

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON INITIAL STOCK ASSESSMENT PLANS AND TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR GROUND FISH AND COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) considered issues pertaining to the planning of 2015 stock assessments, to inform the 2017-2018 management cycle.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) provided a report on prioritization of species in [Agenda Item F.8.b, NWFSC Report](#). This report includes a mix of rebuilding species, species in need of updated assessments, and possible data reports. The report also discusses that if another data moderate stock assessment review (STAR) panel is done, that it cover fewer species than what was attempted in 2013.

Terms of Reference

It is the GMT's understanding that the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) is going to review and comment on the terms of reference (TOR) documents over the summer, in time for inclusion in the September Council meeting advanced briefing book (Agenda Item F.8.b., Supplemental SSC Report). Therefore, the GMT is delaying our specific comments on the contents of the TORs until we are able to review the SSC's recommendations in September.

Data used in assessments

We would like to see at least an informal method developed for considering trans-boundary stocks across their entire range. For example, many of our rockfish stocks' ranges extend well up into British Columbia and Alaska or down into Mexico. Taking into account what is known about biomass and stock structure throughout a species' range could improve our assessments off the west coast.

Data-limited methods

The GMT discussed the need to explore available data in detail well in advance. In the last round of data-limited assessments we saw that if there is very little fishery-independent or fishery-dependent data, then any assessment model will result in low biomass estimates. Likewise, there were questions about stratification and the effect of management on stock dynamics that were not explored as thoroughly as they could have been prior to STAR Panels. The GMT suggests that we should be working with the Science Centers and the states to better explore this prior to the next round of assessments (i.e. meetings of GMT STAR representative with assessor well in advance of the Panel meeting).

Stocks to be assessed in 2015

The GMT understands that which stocks to assess is ultimately the decision of the NWFSC based on input from the Council, available resources, and other logistical factors. Given the limited time available at this meeting, we did not seek to recreate a full list of planned assessments or to prioritize any of our recommendations, but offer considerations on select species to inform prioritizing assessments. These recommendations are summarized in Table 1 below, along with the recommendations from the NWFSC report in Table 2 and Table 3. There

are several concerns that have been raised with the data moderate assessments for nearshore species. The GMT suggests that China rockfish is a strong candidate for a full assessment. It is unclear whether there is enough data to move from a data moderate to a full assessment, but regardless, we would like to see one of the STAR panels dedicated to resolving the issues identified with China rockfish (i.e. even if it is still a data moderate assessment, similar to cowcod). Kelp greenling is another species that would benefit from a full assessment. While new data collection efforts off Washington will not provide information for this assessment cycle, there are also available data from Oregon ([Agenda Item F.8.b, ODFW Report](#)) for kelp greenling and other nearshore species. The GMT recommends that at least one STAR Panel be dedicated to China rockfish and kelp greenling.

The GMT discussed other nearshore species that might also be high priorities for assessment. While all nearshore species suffer from lack of a fishery-independent index, making full assessments difficult, some on the GMT would like to see quillback rockfish prioritized as a full assessment and gopher and olive rockfish prioritized at least for a data moderate assessment. Further, as mentioned above in the section on data-moderate methods, some on the GMT would like to see further exploration of all available catch per unit of effort data (e.g. California private boat data, Oregon commercial logbook data, etc.) particularly for nearshore species.

Some GMT members would also like to see sablefish prioritized as a full assessment. Sablefish is a valuable stock that has been in the precautionary zone for a considerable time. The Council has reduced its P^* to try to speed recovery of the stock in addition to the 40-10 reductions to harvest. While the last sablefish assessment was one of the most thorough that has been done for the stock, it was conducted in 2011. There may be some risk of “wasting” a STAR Panel slot on what would essentially be an update, but some on the GMT argue that the stock is important enough and has been in the precautionary zone long enough to warrant a close look at the new data and assumptions going into the assessment.

Further, some on the GMT think that roughey is a priority for full assessment. There were a number of issues identified in the last assessment, and major management changes are being implemented based on the estimated biomass compared to current catch. Staff at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife have also identified a number of otoliths that are newly available for ageing. There were a number of other data weighting questions that were identified for a workshop that did not happen. Some on the GMT would also like to see exploration of methods to split blackspotted rockfish out to raise this from a Category 2 to a Category 1 assessment.

Some on the GMT would like to explore whether there is information available for a data moderate assessment of shortraker rockfish. Likewise, there is some interest in looking at vermilion rockfish and exploring questions of stock structure and differentiating it from similar species (i.e. sunset rockfish). Current harvest specifications do not account for the fact that vermilion has been confused with a very similar looking species, sunset rockfish (*Sebastes crocotulus*) south of Point Conception. This continues to make assessment south of Conception

challenging, but a new assessment focused on the area north of Point Conception could improve the harvest specification for vermilion.

It is our understanding that lingcod is prioritized by the Science Center in part because there may be students available to contribute to those assessments. The GMT disagrees that this is a priority given the higher priorities listed above. This stock has been recently assessed, is rebuilt, and depletion is well above 40 percent in both regions. Attainment has been well below the annual catch limit, making assessment a low priority from a management perspective. In addition, the Council is considering opening the lingcod fishery during the winter months for the first time in many years, beginning in January 2015 (under Agenda Item F.7). If the winter lingcod fishery is opened in 2015, very limited, if any, information will be available to inform how the change in fishing season might be affecting the lingcod stock if the assessment is done in 2015.

Finally, the GMT would like to see catch reports expanded to provide the error (i.e. the standard deviation) around catch projections for rebuilding species.

Table 1. GMT suggestions on stock assessments that could be prioritized for 2015 and that differ from the NWFSC priorities.

Full	Update	Data Moderate	Data Report
kelp greenling ^a		gopher rockfish	
China rockfish ^a		olive rockfish	
quillback rockfish		shortraker rockfish	
sablefish		vermilion/ sunset rockfish	
rougheye/ blackspotted rockfish			

^a recommended to happen at the same STAR panel

Table 2. Stocks that are higher priority-recommended in [Agenda Item F.8.b., NWFSC Report](#)

Full	Update	Data Moderate	Data Report
black rockfish (2 areas)	lingcod (2 areas)	China rockfish	POP
bocaccio	petrale sole		yelloweye rockfish
canary rockfish	sablefish		
darkblotched rockfish			
widow rockfish			

Table 3. Stocks that are lower priority-potential in [Agenda Item F.8.b., NWFSC Report](#)

Full	Update	Data Moderate	Data Report
chilipepper	chilipepper	arrowtooth flounder	cowcod
China rockfish	POP	bank rockfish	
cowcod		blue rockfish	
kelp greenling (OR)		CA scorpionfish	
lingcod (2 areas)		gopher rockfish	
POP		kelp greenling (OR)	
petrale sole		olive rockfish	
quillback (2 areas)		quillback rockfish	
sablefish			
yelloweye rockfish			

PFMC
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