

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON STOCK ASSESSMENT PLANNING

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed three Terms of Reference (ToR) documents that will be used to guide the stock assessment process for 2015. These documents include the ToR for groundfish and coastal pelagic species (CPS) stock assessment (Agenda Item J.2.a, Attachment 1), the ToR for rebuilding analysis (Agenda Item J.2.a, Attachment 2), and the ToR for methodology reviews (Agenda Item J.2.a, Attachment 3). The documents have been updated to be consistent with the revised National Standard Two Guidelines issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in 2013. Except for the following recommended changes, the SSC considers these documents ready to be used in the 2015 assessment cycle.

In the Terms of Reference for the Groundfish and CPS Stock Assessment Review Process for 2015-2016:

- p. 8. *“The Council also directed that annual harvest measures for Pacific sardine and Pacific mackerel be implemented on a biennial basis beginning with the 2015-2016 fishing year.”* Delete *“Pacific sardine and”* because annual harvest measures are not implemented on a biennial basis for sardine.
- p. 12. Replace *“If a recommendation on whether to send the assessment to the mop-up panel meeting is needed before the full SSC is able to review the STAR panel report, the SSC Chair, Vice Chair, and Groundfish Subcommittee Chair will make a preliminary decision.”* with *“Soon after completion of all STAR panels, a meeting of the SSC groundfish subcommittee will be held to recommend which assessments, if any, will be sent to the mop-up panel and to prioritize further analyses.”* This change is intended to manage workload for the mop-up panel, and to handle situations when there are more assessments recommended for mop-up than can be reviewed at the meeting.
- p. 24. Replace *“Catch-only projections are reviewed by the relevant SSC subcommittee, via email or conference call, and the full SSC.”* with *“Catch-only projections are initially reviewed by the relevant SSC subcommittee with public notice, and subsequently reviewed by the full SSC.”* This change is intended to ensure that advance notice is provided to all interested parties of the SSC subcommittee review of catch-only projections. Sometimes the results of catch-only projections are unexpected, particularly if default assumptions are not used.

The SSC also discussed the Council’s initial list of stocks to be assessed in 2015. Dr. Owen Hamel from the Northwest Fishery Science Center was present for the discussion to provide a NMFS perspective.

The Council’s initial list included cowcod as a full assessment. The 2012 remotely-operated vehicle ROV survey for cowcod is potentially a critical data point that could verify the amount of rebuilding that has occurred since the last ROV survey in 2002. If new methods were used in the ROV survey, the SSC recommends these methods be reviewed before the results are used in the stock assessment.

Since ROV surveys only cover a proportion of cowcod habitat, biomass from the survey area is expanded to the population level for use in the assessment model. The expansion method should

also be reviewed. A review of the ROV survey is unlikely to be completed in time for a cowcod assessment in 2015, suggesting that this assessment should be delayed until the next assessment cycle.

The SSC supports update assessments for petrale sole and sablefish, given that these assessments have been carefully and thoroughly reviewed in previous Stock Assessment Review panels. The SSC would be able to review an update assessment of chillipepper rockfish if an assessment were to be conducted.

Arrowtooth flounder was last assessed in 2007. This stock could be assessed in the next cycle by either a data-moderate assessment or a catch-only projection. There are a number of issues that need to be addressed for data-moderate assessments. If the decision is made to go forward with a data-moderate assessment for arrowtooth flounder, the SSC recommends that the Extended Simple Stock Synthesis method be used, and that input trend information be limited to bottom trawl surveys. This approach would avoid some of the issues associated with data-moderate assessments, and would make it feasible for the assessment to be reviewed by the SSC groundfish subcommittee during the June meeting. Both a data-moderate assessment and a catch-only projection should be done for arrowtooth flounder to provide a useful contrast. If additional data-moderate assessments are added to the list, a fifth STAR panel should be added to the proposed schedule for data-moderate assessments.

Making an informed decision about whether it is possible to conduct an assessment in an area requires going through the initial steps of stock assessment. These steps include soliciting and assembling data sets, gathering information about fishing practices and management history, and evaluating potential stock assessment boundaries based on biology, data availability, data quality, and management history. The SSC considers it unwise to a priori restrict the assessment of kelp greenling to the state of Oregon, and recommends that a similar process be used for kelp greenling, China rockfish, and black rockfish, and any other nearshore species considered for assessment.

The SSC recognizes that there are a number of alternative points of view related to stock assessment boundaries for nearshore species. Since these issues are important for a number of species that will be assessed in 2015, it will be important to discuss these issues and develop agreed-upon approaches prior to the assessment cycle. The SSC groundfish subcommittee is willing to take the lead in planning a meeting to address these issues, and will discuss a possible process during the November Council meeting.

One lesson that perhaps can be garnered from the last assessment cycle is the importance of communication between stock assessment scientists and those closer to sources of fishery information, such as state data stewards and managers. Data stewards have the responsibility to inform stock assessment scientists about the limitations and appropriate use of data for stock assessment. Stock assessment scientists should communicate initial decisions on stock structure, fishery modeling, and priors used in the assessment. For nearshore species where state agencies are the primary source of assessment information, this communication could be fostered by including state agency biologists on stock assessment teams. Holding pre-assessment workshops well in advance of the STAR panels is another excellent approach for ensuring that this critical two-way communication occurs.