

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON  
NEW STOCK ASSESSMENTS FOR LINGCOD AND PACIFIC OCEAN PERCH

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) met with Mr. Jim Glock to discuss new stock assessments for lingcod, Pacific Ocean perch (POP), and widow rockfish. Lingcod and POP have been separated out for discussion, because each is managed under recently-adopted rebuilding plans, and this is the first time new assessments have been prepared for these species since the overfishing declaration. The new widow rockfish assessment indicates the biomass is at or below 25% of  $B_o$ , so the potential for an overfishing declaration exists for this species as well.

The SSC held a lengthy discussion regarding timing of new stock assessment results for rebuilding species, particularly with respect to updating current rebuilding plans and applying changes for the upcoming management season. For example, rebuilding plans for lingcod and POP have just been approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service, immediately followed by new stock assessment results for each species. The Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA) requires re-evaluation of rebuilding plans every two years, but the groundfish fishery management plan (FMP) states that stocks will be managed based on the best available information. This leaves the Council with two options, (1) re-establish rebuilding plans according to the new benchmarks each time new data are available, or (2) carry forward current rebuilding plans as approved, applying the new information in the next review period. The SSC favors the second option.

The SSC has the following specific comments regarding the new stock assessment results:

Widow Rockfish - Although there is a fair amount of uncertainty in the preferred model estimate of widow rockfish biomass, there is a 70% probability that current biomass is less than 25% of  $B_o$ . The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) is currently developing preliminary optimum yields (OYs) based on this estimate and the assumption the stock will be declared overfished. In addition, the current assessment indicates year class strengths have been weak in recent years. The current 40-10 policy will likely be sufficient to rebuild widow rockfish within the next 10 years, and supplemental analysis, provided as an appendix in the stock assessment report, but not reviewed by the Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel, suggests widow rockfish biomass may be somewhat greater and not in an overfished condition. The SSC's groundfish subcommittee will review the supplemental analysis prior to the October Council meeting.

Pacific Ocean Perch - The previous POP rebuilding analysis estimated 20 to 30 years to rebuild the stocks. The latest analysis indicates a much shorter rebuilding time on the order of 10 years. The data used in the new rebuilding analysis are based on the new assessment, in which  $B_{MSY}$  was estimated from parameters in the model. There are many confounding factors associated with simultaneous estimation of steepness of the stock-recruitment relationship and survey catchability. This confounding and other technical issues affect the reliability of the  $B_{MSY}$  estimate, which subsequently impacts the rebuilding plan. The SSC does not recommend superceding the currently approved rebuilding plan with the new analysis. The new analysis has not yet been reviewed, but should be considered for the process in 2001.

Lingcod - The lingcod stock is still considered to be in an overfished state, but the most recent assessment results indicate the stock has started to rebuild. The stock assessment authors did not develop a modified rebuilding plan based on the latest results. The SSC recommends continued implementation of the recently approved rebuilding plan.