Agenda Item F.8.b
Supplemental GAP Report
June 2013

GROUNDFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON ADOPT PRELIMINARY STOCK COMPLEX AGGREGATIONS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) was briefed by Mr. John DeVore on the preliminary adoption of stock complex aggregations and offers the following comments and recommendations.

In general, the GAP cautions against a proliferation of multiple stock complexes that will create unnecessary management constraints. Many more stock complexes and management units will disrupt the fishery and further reduce the ability to achieve the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) objective of attaining optimum yields. The GAP acknowledges that there should be consideration for restructuring some of our current stock complex aggregations but urges that an overall philosophy of "keep it simple" be a foundation in such considerations.

The GAP reiterates the general concern that this initiative will receive a higher priority than other initiatives that the GAP believes are of more immediate importance, such as recommended trawl trailing actions and non-trawl initiatives that have been consistently falling below the Council/NMFS priority line (e.g., sablefish permit ownership and control). Given the backlog of actions already decided by the Council yet not implemented in regulations, the GAP continues to be concerned about pursuing overly complex actions that may further delay implementation of higher priority items for little benefit to the fishery or fishery-dependent communities.

The GAP also reiterates the need for doing an adequate analysis of the socioeconomic effects of restructuring complexes, including an evaluation of the management implications of restructuring complexes, and an analysis of the conservation effects of proposed changes. While the GAP understands such analyses will be conducted, the GAP stresses these analyses will be critical for informing a good decision on restructuring stock complexes.

In the spirit of prioritizing workload, the GAP recommends that the action for restructuring stock complexes be limited to considerations for alternative slope rockfish complexes and alternatives for restructuring the Other Fish complex. The GAP notes that any issues regarding stocks managed in the nearshore rockfish complexes can be resolved with management measures in the 2015-16 specifications process. For example, if there are concerns, trip limits and no retention regulations implemented inseason in the next management cycle can effectively limit fishing-related mortality of that stock. The GAP reiterates that any restructuring of the shelf rockfish complexes need not be done at this time since Rockfish Conservation Area management effectively minimizes catch of these stocks and trawl catch can be further controlled with individual fishing quota (IFQ) management. The GAP also reiterates that there is no pressing need to restructure the Other Flatfish complex since that is a very well structured assemblage of stocks with similar vulnerabilities and meets the National Standard 1 guidelines for managing stock complexes.

Additional to these recommendations, the GAP offers the following recommendations and comments specific to restructuring the slope rockfish and Other Fish complexes.

Slope Rockfish

The GAP recommends the No Action alternative for managing the slope rockfish complexes. To clarify why the GAP did not summarily dismiss considerations for restructuring the slope rockfish complexes, the GAP acknowledges that the concerns regarding management of slope rockfish stocks that have apparent dissimilar vulnerabilities should be more thoroughly vetted in the contemplated analysis supporting any decision on restructuring stock complexes.

The GAP does not prefer Alternatives 1 and 2 for slope rockfish (see Tables 6 and 7 in Agenda Item F.8.a, Attachment 1). These alternatives contemplate additional vulnerable slope rockfish complexes which increase the number of management units where allocation and IFQ decisions will need to be made. Such actions could be difficult to reconcile since it could require a reconsideration of Amendment 21 allocations and entails the difficulty of determining new quota shares for a new set of stock complexes. Further, the GAP emphasizes that the proliferation of slope rockfish complexes will add unnecessary constraints to the fishery and creates smaller boxes that reduce fishery stability and increase the cost of managing the fishery. For example, creating more stock complexes requires sorting of more stocks that will hamper fishing operations on the water, increase the workload for first receivers, and complicate the port sampling of landed catch. None of these costs are trivial and will either require more resources (not likely to occur in today's budget-limited environment) or a reduction in other tasks that are currently done to sample and process groundfish catch.

The GAP also does not prefer Alternative 3 which contemplates removing rougheye and aurora rockfish from the slope rockfish complexes and managing these stocks with stock-specific harvest specifications. Both of these stocks will be newly assessed this year. It is premature to conclude these stocks are as vulnerable as the GMT's Productivity and Susceptibility Assessment indicate. The GAP notes that the catches of aurora rockfish have not exceeded the component over fishing limits of this stock reducing concerns regarding potential overfishing. If rougheye rockfish are managed coastwide with stock-specific harvest specifications, there will be the difficulty of reallocating the stock to sectors; a process that is exacerbated by the fact that the current Amendment 21 allocations differ north and south of 40º10' N lat. Furthermore, the rougheye catch histories associated with individual trawl permits are uncertain making it a difficult task to develop an equitable sharing of any trawl allocation of the stock.

Finally, the GAP's support of No Action for slope rockfish is bolstered by the fact that management measures can be implemented to address individual stock concerns. For example, the Council established a harvest guideline (HG) for blackgill rockfish south of 40º10' N lat. for this management cycle. This action effectively limits mortality of this stock designed to rebuild the blackgill rockfish to its target level. Similar actions can be contemplated for any other slope rockfish stock of concern if the need arises. Such actions are preferred by the GAP to avoid the other consequences associated with restructuring stock complexes described above.

Other Fish

The GAP agrees with the Council priority to consider restructuring the Other Fish complex. This complex is an assemblage of species with disparate life histories, distributions, co-occurrence in the fishery, and vulnerabilities to overfishing which should not be managed together. The GAP also agrees with the recommendation to first consider splitting the cartilaginous stocks from the roundfish stocks contemplated in Attachment 1.

Cartilaginous Stocks:
The GAP prefers Alternative 1 for cartilaginous species (see Table 13 in Attachment 1). This alternative contemplates managing skates separately from the other cartilaginous species (spiny dogfish and ratfish) which is sensible given their disparate life histories, distributions, and vulnerabilities. The GAP does not recommend Alternative 2, which further subdivides skates into shallow and deep complexes. This alternative unnecessarily creates an additional complex that is not fully supported by the analyses provided in Attachment 1. Figures 17 and 18 depict the observed area distributions of the catch of skate species in trawl and commercial hook-and-line fisheries, respectively from the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program. These figures indicate that the skate species caught in west coast groundfish fisheries have a wide depth range with a great deal of overlap of the stocks proposed for the shallow and deep skate complexes considered under Alternative 2.

The GAP does not recommend Alternative 3 for cartilaginous species (see Table 15 in Attachment 1) since it contemplates managing all these species (i.e., sharks, skates, and ratfish) with disparate life histories, distributions, and vulnerabilities in one complex. This alternative also contemplates adding brown catshark to the FMP and complex. Brown catsharks are not caught in great amounts in any groundfish fishery with a depth distribution far deeper than the trawl fishery can be prosecuted (i.e., deeper than 700 fm), which is the only fishery with any kind of historical bycatch of this species.

The GAP also does not recommend Alternative 4 for cartilaginous species (see Table 16 in Attachment 1) since it manages the species in Alternative 3 together with the added subdivision of cartilaginous species into shallow and deep assemblages. The reasons for this recommendation are the same as those posed for rejecting Alternative 3, coupled with the added complexity of a depth stratification of this mixed assemblage.

Roundfish:
The GAP recommends a revised Alternative 1 for roundfish species (see Table 18 in Attachment 1) that would create a nearshore roundfish complex[1] but eliminates the creation of a grenadier complex. The GAP recommends removing Pacific grenadier and not adding the other grenadier species to the FMP, as well as removing finescale codling (aka Pacific flatnose) from the FMP since the distribution of grenadiers and finescale codling extends far deeper than the 700 fm trawl limit and no fisheries target these species on the west coast.

[1] The GAP was told by Mr. DeVore that the inclusion of the Oregon substock of cabezon in the nearshore roundfish complex under Roundfish Alternative 1 was a typographic error. This stock would continue to be managed with stock-specific harvest specifications under this alternative.

The GAP does not recommend Roundfish Alternative 2 (see Table 19 in Attachment 1). The creation of a deep roundfish complex under Alternative 2 does not comport with the GAP recommendation to remove Pacific grenadier and finescale codling. Alternative 2 also contemplates adding California slickhead, a deepwater smelt species, which is distributed deeper than 700 fm and is also not targeted on the west coast. The GAP does not recommend adding California scorpionfish to the nearshore roundfish complex, as contemplated under Alternative 2, since the stock does not co-occur with the other nearshore roundfish species (see Figures 21-23 in Attachment 1). The GAP also does not recommend adding the California and Oregon substocks into a new nearshore roundfish complex as contemplated under Roundfish Alternative 2. The GAP is satisfied that both stocks are well managed with stock-specific harvest specifications and management measures. Further, it is not clear to the GAP how management of stock complexes in general using indicator stocks is done or how it improves our current management system.

PFMC
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