

Groundfish Advisory Subpanel Report on  
Stock Complex Assemblages

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a briefing from Mr. John DeVore on restructuring groundfish stock complexes and offers the following comments and recommendations.

The GAP is generally concerned this initiative will receive a higher priority than other initiatives that the GAP believes are of more immediate importance. The GAP is concerned the trawl trailing actions already addressed by the Council are not being implemented in a timely fashion by NMFS due to competing workload. The GAP believes other initiatives that are more important to GAP members, such as widow rockfish reallocation, an issue of permit ownership and control in the fixed gear sablefish primary fishery, and other actions may be unnecessarily delayed to accommodate stock complex restructuring.

The GAP is also very concerned analysis presented is insufficient to adequately decide preliminary preferred alternatives or to recommend a full range of alternatives for detailed analysis. For instance, there is no analysis of the socioeconomic effects of restructuring complexes, any discussion of the management implications of restructuring complexes, nor any analysis of conservation effects of the proposed changes. The GAP is nervous that these important analyses may be given short shrift under the proposed timeline to decide a final preferred alternative by September. GAP members emphasize it will be extremely important to provide these analyses before an informed decision can be made.

Notwithstanding these provisos, the GAP explored the initial range of alternatives and offers the following recommendations for each of the six species groups identified in Attachment 1.

Nearshore Rockfish

The GAP recommends an additional alternative for analysis in which brown, China, and copper rockfish are removed from the complex and managed with stock-specific harvest specifications. These three stocks will be assessed for the first time this year with data-moderate assessments. This alternative is necessary in the analysis to preserve a wide range of options for managing these stocks. In the event one or more of these stocks is determined to be overfished, an option for managing these stocks outside of a complex may be needed.

Shelf Rockfish

The GAP recommends there be no detailed analysis of alternatives to status quo for the shelf rockfish complexes. The current configuration of the Rockfish Conservation Areas (RCAs) has significantly limited access to shelf rockfish reducing any conservation concerns for these stocks. In the event there is a substantial reduction or elimination of RCAs in the future, alternatives for managing shelf rockfish can then be considered in a subsequent action.

The GAP further recommends that starry and honeycomb rockfish *not* be designated Ecosystem Component (EC) species south of 40°10' N latitude. The GAP notes these species are caught in recreational fisheries and are caught incidentally in commercial fisheries in the Southern California Bight. While these species are not targeted, they are caught in amounts that may be considered greater than incidental and would therefore not meet the criteria for EC species.

### Slope Rockfish

The GAP recommends an alternative for analysis in which aurora and roughey rockfish are removed from the slope rockfish complexes. Both of these stocks will be assessed this summer and the Council may desire the flexibility to manage these stocks with stock-specific harvest specifications. In the event one or both of these stocks is determined to be overfished, an option for managing these stocks outside of a complex may be needed.

The GAP further recommends that bank rockfish *not* be removed from the slope rockfish complexes and re-categorized as a shelf species. The GAP notes that bank rockfish are caught on the shelf-slope break south of Pt. Conception and on the slope north of Pt. Conception.

### Flatfish

The GAP recommends there be no detailed analysis of alternatives to status quo for the Other Flatfish complex. This is the most balanced and well structured complex in the fishery management plan (FMP) and the GAP sees no need to change the structure.

The GAP further recommends that slender sole *not* be added to the FMP. Slender sole are a diminutive flatfish species that are not readily caught in the trawl fishery. While they may be caught in the NMFS trawl survey, the survey nets use codend liners with smaller mesh sizes than allowed in the fishery. The fishery gear selectivity for slender sole is such that the catch is *de minimus*. The GAP therefore concludes that slender sole are not in the fishery and do not warrant inclusion in the FMP.

### Elasmobranchs

The GAP is not recommending any change to the elasmobranch alternatives presented in Attachment 1. The GAP does recommend that leopard shark be removed from the FMP. Leopard shark are only caught within state waters in California and are not targeted in any federal fisheries. Further, leopard shark is a species with a different life history, distribution, and fishery interaction than any of the other FMP species making it difficult to design any complex that includes the species. Therefore, the GAP recommends delegating management authority for leopard shark to the state of California.

### Roundfish

The GAP recommends an alternative for analysis that removes Pacific grenadier from the FMP. Pacific grenadier, as well as the other endemic grenadier species, are caught incidentally in West

Coast fisheries and are not targeted. Furthermore, since these are deepwater species, catch of grenadiers are restricted since the prohibition on trawling deeper than 700 fm went into effect in 2006 with the final rule implementing Amendment 19. Since 2006, the average annual landings of grenadiers is 127.7 mt. Finally, the GAP notes the core distribution of grenadiers is much deeper than the 700 fm limit for West Coast trawl fisheries. Therefore, if harvest were to increase from the recent year average, there would be no biological effect of any significance since the fishery cannot access the core population.

Lastly, the GAP recommends against adding California slickhead to the FMP. The GAP notes this species is not targeted nor is it incidentally caught in west coast groundfish fisheries. The GAP further notes this species is a deepwater smelt species and, if there is a need to manage California slickhead in a federal FMP, then this species should be managed under the coastal pelagic species FMP.

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