

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON  
BIENNIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2015-16 GROUND FISH FISHERIES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) was briefed by Mr. John DeVore about the 2015-16 biennial specifications and offers the following comments and recommendations.

**Range of Acceptable Biological Catches (P\*s/ABCs)**

The GAP reviewed [Agenda Item H.6.a, Supplemental Attachment 7](#) and recommends adopting a P\* of 0.45 for all stocks and stock complexes to determine 2015 and 2016 ABCs. For some stocks (e.g., sablefish and arrowtooth flounder), this is a departure from the default ABC harvest control rules (HCRs) adopted for the 2013-2014 management cycle.

**Range of Annual Catch Limits (ACLs)**

The GAP reviewed Tables 6 and 7 in [Agenda Item H.6.a, Supplemental Attachment 7](#) to consider 2015 and 2016 annual catch limits (ACLs). The GAP process for recommending 2015 and 2016 ACLs was to first deliberate whether application of the status quo ACL HCRs used to determine 2013 and 2014 ACLs would serve to optimize the socioeconomic benefits to the fishery and affected fishing communities, while minimizing any biological risks to groundfish stocks. For most stocks and stock complexes, the GAP is recommending the default HCRs be applied for the next management cycle. Those stocks where the GAP is recommending a departure from the default ACL HCRs are listed below.

- **Cowcod:** The GAP is not prepared to recommend a preferred cowcod ACL pending provision and adoption of a final 2013 cowcod rebuilding analysis. The GAP reviewed the draft cowcod rebuilding analysis ([Agenda Item H.5.a, Supplemental Attachment 2](#)) and the advice of the Scientific and Statistical Committee to develop their cowcod ACL recommendation. The GAP recommends analyzing a range of cowcod ACLs from 3 mt, in the 2014 ACL in regulation, to 16 mt, the ACL determined by applying the default harvest rate in the current rebuilding plan (i.e., SPR of 82.7%). The GAP notes the 16 mt ACL is predicted to rebuild the stock by 2020, one year longer than the minimal time to rebuild if all harvest were eliminated starting in 2015 (i.e.,  $T_{F=0}$ ).
- **Arrowtooth flounder:** The GAP recommends setting the ACL equal to the ABC. However, the GAP recommends the ABC (and ACL) be specified using a P\* of 0.45, which is a departure from the status quo P\* of 0.4. The West Coast arrowtooth stock is healthy and increasing in abundance. They are a top level predator on the shelf and compete with Pacific halibut. Further, this is a trawl-dominant stock and targeted by some members of the fleet, some of whom are close to attaining their vessel cap for arrowtooth.
- **Dover sole:** While the GAP is not prepared to recommend a preferred ACL for Dover sole, we do recommend analyzing higher ACLs than the default 25,000 mt ACL. The GAP recommends analyzing ACLs ranging from 25,000 mt to the ABC set at a P\* of 0.45 (i.e., 63,929 mt and 56,615 mt in 2015 and 2016, respectively). This is a healthy

stock with an abundance much higher than the target  $B_{MSY}$  level; the stock is projected to remain above target at a level of removals higher than the ABC. The potential of developing a more robust Dover market depends on a certainty of potential higher volume of landings enabled with higher ACLs.

- **Lingcod south of 40°10' N lat.:** The GAP recommends setting the ACL equal to the ABC. However, the GAP recommends the ABC (and ACL) be specified using a  $P^*$  of 0.45, which is a departure from the status quo  $P^*$  of 0.4. This is a healthy and well managed stock targeted by every sector of the West Coast groundfish fishery. The slight increase in yield afforded by a higher ACL will directly benefit the industry and affected fishing communities in California.
- **Longspine thornyhead:** The GAP recommends maintaining the Point Conception management line at 34°27' N lat. for managing this stock. Further, the GAP recommends a departure from the default HCR, which apportioned the coastwide OFL north and south and specified a further scientific uncertainty adjustment to determine the default ACLs. The new longspine thornyhead assessment conducted this year explicitly recommended this further scientific uncertainty adjustment was no longer needed since the Northwest Fisheries Science Center bottom trawl survey has been conducted in the Southern California Bight for a long enough period to develop an informative abundance index. Therefore, the GAP recommends setting the longspine ACLs by apportioning the ABC, determined using a  $P^*$  of 0.45, using the survey biomass estimates recommended by the stock assessment team (see [Table 7 of Agenda Item H.6.a, Supplemental Attachment 7](#)). The recommended ACLs for north and south of 34°27' N lat. are 3,474 mt and 1,097 mt, respectively in 2015 and 3,305 mt and 1,044 mt, respectively in 2016. While coastwide management of longspine thornyhead was considered by the GAP, it was not recommended due to concerns it would potentially open an Amendment 21 allocation battle, especially for other stocks such as shortspine thornyhead.
- **Sablefish north of 36° N lat.:** The GAP recommends setting the ABC using a  $P^*$  of 0.45 rather than the status quo  $P^*$  of 0.4. We note the  $P^*$  of 0.4 was used only for the 2013-14 biennial specifications and a  $P^*$  of 0.45 was the expected default at the time. The GAP further recommends application of the default 40-10 ACL HCR to determine the ACL to manage this important stock. Sablefish is a critically important stock to west coast commercial fisheries. It is the main target in offshore limited entry (LE) and open access (OA) fixed gear fisheries, as well as the bottom trawl fishery. Ex-vessel prices for sablefish are increasing and a higher ACL directly benefits the industry and affected fishing communities. Further, the LE trawl fleet needs a higher quota of sablefish to optimize their Dover/thornyheads/sablefish (DTS) complex and shelf fishing strategy. A higher sablefish quota allows trawlers to better attain their Dover sole quota, a stock that, along with sablefish, is the subject of developing markets. A higher sablefish quota would also benefit fixed-gear fisheries that, in recent years, have also been significantly constrained by lower catch limits.
- **Sablefish south of 36° N lat.:** The GAP makes the same recommendation for this stock as made for sablefish north of 36° N lat.

- Shortspine thornyhead:** The GAP has the same recommendation as that made for longspine thornyhead: to depart from the default HCR and specify ACLs north and south of 34°27' N lat. by apportioning the ABC using a P\* of 0.45. The GAP-recommended ACLs for north and south of 34°27' N lat. are 1,913 mt and 1,012 mt, respectively, in 2015 and 1,892 mt and 1,001 mt, respectively, in 2016. The GAP does not recommend setting a coastwide ACL for shortspine thornyhead. This stock is targeted almost exclusively by fixed gear, non-trawl sectors in the south and the bottom trawl sector in the north. Therefore, the Amendment 21 allocations are much different north and south. A reallocation process for shortspine would be contentious and a needless distraction from other, more important priorities that are contemplated for 2015 and 2016.
- Starry flounder:** The GAP recommends setting the ACL equal to the ABC. However, the GAP recommends the ABC (and ACL) be specified using a P\* of 0.45, which is a departure from the status quo P\* of 0.4. This is a healthy stock far above its B<sub>MSY</sub> target and is caught in nearshore commercial and recreational fisheries. There are no biological risks associated with a higher ACL.
- Widow rockfish:** The GAP recommends a higher ACL than the default 1,500 mt ACL specified for 2013 and 2014. Specifically, the GAP recommends setting the ACL equal to the ABC determined with a P\* of 0.45 (i.e., 3,929 mt and 3,790 mt in 2015 and 2016, respectively). The trawl fishery needs a higher widow ACL to gain greater access to the healthy yellowtail rockfish resource. Further, this is a constraining stock for the at-sea whiting sectors. A higher widow quota will allow greater flexibility to target whiting while avoiding other species of concern such as canary and roughey rockfish. This is a healthy stock above its target B<sub>MSY</sub> harvest level. The GAP notes that annual average widow landings in the three years immediately prior to the 2002 widow shutdown (1999 to 2001) were below 3,900 mt. It is hoped the regulations for 2015-16 will allow midwater gear to be used outside of the whiting season; specifically, a 12-month non-whiting midwater fishery to target yellowtail. Increased widow rockfish would be needed to prosecute this fishery.
- Minor Slope Rockfish north and south of 40°10' N lat.:** The GAP recommends setting the ACL equal to the ABC using a P\* of 0.45 for both of these complexes. This recommendation applies regardless of the Council's final decision on restructuring these complexes.
- Minor Nearshore Rockfish north and south of 40°10' N lat.:** The GAP does not recommend changing the management line from 40°10' N lat. to the California-Oregon border at 42° N lat. This consideration is driven by the request to explore moving to the new management line through revised assessments for brown, China, and copper rockfishes. The GAP believes these three stocks cannot be effectively managed with a different management line used to manage the other minor nearshore rockfish stocks. Further, the GAP does not recommend removing these three stocks from the minor nearshore rockfish complexes. While the GAP does not oppose eventual consideration for changing the nearshore management line to the California-Oregon border, the GAP

believes this should be a more deliberative process that should start next year for consideration in the 2017-2018 management cycle. The GAP believes considering this change for the 2015-2016 management cycle would provide a needless distraction from other, higher priority tasks contemplated for the next management cycle.

- **Other Fish:** The GAP recommends setting the ACL equal to the ABC using a P\* of 0.45 for this complex. This recommendation applies regardless of the Council’s final decision on restructuring this complex.

**Table 1. Summary of GAP recommendations for ranges of ABCs**

Species	GAP recommendation	Comments
Cowcod	Analyze a range of ACLs between 3 and 16 metric tons	
Arrowtooth	ABC=ACL/P* of 0.45	
Dover sole	ACL range: 25,000 mt to ABC=ACL/P* of 0.45	At ABC=ACL/P* of 0.45, the high range would be 63,929 mt in 2015 and 56,516 mt in 2015
Lingcod S. of 40°10’	ABC=ACL/P* of 0.45	Departure from status quo P* 0.4
Longspine thornyhead	For ACLs, apportion ABC using P* of 0.45 using survey biomass estimates	Maintain management line at 34°27’
Sablefish N. of 36°	Set ABC using P* of 0.45; use 40-10 HCR to determine ACL	Departure from status quo P* of 0.4, which was established for the 2013-14 spex cycle; P* of 0.45 was assumed to be the default at the time
Sablefish S. of 36°	Same as sablefish north of 36°	
Shortspine thornyhead	For ACLs, apportion ABC using P* of 0.45 using survey biomass estimates	Maintain management line at 34°27’
Starry flounder	ABC=ACL/P* of 0.45	Departure from status quo P* of 0.4
Widow rockfish	ABC=ACL/P* of 0.45	Higher ACLs than status quo of 1,500 mt
Minor slope rock, N. and S. of 40°10’	ABC=ACL/P* of 0.45	Applies regardless of decision on restructuring complexes
Minor nearshore rock, N. and S. of 40°10’	Do not change management line to 42°; consider for 2017-18 biennial specifications process	
Other fish	ABC=ACL/P* of 0.45	Applies regardless of decision on restructuring complexes

**The Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (Amendment 24 process)**

The GAP strongly recommends proceeding with the Amendment 24 (Tier 1) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the 2015-2016 management cycle and beyond. This analysis, which provides a longer term outlook on the potential environmental impacts of the groundfish fishery,

should serve to provide relief from the detailed National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses done every year to specify new harvest specifications and management measures. Any future NEPA workload relief will free up resources to devote to other important priorities that are currently being neglected. The GAP further offers that delaying this analysis makes no sense. New information is always emerging. Future supplementation or tiering off the Amendment 24 (Tier 1) EIS would address a narrower scope of issues and is a much more sound process that will provide workload relief sooner than delaying the Amendment 24 (Tier 1) analysis.

PFMC  
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