

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON SCIENCE
IMPROVEMENTS FOR THE NEXT GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT CYCLE

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) offers the following comments for Council consideration on prioritizing science activities for 2014.

Research in the Cowcod Conservation Areas (CCA)

As part of the 2012 off-year science improvements, the Council recommended prioritizing exploring the relative or absolute abundance of groundfish in the CCAs. Such non-invasive survey methods could greatly enhance the amount of data informing stock assessments and provide information on habitat and species abundance. This type of research is also extremely valuable because it can accomplish what trawl surveys cannot or are unsuitable for because of the inaccessibility inside the CCAs or adjacent areas. Given the importance of these data for stock assessments, CDFW supports prioritization of this item as an off-year science activity for 2014.

Data-moderate Stock Assessments

In 2013, the Council employed a new approach for stock assessments using data moderate methods. The results were intended to provide an understanding of the stock status, provide estimates to inform harvest limits, and help managers prioritize whether a more data intensive (i.e., full assessment) was necessary. As with any new method, issues came up during the STAR Panel and all of the stocks could not be reviewed (or compared) as thoroughly as intended.

Trying to balance the increasing demand to complete (or update) a greater number assessments with limited staff resources is a challenge. Data moderate assessments will likely be a useful tool to help achieve these goals. As such, CDFW supports the STAR Panel's recommendations for improvements to data moderate assessments for inclusion as part of the off-year science activities. These improvements will help refine the data moderate stock assessment review process and Council decision making.

Apportionment North and South of 40°10' N latitude.

During planning for the 2012 off-year science activities, the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) recommended the Council prioritize development of alternative apportionment methods north and south of 40°10' N latitude (Agenda Item G.10.c, Supplemental GMT Report, September 2011). Although the original impetus for this request arose from the apportionment used in the data poor assessment methods, it is also applicable to data moderate assessments. Given the importance of apportionments and the resulting implications when setting harvest limits, CDFW recommends that the Council include development of alternative methods to apportion catch north and south of 40°10' N latitude as an off-year science activity for 2014.

West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) Discard Estimates

During planning for 2012 off-year science activities, the Science and Statistical Committee considered the review of WCGOP methods to estimate discard rates to be a high priority issue (Agenda Item G.10.c, Supplemental SSC Report, September 2011). In addition to stock assessments, WCGOP discard estimates also form the foundation for the nearshore bycatch projection model. This bycatch model is used by the GMT to project target and overfished

species impacts under various depths and harvest levels. These results are then used by the Council to inform their decision making on nearshore fishery management. Given the importance of WCGOP data, CDFW supports efforts to review the methodology to ensure adequacy for both stock assessments and commercial modeling.

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