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NOAA Imposes Fine and Penalty for False Reporting in Alaska Fishery

A hired master, vessel owners and permit holders of the Alaskan fishing vessel *Trident* have agreed to pay more than \$18,000 in penalties and \$241,000 worth of sanctions for falsely reporting areas fished by the vessel on five trips during 2006 and 2007.

The violations were detected and investigated by the Alaska division of NOAA's Fisheries Service Office of Law Enforcement, and the charges were brought by NOAA's Office of General Counsel.

Under the individual fishing quota (IFQ) program, fishermen are allotted specific amounts of halibut and sablefish they may catch in specific areas in order to keep the fish population sustainable. A hired master and permit holders who fished aboard the *Trident* reported the catches as being taken from more remote areas when they were actually harvested in regulatory areas closer to port.

"These violations affect not only the management of Alaska's well-managed halibut and sablefish IFQ fisheries, they are also unfair to the fishermen who abide by the rules and fish in the correct areas," said assistant special agent in charge Ken Hansen of the Alaska division of NOAA's Fisheries Service Office of Law Enforcement.

Tri Fish Limited Liability Corporation and the owners and permit holders of the *Trident* have agreed to pay \$10,000 for falsely reporting areas fished by their vessel. The settlement agreement also suspends vessel owner and permit holder Michael Lang's Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands sablefish IFQ for the 2010 fishing season and vessel owner and permit holder Barry McKee's Aleutian Islands sablefish IFQ for 2010.

McKee and Lang also are barred from hiring skippers to fish their IFQ shares for them next year. They will have to be on their boats when their share is fished.

In a separate enforcement action, NOAA's Office of General Counsel cited IFQ permit holder Richard Swartz for falsely reporting where the vessel fished. Swartz, who is not an owner of the *Trident*, paid an \$8,265 penalty and had 2,000 pounds of his Western Gulf sablefish IFQ suspended for one year.

Permit sanctions against IFQ and quota shares prohibit the harvest of the sanctioned pounds for the fishing year. The estimated value of the sanctions was calculated using current prices of halibut and sablefish.

A third settlement agreement bars vessel operator Kenneth Spjut from serving as the captain of a fishing vessel on the west coast of the United States for five years. Spjut was the captain and hired master on some, but not all, of the falsely reported trips.

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