

2001/2002 GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

Situation: This agenda item has two elements relative to the 2001/2002 groundfish management process and schedule. The first element is generated from a concern the current groundfish management process and schedule is deficient and impractical relative to current fishery management problems, mandatory regulatory obligations, and alternative solutions. The second element is directed specifically at the terms of reference for the 2001 stock assessment process and was prepared without assuming there will be other significant changes to the 2001/2002 management process.

2001/2002 Management Process

At the September Council meeting, there was considerable dialogue about the impracticalities and inadequacies in the process to date with regard to the Council adopting detailed regulatory proposals for public review at that meeting. There is a perspective the current process is designed to simply adopt annual harvest guidelines and adjust routine management measures such as trip limits, and the current process has several deficiencies in dealings with the complexities of such management measures as rebuilding plans, mixed-stock, cross-fishery conservation/allocation dilemmas, etc. It seems apparent the existing September-November two-meeting arrangement leaves too little time to accomplish all the new analytical and regulatory necessities that accompany the current situation in the groundfish fishery. The recently adopted Groundfish Strategic Plan recognized this problem, concluding in Section II.C.a about the Council process... "The fundamental trust and credibility relationship between industry, the public, and management is strained and the process is not serving its intended purpose".

Therefore, the Council may wish to initiate an evaluation of the overall groundfish management process and schedule. If so, a small committee should be appointed to further analyze improvements and alternatives, and report results to the Council at the March meeting. Such a decision may be most efficiently administered under the auspices of the Strategic Plan Oversight Committee, which will appoint other sub-committees subsequent to the November meeting.

2001 Stock Assessment Process

This year's groundfish stock assessment and review process was conducted under the terms of reference in Attachment C.7. Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) members and Groundfish Management Team (GMT) members served in an advisory role to Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panels and were not considered official members. Assessments were coordinated by Ms. Cyreis Schmitt, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS); and the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) was tasked to resolve any disagreements among the Stock Assessment (STAT) Team, the STAR Panel, and the GMT.

In June, the Council adopted the following list of species for which stock assessments will be prepared and reviewed in 2000: coastwide lingcod, yellowtail rockfish, widow rockfish, bank rockfish, darkblotched rockfish, and splitnose rockfish. In September, Pacific Ocean perch was added. Ms. Schmitt will update the Council on the assessment calendar for 2000.

Several points bear mentioning as the Council considers the stock assessment review process for 2001:

- (1) In addition to conducting and reviewing stock assessments for the species listed above, developing, implementing, and analyzing rebuilding plans will also require commitments of already limited time and resources.
- (2) The NMFS laboratory in Tiburon, California is in the process of moving to new facilities in Santa Cruz, California, and several Northwest Fishery Science Center, NMFS scientists involved in groundfish stock assessments have left the groundfish program – these changes may potentially cause delays in the stock assessment process.
- (3) Currently, public participation is minimal and the cost (time and expense) for external reviewers limits their availability. It may be beneficial to consider ways to increase the role of the public and outside reviewers in the assessment process.

A change that has been previously suggested would add "data review meetings" that require less time and resources than a STAR Panel. These data reviews would be intended only for new species that have not previously been assessed. This would allow new species to go through a data review in the first year, and a full STAR Panel review the second year. Other species that have been assessed would continue to be reviewed by a STAR Panel meeting. This change has been suggested to allow the process to accommodate more species, without a significantly increased time and resource burden.

In the past few years, the Council has convened a working group in December/January to finalize revisions to the terms of reference and plan for the upcoming assessment cycle. This may not be necessary this year, if suggested changes are minimal and consensus-based.

The SSC, GMT, GAP, and interested persons will meet Tuesday, October 31, at 10:30 a.m. to review the stock assessment process and assess how effectively the process has achieved its goals. An oral report on the meeting will be presented.

Council Action:

- 1. Consider directing the Strategic Plan Oversight Committee to appoint a sub-committee to evaluate the long-term groundfish management process and schedule.**
- 2. Revise *Stock Assessment Process Terms of Reference*, as necessary.**

Reference Materials:

1. Terms of Reference (Exhibit C.7, Attachment 1).

PFMC
10/17/00