GROUNDFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON PACIFIC WHITING HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2011

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a presentation from Dr. Ian Stewart and Dr. Robyn Forrest about the Pacific whiting stock assessment models that were reviewed and adopted by the Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel. The GAP greatly appreciates the tremendous amount of work accomplished by the stock assessment authors, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and Northwest Fisheries Science Center during 2010. We believe that their comprehensive review of the model and input data, including re-analysis of the acoustic survey data, vastly improved the stock assessment because it addressed many of the critical questions raised during past STAR Panels.

The GAP also reviewed *The 2011 Pacific Whiting OFL, Depletion Rate, and Revised Decision Tables as Recommended by the SSC* (Exhibit H.3.a, Supplemental Attachment 3). The GAP supports the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) recommendation to adopt both assessment models with equal weight. The GAP also supports the SSC's recommended 2011 Overfishing Level (OFL) value of 973,727 mt. The combined assessments estimate 2011 depletion at 126 percent of unfished biomass, which is well above the 40 percent management target.

Mr. John Devore informed the GAP about the range of optimum yields (OYs) analyzed in the 2011-2012 biennial specifications and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Apparently, the DEIS constrains the upper range of the 2011 U.S. OY to 290,903 mt, which corresponds to a 2011 coastwide (i.e., U.S. and Canada) OY of 393,751 mt.

The GAP discussed the strength of the 2008 year class, which is identified as the key uncertainty in the stock assessments because its effect in the model is primarily informed by one year (2010) of fishery data. While we accept that there is uncertainty about the strength of the 2008 year class as presented in the assessment model, the GAP notes that the model appears to confirm anecdotal information from both the shrimp and whiting fisheries about a very large biomass of young whiting. We also note that 7 out of 8 times a very large year class has shown up as two-year-olds in the fishery data, the fishery data was correct and there was a very large year class. In other words, historically, fishery data has been a very strong indicator of large year class strength.

The GAP recommends a 2011 coastwide OY of 393,751 mt. Our recommendation is premised, in part, on our understanding that under current NMFS procedural constraints, our recommended OY is at the upper limit of the available range. Importantly, the recommendation also accounts for the uncertainty underlying the strength of the 2008 year class. This harvest level recommendation provides a buffer of 579,977 mt below the SSC-recommended OFL, which, to our knowledge, is the largest buffer in the history of the fishery.