

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON STOCK ASSESSMENTS
FOR 2015-2016 GROUND FISH FISHERIES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) discussed the results of data moderate and full assessments as well as updates and catch reports conducted to date. The GMT recognizes and appreciates the efforts of those involved in the stock assessment process and progress made in developing data-moderate assessment methods. The only concerns expressed were relative to the data-moderate assessment of China rockfish north of 40°10' N. lat., which is currently at 33 percent depletion and declining at the current harvest rates. Later analysis by the GMT advisor to the Stock Assessment Review (STAR) panel determined that of the 129 mt of China rockfish taken between 2004-2012, only 13 percent or 17 mt was taken between 40°10' and 42° N. lat. in California waters, a pattern of differential exploitation extending back to the late 1980s. In addition, the indices of abundance were dominated by data from the Oregon commercial passenger fishing vessel fishery. The relatively low removals between 40°10' and 42° N. lat. and use of indices of abundance from data predominantly collected in Oregon make applicability of results of the assessment to California waters questionable to some on the GMT.

Each state has implemented different regulations for their nearshore fisheries, and removals differ between states, as may also be the case for the resulting stock status. Given the lower removals in California waters north of 40°10' N. lat., the indices of abundance from the assessment south of 40°10' N. lat. may more accurately reflect the depletion within California waters than those to the north of the California-Oregon border at 42° N. lat. There is currently no evidence of population structure at Cape Mendocino that would necessitate stratification at 40°10' N. lat. The Council may want to consider requesting an assessment with re-stratification of indices and catch history at 42° N. lat. instead of 40°10' N. lat. be conducted in time for review at mop-up for further consideration and comparison to the model stratified at 40°10' N. lat. This may help better inform the depletion in California waters and appropriate overfishing limits in each region. Such issues may arise in future assessments where the contribution of data across the assessed area is not proportional and depletion may vary within assessed regions. Development of indices of abundance from additional data sources as well as evaluation of the trends in indices and historical catch across ports or counties etc. would help address these issues to better inform relative abundance and stratification future assessments respectively.

Recommendations

1. Consider prioritizing the alternative stratification of the China rockfish assessment at 42° N. lat. for review at mop up.
2. Consider adopting the remaining data-moderate and full assessments recommended by the SSC for use in management in 2015-2016.