The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) met with the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to discuss proposed harvest levels for 2002. Because many of the proposed levels are unchanged from 2001 or are mandated by previous management actions such as rebuilding plans, the GAP chose to comment specifically on only certain species.

Sablefish: This is by far the most controversial of the species being considered. Two stock assessments were completed for sablefish this year and reviewed by a Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel. Both assessments found current biomass to be roughly in the same range. However, the range of harvest levels recommended by the GMT reflect uncertainty as to whether the recruitment decline observed several years ago reflects environmental factors or density factors; and whether stocks will continue on a downward trend or rebound with more recent recruitment.

The GAP urges the Council to adopt the higher harvest level recommended by the GMT, using the assumption that lower recruitment was caused by environmental factors. The GAP notes that several scientific publications have demonstrated a regime shift occurring; that 2001 stock survey data (which was not included in the assessment) shows preliminary signs of large numbers of juvenile sablefish; and coast-wide data from fishermen reflects heavy concentrations of young sablefish being caught in fishing gear.

Further, as a practical matter, the GAP notes that if all scientific assumptions are considered equally valid, the Council should then look at the effect of management actions on fishing communities. The reduction in sablefish harvests - even to the higher level recommended - will have a substantial adverse economic impact. A reduction below that level will be disastrous, especially considering other harvest reductions that have been made and will be made next year.

Dover sole: The GAP recommends the Council continue managing Dover sole at the F_{40\%} level. Based on data supplied by the author of this year’s stock assessment, harvest at the F_{40\%} level after application of the Council’s 40-10 control rule will result in an increase in biomass over the next several years based on the preferred assessment model. The GAP further notes that although this model assumes average recruitment, the same average recruitment was used to determine virgin biomass. The GAP suggests that science which works in one direction will also work in the other. Finally, the same situation involving economic effects as noted in discussion of sablefish applies here as well. We have a valid peer reviewed stock assessment that provides a modest harvest level which in turn will continue to provide an economically viable fishery.

Widow rockfish, Pacific ocean perch, Darkblotched rockfish: The GMT provided the Council with a range of potential harvest levels based on assumptions of chances of recovery of these species. In the past, the Council has generally chosen a recovery chance of 60\% as a reasonable target. Given the interaction of these species (and especially widow rockfish) with other healthy species, we believe the 60\% chance of recovery target makes sense for these species too. We recommend the Council adopt acceptable biological catch/optimum yield levels reflecting a 60\% chance of full rebuilding within the specified time frame.

PFMC
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