Mr. Mark Cedergreen, Chair
Dr. Don McIsaac, Executive Director
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place #200
Portland OR 97220-1384

RE: Agenda Item J.1.c Terms of Reference for Stock Assessment and Methodology Review Panels

Dear Mr. Cedergreen, Dr. McIsaac and Council members,

The California Wetfish Producers Association (CWPA) represents the majority of active wetfish fishermen and processors from both Monterey and southern California. We appreciate this opportunity to address the Council on the TOR for STAR and Methodology Review Panels.

Regarding STAR panel terms of reference, we generally support the recommendations and concerns highlighted in CPS Advisory and Management Team statements, with particular emphasis on the need to provide as much flexibility as possible in the timeline for the Stock Assessment Team to produce documents for review. The first draft language specified distribution at least two weeks prior to STAR panel and update meetings. In light of weather constraints and vagaries of Mother Nature that we’re experiencing on the ground during our summer aerial sardine survey, completing the project in time to meet the two-week requirement is not possible. We requested and the CPSAS and CPSMT concurred that providing flexibility in the language was appropriate. We can live with the recommended change: delete the phrase “at least” before two weeks prior and add the caveat “if possible”, on pages 11 and 13.

Regarding terms of reference for Methodology reviews, we observe the terms as written provide no clear process for proponents to propose and secure reviews of new methodology. We discussed this issue during the CPSAS/MT teleconference but came to no definitive conclusion as to the need for specific procedures. Comments during discussion implied that proponents can now make requests for such reviews through the advisory body structure. As the Council is aware, California has invested significant resources, supported in part by a small (800 mt) EFP allocation, to assess the variance between and among several methods to measure sardine: day vs. nighttime photography following the same techniques as in the summer aerial survey, coupled with the addition of LIDAR (Light Detecting and Range), which can ‘see’ 50 meters underwater (far deeper than the cameras now employed in the aerial survey), and hydroacoustics.
As part of our research plan, we will be conducting point sets to calibrate and compare all these survey methods, working in communication with the SW Fisheries Science Center to conduct point sets on schools measured with acoustics.

We understand the Council contemplates conducting a methodology review early in 2011 to review acoustic technology at the request of the SW Fisheries Science Center, and the review may also include Canadian trawl data that could possibly be incorporated in the 2011 sardine stock assessment. We ask for Council support to include the results from CWPA’s fall pilot in this review also. Peer-reviewed papers by NOAA’s Dr. James Churnside et al have already been published, comparing LIDAR and acoustics as well as LIDAR and aerial photogrammetry (specifically video). The CWPA research project will draw on these published works to expand and improve aerial survey and acoustic techniques to measure sardine abundance.

We would appreciate the Council’s support to promote STAR panel review of the data produced by CWPA’s fall research early in 2011, enabling its potential use for the 2011 survey. We will present this request for support at the November CPS advisory meetings also.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Best regards,

Diane Pleschner-Steele
Executive Director