THE GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON STOCK ASSESSMENTS FOR 2015-2016 GROUNDFISH FISHERIES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) discussed the stock assessments conducted for aurora rockfish, rougheye rockfish, shortspine thornyhead, longspine thornyhead, cowcod, and Pacific sanddab for the 2015-2016 harvest specifications and management measures cycle. No unresolved concerns were noted by GMT advisors to the STAR Panel reviews.

After a joint discussion between the GMT and the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) regarding the motion made by the Council in June 2013 to evaluate alternative stratification of brown, copper, and China rockfish assessments, the GMT provides the following for consideration.

The SSC approved the china, brown, and copper rockfish stock assessments for use in management in 2015-2016 at the June Council meeting (June 2013, Agenda Item F.5.b Supplemental SSC Report). The SSC proposed an analysis to provide an indication of the effect of re-stratifying the catch in the China rockfish assessment, which the GMT supports. Some on the team emphasize that the same general issues are at play with China rockfish— an index of abundance that covers only part of the area and potential differences in fishing intensity between areas— also apply to some degree for brown rockfish and copper rockfish. A key difference is that no new indices of brown and copper rockfish abundance are available in the near term to look at a different stratification. The GMT may discuss the related issue of apportioning OFLs and ABCs between north and south stock complexes in later agenda items.

The GMT supports the SSC recommendation that the China, brown, and copper rockfish assessments be approved for use in management in 2015-2016. The GMT continues to agree that stocks determined to be in the precautionary zone should be prioritized for full assessment in future cycles as outlined in Agenda Item H.2.b, Supplemental NWFSC Powerpoint, March 2013. A full assessment of China rockfish for off-year science research may provide an opportunity to further examine restratification of the assessment or the development of additional indices of abundance.

In the future more advance review of data at the summer 2014 GMT meeting could be conducted after adoption of stocks for future assessment in April 2014. Off-year science research regarding variation in depletion and removals along the coast that should be accounted for in stock assessment may facilitate future data-moderate assessments by informing appropriate stratification encompassing management units. For the purposes of expediency, assumptions are made regarding stratification of assessment and such analyses would save time by identifying structure in advance. In addition, examination of management measures between states through time may also inform whether differential management may reinforce the need to stratify the assessment. Further off-year science research on methods to apportion catch across management boundaries may help address concerns expressed by some on the GMT regarding how the OFL is split when a species is rarely encountered across the boundary as is the case for brown and

copper rockfishes. Taking on fewer data-moderate assessments or dedicating more personnel to allow analysis of more stocks may be advisable to allow greater resources for examining alternative models. The GMT would appreciate continued opportunities to participate in the review of data used in data-moderate and full assessments, especially those for vulnerable species such as China and copper rockfishes.

PFMC
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