

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
BIENNIAL SPECIFICATIONS FOR FISHERIES IN 2015-2016 AND BEYOND

Hotspot analysis

Ms. Rosemary Kosaka (Groundfish Management Team, GMT) briefed the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on a preliminary analysis of spatial patterns of roughey bycatch in the Pacific whiting fishery. The GMT is considering whether this type of analysis could be used to establish spatial closures as an in-season tool to manage bycatch. Spatial management is just one of the potential tools that could be used for this purpose. The data are based on observer sampling, and the SSC noted some concerns regarding the use of observer data, including how discard that occurs before the net is brought on board is identified to species, and whether sub-sampling of the catch leads to highly variable estimates of tow-by-tow bycatch. The SSC considers this approach to be worth further development as a management tool, and made a number of recommendations on how to improve the analysis.

Mr. Dave Fraser gave a presentation on the spatial analysis tools that are being used by the Pacific whiting mothership fleet to manage bycatch. The focus is on easy-to-interpret spatial displays with color-coding to indicate spatial cells with high bycatch. The spatial displays use real-time high-resolution data from on-board observers and vessel monitoring systems. High resolution tow-by-tow data is confidential, but the mothership fleet has waived the confidentiality restrictions to make these data available to SeaState. The SSC encourages a discussion of the tradeoffs between self-management of bycatch by risk-pools and the more formal regulatory approaches being considered by the GMT. In addition, spatial closures may be more effective for controlling bycatch for some species than others, depending on how consistently the species is distributed spatially and seasonally.

Review proposed 2015-2016 OFLs

The SSC recommends the 2015 and 2016 overfishing limits (OFLs) for Washington cabezon (Table 3 of Supplemental Revised Attachment 2) and the 2016 OFLs for brown, China, and copper rockfish (Table 1 of Supplemental Revised Attachment 2). The SSC also recommends the revised green-spotted rockfish OFLs for 2015 and 2016 that were obtained by assuming that catch for 2013 and 2014 (and 2015 for the 2016 OFL) will be equal to the recent average rather than assuming the full annual catch limit will be taken. The SSC endorses all the other OFLs in Table 1 of Agenda Item C.4.a, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 2, with the exception of the following.

For kelp greenling OFLs in Oregon and Washington, the approach that was recommended by the SSC groundfish subcommittee in December was to condition both the Oregon and Washington DB-SRA analysis on the depletion estimates from the 2005 kelp greenling stock assessment for Oregon. At this meeting, the SSC discovered that the best current estimates of kelp greenling historical catches in Oregon are very different than the catches that were used in the 2005 assessment. This raises a major concern about reliability of the 2005 assessment. The SSC concluded that it could no longer support the OFLs for kelp greenling in Oregon and Washington that were obtained from DB-SRA analyses conditioned on the 2005 assessment.

The SSC discussed two options for Council consideration for moving forward. One option would be to request that Dr. E.J. Dick conduct new DB-SRA analyses for kelp greenling in Oregon and Washington that are not conditioned on the 2005 assessment, and to provide those results to the SSC at the June meeting for review and to set OFLs. This option would not take advantage of the information available on stock trends and age composition in Oregon, and is likely to give results that are similar to the OFL values that were previously endorsed. The second option, which would not cause further delay in the specifications process, is for the SSC to not make any further attempts to specify new kelp greenling OFLs, and for the Council to continue to manage these stocks under a stock complex for 2015-2016. Kelp greenling would be given high priority for full assessment in the next assessment cycle.

Review Atlantis model results

An analysis using the Atlantis model for the California current ecosystem is being considered for inclusion in the Tier 1 Groundfish Environmental Impact Statement. Dr. Isaac Kaplan presented preliminary Atlantis results that followed SSC recommendations on how to structure the analysis using the decision tables in groundfish stock assessments. Initial results suggested that there do not appear to be large impacts of the groundfish fishery on other components of the ecosystem across a broad range of catch levels. Results presented to the SSC indicate that a good start has been made in evaluating the cumulative impacts of the groundfish fishery using the Atlantis model. The SSC communicated a number of recommendations to the analysts. The SSC is planning to conduct a methodology review of the Atlantis model in July.

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