



Pacific Fishery Management Council

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Donald K. Hansen, Chairman Donald O. McIsaac, Executive Director

July 29, 2009

Dr. Norm Bartoo, Acting Research and Science Director
National Marine Fisheries Service, Southwest Fisheries Science Center
8604 La Jolla Shores Drive
La Jolla, CA 92037-1508

RE: Pacific Fishery Management Council Recommendations for Future Pacific Mackerel Assessments.

Dear Dr. Bartoo:

Norm

This letter is formal notice of recent Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) action regarding the future assessments of Pacific mackerel. The Council appreciates the dedicated efforts of the Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) in the research and assessment of coastal pelagic species (CPS). Dr. Paul Crone and the stock assessment team conducted a thorough and timely assessment, participated fully in a well-conducted Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel meeting in May, and were an integral part of the Council's June 2009 meeting where the assessment was adopted for use in management.

Concerns were raised throughout the 2009 assessment process for Pacific mackerel regarding the data that inform the assessment model and the uncertainty associated with model results. The stock assessment team, the STAR Panel, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Council's two CPS advisory bodies all reported some level of discomfort with the current assessment. The Council, in response, recommends a new assessment schedule that allows time to address research and data issues aimed at improving the next full assessment of Pacific mackerel.

Because of variability and the difficulty in forecasting CPS populations, actively managed species in the CPS Fishery Management plan, such as Pacific mackerel, are assessed annually. This assessment cycle includes full assessments every three years and updated assessments in the interim years. Under this schedule, updated Pacific mackerel assessments would be conducted in 2010 and 2011, and in 2012 a full assessment would be conducted and a STAR Panel would be convened.

The Council recommends an alternate schedule where no assessment is conducted in 2010, but the next full assessment is conducted in 2011, one year in advance of the adopted plan. In the absence of an assessment update in 2010, the Council intends to use the 2009 assessment plus any new research and landings data to inform management decisions for the 2010-2011 fishery. Further, the Council recommends that the savings of time and workload from not conducting an assessment update in 2010 be used to address research and data needs identified in the 2009

assessment process. Although this proposed schedule involves a break in the assessment schedule, the Council recommends continued data collection in 2010 and concurs with requests at the June 2009 Council meeting for enhanced data gathering.

The SSC endorsed the 2009 Pacific mackerel as the best available science for use in management, but recommended caution in its application and agreed with the research and data needs identified by the stock assessment team and the STAR Panel. These recommendations included but are not limited to:

- Enhance monitoring of the commercial passenger fishing vessel (CPFV) fleet including increased sampling for biological data,
- Examine use of CPFV data as a fishery dependent index to determine if catchability and selectivity have not changed over time, or that the changes have been adequately included in the model configuration,
- Increase support of current port sampling and laboratory analysis programs and increase biological sampling of landings in the Pacific Northwest,
- Reanalyze biological parameters such as maturity-at-age, sex ratio, sex-specific parameters, and natural mortality rates,
- Revisit ageing error and consider conducting an age validation study, and
- Improve collaboration with Mexico and Canada in data collection including size- and age-composition from landings.

Complete listings of research and data needs for the Pacific mackerel assessment can be found in the 2009 assessment and the May 2009 STAR Panel report; both documents are readily available in the June 2009 Council Briefing Book as posted on our web site.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. Should your staff have any questions on this matter or need additional documentation, please contact Mr. Mike Burner at the Council office.

Sincerely,



Donald McIsaac, Ph.D.
Executive Director

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- c: Ms. Marija Vojkovich, Marine Regional Manager, California Department of Fish and Game
Mr. Rod McInnis, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Southwest Region
Dr. Gary Sakagawa, Assistant Center Director, NMFS, SWFSC
Dr. Russ Vetter, Fisheries Resources Division Director, NMFS, SWFSC
Mr. Mark Helvey, Assistant Regional Administrator, NMFS, Southwest Region
Mr. Josh Lindsay, NMFS, Southwest Region
Dr. Sam Herrick, CPS Management Team Chair
Mr. John Royal, CPS Advisory Subpanel Chair
Dr. Paul Crone, Research Fishery Biologist, NMFS< SWFSC