

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
SCIENCE IMPROVEMENTS FOR THE NEXT GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT CYCLE

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a presentation from Dr. Michelle McClure on science improvements for the next groundfish management cycle. The GAP also reviewed the STAR Panels' recommendations under this agenda item.-

Generally, the GAP understands the Council has to prioritize science needs and improvements, taking into consideration the recommendations by the STAR Panels, science centers and Scientific and Statistical Subcommittee, but request the Council concentrate on changes and suggestions that have the most benefit to the industry.

Thus, our recommendation in September 2011 (Agenda Item G.10.b, Supplemental GAP Report) still stands. Briefly, we requested four workshops: 1) A workshop on transboundary stocks; 2) one on the B_0 harvest management framework; 3) one to review historical catch reconstructions; and 4) one to develop techniques (non-extractive) to survey Cowcod Conservation Areas. That statement is attached for your review.

We understand there are budgetary concerns at all levels of government (including Canada, in the case of transboundary stocks), but fiscal concerns also affect every harvester, processor and community when it comes to operating small businesses. The GAP supports these improvements and believes they will be the most productive at making the industry and management process more efficient.

It is also the GAP's understanding that a workshop will be held to review stock assessments and the stock assessment process. We request industry members also be included in this workshop, as we reiterate the collective knowledge of the fishing industry will certainly aid conveners and participants of these workshops.

PFMC
09/13/13

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON SCIENCE IMPROVEMENTS FOR THE NEXT GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT CYCLE

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a presentation from Mr. John DeVore on science improvements for the next groundfish management cycle. The GAP also reviewed the Scientific and Statistical Committee's statement under this agenda item. The GAP recommends the following activities in priority order to improve the science informing groundfish management.

1. Workshop on Transboundary Stocks

The distribution of many west coast groundfish stocks extends beyond the borders of the west coast exclusive economic zone (EEZ), yet assessments for these stocks are limited geographically to the EEZ. Results of west coast assessments of transboundary stocks are likely compromised by not incorporating data collected comprehensively from surveys and fisheries throughout the range of these stocks. Important stocks such as sablefish, Pacific ocean perch, spiny dogfish, canary rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish are transboundary stocks and their dynamics are likely not as well understood as they could be if assessments were more geographically comprehensive. A workshop to evaluate these effects and consider new assessment protocols to address these limitations may improve assessments of transboundary stocks. The GAP notes this issue is perennially raised by the stock assessment review (STAR) panels that evaluate assessments of transboundary stocks.

2. Workshop on the B_0 Harvest Management Framework

The current biomass-based harvest management framework relies on estimates of initial, unexploited spawning stock biomass (B_0) to determine the status of stocks. Stock status, or relative depletion, is defined as the ratio of estimated current spawning stock biomass to estimated B_0 . However, estimation of B_0 is extremely uncertain and such estimates tend to change dramatically from assessment to assessment as assumptions regarding historical catch and stock productivity change. This leads to fishery instability and lack of confidence in assessment results. The GAP notes that other regions do not use such a harvest management framework and assessments and management actions tend to be much more stable and much less contentious. For instance, assessments of North Pacific groundfish do not include poorly estimated historical catches prior to the mid-1970s because there is no need to estimate B_0 . These assessments tend to produce more consistent and plausible results, largely because they are based less on assumptions and more on empirical data. The Council sponsored a groundfish harvest policy evaluation workshop in December 2006, which began to explore the limitations of our current framework. Many of the shortcomings of our B_0 framework were evaluated and it was concluded there may be better ways to manage many of our stocks. Workshop participants also supported another workshop to continue this evaluation. The GAP strongly recommends this second workshop be scheduled next year to evaluate an alternative framework for assessing groundfish stocks and managing west coast groundfish fisheries.

3. Workshop to Review Historical Catch Reconstructions

One of the consistent recommendations from the 2011 STAR panels was to convene a workshop to review historical catch reconstructions of west coast groundfish. To date, historical catch reconstructions have been done for California and Oregon fisheries. While there was a peer review of the California catch reconstruction effort, further refinements of methods to reconstruct historical California catches have been subsequently identified in STAR panels and no such peer review of the Oregon catch reconstruction effort has been done. The GAP understands that there are plans to reconstruct historical Washington catch reconstructions as well. Given the sensitivity of assessment results (especially estimates of B_0) to assumptions regarding historical catches, a formal workshop to review methods to reconstruct historical catches should be done. The GAP strongly recommends the participation of fishermen in any workshop designed to review catch reconstructions since their knowledge will certainly be helpful in interpreting historical catch data.

4. Workshop to Develop Techniques to Survey the Cowcod Conservation Areas

One notable limitation in stock assessments of many groundfish species that occur in the Southern California Bight is the lack of fishery-independent survey data from the Cowcod Conservation Areas (CCAs). This is a critical uncertainty in recent assessments of bocaccio, blackgill rockfish, greenspotted rockfish, and, of course, cowcod. No surveys, including the Northwest Fisheries Science Center shelf/slope trawl survey are allowed to survey the CCAs. However, development of an effective non-extractive survey technique is critically needed to better understand the distribution and relative abundance of species that reside in the CCAs. The GAP therefore recommends development of techniques to survey the CCAs and other areas that cannot be effectively accessed by our current groundfish surveys.

The GAP would also like to participate in the other workshops recommended for next year since these activities will likely affect future assessments and management actions. The collective knowledge of fishermen will certainly aid participants in each of these workshops.

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