.

**LINKS**

DFO - Fisheries Management Plans: www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/ops/fm/fishmgmt_e.htm

BC Seafood Industry Year in Review: www.env.gov.bc.ca/omfd/reports/index.html

Canadian Sablefish Association: www.canadiansablefish.com/index.htm

BCSeafood.ca: www.bcseafood.ca/index.php

Fish and Seafood Online: <http://www.ats-sea.agr.gc.ca/sea-mer/index-eng.htm>