

THE SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMENTS ON
2001/2002 GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed the groundfish management process and schedule for the upcoming year. In recent years, the Council's groundfish process has become increasingly more complex with each management cycle. Growing demands on the system coupled with inherently difficult management decisions have taxed all elements of the Council family. Completion of advisory committee documents and analyses needed to support Council decision making is often delayed until late in the calendar year, leaving little time for reflection and discussion. The problems facing the groundfish management process involve many different issues. The SSC is best suited to address stock assessment review (STAR) issues and looks forward to working with the rest of the Council family on developing long-term solutions for the overall problem.

The STAR process was developed after long and involved negotiations among the Council's groundfish entities, the SSC, and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to resolve the problem of providing independent and comprehensive review of stock assessments. Over the past few years, the STAR process coupled with SSC review has taken on additional responsibilities with the need to review more complex stock assessment models, additional analyses related to rebuilding plans, and harvest policy rate guidelines. The SSC partnership with the STAR coordinator, Ms. Cyreis Schmitt (NMFS) has generally worked well, but the process is being strained under the weight of increasing demand but few additional resources. Long-term solutions may require rethinking the frequency with which assessments are conducted and the need to formally review all stock assessments, as well as other streamlining measures that bring the demand more in line with available resources.

For the short term, the SSC suggests the following:

- (1) As indicated in the June 2000 SSC statement, the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee will develop guidelines on the technical aspects of rebuilding plans, based on the experience with such plans to date. These guidelines will facilitate the process of developing and approving rebuilding plans for overfished stocks.
- (2) All members of the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee will attend the August 2001 Groundfish Management Team (GMT) meeting to discuss the 2001 assessments and STAR Panel reports with the GMT and to identify any important loose ends not adequately covered by the STAR Panel reviews.
- (3) All stock assessment analyses, including those commissioned by private groups, must be included in the STAR process, including adherence to all terms of reference and the STAR process schedule. In addition, it is critical that assessment documents be completed following the STAR meeting and incorporated into the Council's annual stock assessment and fishery evaluation (SAFE) document.

PFMC
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