

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON INTEGRATED ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT (IEA) REPORT

Drs Brian Wells (SWFSC), Nick Tolimieri (NWFSC), and Kelly Andrews (NWFSC) provided the SSC with an overview of the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) discussion document (Agenda Item H.1.b, Attachment 1). This substantial document provides information on climate, predator-prey and non-fisheries impacts on hake, sablefish, canary rockfish, bocaccio and Sacramento River Chinook salmon, and moves forward the inclusion of ecosystem considerations in assessments and Council decision-making. The document is one outcome of the IEA process, and is focused on providing information for a limited number of species. It is not a broad overview of the status and trends of the California Current Ecosystem.

The information provided in the report could potentially be used in a variety of contexts, including improving salmon forecast models and identifying information and hypotheses that could be included in stock assessments, and in principle harvest control rules. It may also provide information that would assist the Council when selecting P^* , and assist the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) when it assesses sigma, the uncertainty associated with the Overfishing Level.

It will be necessary to develop appropriate processes for reviewing the use of this information. Due to time constraints, the SSC was unable to review the technical aspects of the document, nor was the SSC able to comment on any of questions raised in the document. Rather, review of the document would best be conducted in the context of a focused workshop, which would likely require several days to a full week. Such a workshop would evaluate the detailed analyses underlying the conclusions presented. Once the basic methodology and hypotheses are reviewed, there would be little need to prepare a lengthy document each year; rather an annual update of the basic indices could be provided.

The SSC is concerned that the overall summary plots could be easily mis-interpreted and recommends that these plots be modified to better reflect the uncertainty associated with the indices and their likely impact on stocks. In addition, information should be provided on how the various factors should be weighted when used for decision making.

The SSC notes that the document provides trends in indicators over five years. The appropriate length of time for assessing both time-trends and current indicator status is likely species-specific. The time length for each species should be evaluated separately for each species. The SSC also notes that some of the conclusions such as climate impacts on recruitment and abundance are more definitive than appears to be case from the data. In general, the information provided in the report should be considered hypotheses, which would be examined further before being used for decision making.

Finally, the SSC reiterates the benefit of having scientists with an ecosystem considerations background directly involved in stock assessment teams as this will provide the best way for ecosystem information to be integrated into stock assessments. However, even as currently structured the document is sufficient to identify factors which might be explored in stock assessments.