

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON
PRELIMINARY HARVEST LEVELS AND OTHER SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2001

Dr. Richard Methot of the National Marine Fisheries Service, Northwest Fisheries Science Center, discussed the report *A Preliminary Analysis of Discarding in the 1995-1999 West Coast Groundfish Fishery* with the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). An update of discard levels is needed as the data supporting the current estimates are 15 years old, and the current procedure for estimating discard as a fraction of the total catch of a target species is no longer applicable to today's fishery. The report uses a new model to analyze data from the Enhanced Data Collection Project (EDCP) for the Dover sole, thornyhead, sablefish (DTS) bottom trawl fishery during the 1995-1999 fishing seasons and proposes a new model for estimating DTS discards based on trip limits. The model has two important features, (1) it can be used to estimate discards from current fishery data, and (2) it can be used to predict discards for a given set of proposed trip limits.

The SSC finds the approach used to estimate discards in the DTS trawl fishery very promising. It has the potential to provide better estimates of discards than current procedures and explicitly accounts for changes in trip limits. The SSC recommends future work with the model examine the following:

1. Length frequency information from the data used to develop the model, to determine if there is evidence of high-grading and whether discards are having a significant impact on recruits to the population.
2. Associated economic data that may influence discard behavior in the fishery.
3. A tow-by-tow analysis of the data.
4. Availability of existing log book data (beyond the EDCP data) to support model development.

Although the SSC recognizes the preliminary nature of the current model, it does represent the best available science. Therefore, the SSC recommends using the proposed method for estimating discards in the DTS trawl fishery during the 2001 season. Because of the early stage of development of this model, future improvements to the model may result in changes to the DTS discard estimates and the estimation procedures. Furthermore, the proposed model is dynamic, and discard rate estimates may change annually. The SSC encourages further development of this model.

The restrictive 2000 and 2001 catch levels for many of the OY groundfish stocks will continue to create problems with bycatch in other fisheries and will adversely impact the collection of fishery-dependent data. Additional management efforts will need to be undertaken by the state agencies to reduce the bycatch in shrimp and prawn trawl fisheries and recreational fisheries to keep the catches below OY levels. In addition, fishers may become reluctant to land any catch of rockfish stocks with OY levels of just a few 100 tons to ensure landings do not exceed OY. This will likely contribute to additional unaccounted discards for rockfish stocks. The port sampling opportunity to collect biological data from commercial or recreational catches will then be jeopardized. Information on fish size and age composition is important to our efforts to evaluate the magnitude of incoming year classes and to track stock rebuilding. The lack of sufficient port samples will place more emphasis on the data from the coast-wide shelf and slope surveys.

The SSC reviewed with Dr. Jim Hastie, Chair of the Groundfish Management Team (GMT), the preliminary OY levels for a number of the stocks, particularly those judged to be overfished or near overfishing levels. The new harvest rate policy, and 40-10 reductions are being implemented as 2001 point estimates or as the lower bound of a range. Comments on OY levels for selected stocks are:

Canary rockfish - SSC supports the OY levels based on the preferred model of the Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel which reduced the estimates of recent recruitment levels by 50%. These result in OY ranges of 13 mt to 40 mt for the northern area. The extremely low harvests levels will severely impact shelf fisheries.

Pacific Ocean perch (POP) - With respect to the OY levels for Pacific Ocean perch there is confusion over the existing rebuilding plan, given the results of the new assessment which concluded that current biomass

is above 50% of B_{MSY} . The new rebuilding analysis provided in the briefing book has not been reviewed, and the SSC cannot endorse its use in setting the 2001 OY level. We recommended to the GMT they develop a range using last year's OY (294 mt) and a yield obtained using the current harvest policy ($F_{50\%}$ with the [40-10] reduction) applied to the most recent biomass estimate. This recommendation should be in place until the status of the POP rebuilding plan is resolved. Given the sophistication and complexity of the new models being used to assess rebuilding and to derive biological reference points, the current review process is being stretched beyond its capability to provide the in-depth evaluations required to make informed, valid, and pertinent judgments to resolve conflicting model outcomes similar to those for the POP assessment.

Widow rockfish – The updated assessment concluded the current biomass for the widow rockfish stock has a 70% probability of being less than 25% of B_o , which indicates an overfished stock. However an existing analysis, which has not been reviewed or approved by the Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel or SSC, concludes a rebuilding plan for widow rockfish may not be required. If this is the case, the harvest rate would be based on the (40-10) policy. Prior to Council adopting OYs in October, the SSC will review the overfished status report appended to the assessment document and will provide advice on OY at that time.

Darkblotched rockfish – The OY range is based on uncertainty in the amount of darkblotched taken in the foreign rockfish fishery and initial rebuilding projections by the Stock Assessment Team (STAT) that assume the stock will be declared overfished. SSC recommends further analysis be undertaken to resolve the uncertainty of species composition in the foreign fishery. Until there is some resolution to this issue, SSC can offer no advice on any particular point estimate.

Lingcod – The lower value of the OY range is based on the existing rebuilding projections and the upper value is based on the new assessment results. The best available information is from the new assessment.

PFMC
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