

GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM COMMENTS ON
GROUNDFISH HARVEST RATE POLICY

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) discussed the draft panel report of the ad-hoc West Coast Groundfish Harvest Policy Review Workshop Panel (Panel) (Supplemental Attachment B.3.a.), and believes the Panel has given the subject a thorough review resulting in useful recommendations. The GMT concurs with the Panel that available information suggest default harvest policies of $F_{40\%}$ for rockfish and $F_{35\%}$ for all other groundfish are too aggressive. Less aggressive default rates should be adopted in accordance with information presented at the March 2000 and previous workshops. Further, the GMT agrees with the Panel that it is appropriate to adopt the suggested default F_{MSY} proxy rates for 1) whiting, $F_{40\%}$; 2) *Sebastes/Sebastes*, $F_{50\%}$; 3) flatfish, $F_{40\%}$; and 4) other groundfish, $F_{45\%}$. These are practical groupings that include all groundfish, while recognizing different life histories and population dynamics among species.

It is important for managers to have flexibility in estimating F_{MSY} for individual species, so risk of overharvest or underharvest may be minimized. While use of an unbiased default rate may be risk-neutral for a group of related species as a whole, it nevertheless involves risk; because actual stock productivity for some species will be higher than the default, while for others it will be lower. In particular, this concern applies to the "other groundfish" category, where more dissimilar species are grouped together. Likewise, more than 50 species of *Sebastes* display a range of productivity that is difficult to capture with a single F_{MSY} proxy. Thus, use of a default will result in harvest of some species in excess of maximum sustainable yield (MSY), based on variability in life history and productivity among species. Unfortunately, biological information is often inadequate to reliably estimate spawner-recruit relationships, which are needed to directly calculate B_{MSY} and F_{MSY} for individual species. In order for managers to address the tradeoffs between use of defaults and direct estimates of F_{MSY} , the GMT believes it is desirable for the Stock Assessment Review Team's terms of reference to request assessment authors routinely investigate B_{MSY} and F_{MSY} as part of the stock assessments for individual species, with appropriate treatment of associated uncertainty.

For many species, information is lacking to even allow use of default values of B_{MSY} and F_{MSY} . In the case of "remaining rockfish", Panel recommendations support $F=0.75M$ as a risk-neutral policy. However, these species have previously been classified as data-moderate with respect to stock status. Thus, the GMT thinks further reductions in harvest rate should be considered if a "precautionary adjustment" is intended to be applied in response to greater uncertainty in the status of these stocks.

The Panel addressed issues concerning the current 40:10 policy and estimation of B_0 . In addition, it may be appropriate to examine the default biomass level ($0.25*B_0$) that is used to determine whether or not a stock is formally classified as overfished. Since an overfished stock may be defined as one where current biomass is $<0.5* B_{MSY}$, the overfished threshold may be expected to vary among species or species groups as the F_{MSY} varies. Accordingly, it would be useful for the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to provide B_{MSY} values associated with the recommended SPR rates for each species group, which may be used to better estimate overfished biomass levels for each species group. Also, the GMT is concerned unproductive stocks may have equilibrium biomass considerably lower than the SPR rate that gives MSY, which may bring equilibrium biomass close to the current overfished definition level of $0.25*B_0$.

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