

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON  
PACIFIC HALIBUT BYCATCH ESTIMATE

Dr. Jason Jannot of the NWFSC West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) met with the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and reviewed the Pacific halibut bycatch report and WCGOP Response to the SSC (Agenda Items D.1.b). The SSC had previously reviewed and commented on the estimation methodology used for the 2011 estimates and there have been relatively minor changes to that methodology for the 2012 estimates.

Dr. Jannot presented the results of analyses that addressed comments made by the SSC during its review of the halibut bycatch report in 2012. There was a relatively large decrease in the halibut total mortality estimate from 2010 to 2011 and, in its 2012 review, the SSC was concerned that some of that decrease could be due to the change in estimation methods. The analyses presented indicated that the decrease was largely due to a decrease in effort. The SSC appreciated the efforts made to address their previous concerns.

The SSC notes that there were differences between the WCGOP and Vessel Accounting System (VAS) estimates of total halibut mortality. However, both numbers were well below the quotas for 2011 and 2012. These differences may be a result of the WCGOP producing estimates by strata (across multiple vessels) while the VAS estimates are produced at the vessel level. Having two estimates, despite their similarity, could be problematic in certain situations. Based on the 2011 and 2012 estimates, both systems are producing similar estimates. If this continues, the need for the separate WCGOP estimates for the IBQ fishery should be assessed.

Dr. Jannot indicated that for the 2013 analysis, estimates for the pink shrimp fishery would be stratified by state and further investigations of the catch threshold stratification would be conducted. The SSC supports both these future analyses.

The SSC considers the bycatch estimates presented for halibut as the best scientific information available and recommends their use for 2014 management. Unless there are significant changes in the estimation methodology, the SSC does not see a need to review these estimates on an annual basis.