Exhibit F.6.b
Supplemental SSC Report
April 2001

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON FUTURE GROUNDFISH 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 Council has established an Ad Hoc Groundfish Management Process Review Committee (GMPC) to address these issues. The GMPC has met twice and developed several ideas to investigate alternatives. Dr. Don McIsaac presented the draft report of the GMPC (Exhibit F.6.b) to the SSC.

While the SSC fully appreciates the multifaceted problems facing the groundfish management process, the SSC is best suited to address the stock assessment review (STAR) elements of the overall process. The STAR process was developed after long and involved negotiations among the Council's groundfish entities, the SSC, and NMFS to resolve the problem of providing independent and comprehensive review of stock assessments. This has been a resource and time-consuming process, and the challenge has always been to complete the process sufficiently early within the annual groundfish cycle (including assessment documents and STAR Panel reports) to allow for full Council deliberation without sacrificing the quality and reliability of the stock assessments. The SSC is concerned that some of the options for changing the groundfish management process – as outlined in the draft GMPC report – may result in the inability to use the most recent data in stock assessments. More specifically, modification of the present "2-meeting" sequence to either the "3-meeting" or "4-meeting" sequences considered in the draft GMPC report (p.3), will reduce the time available for stock assessment and review, with concomitant reduction in quality of the products. If the status quo "2-meeting" sequence is to be modified, the SSC prefers the "3-meeting" sequence (June, September, and November).

With respect to the other possible changes delineated in the draft GMPC report, the SSC sees both pros and cons for most of these changes. Implementing multi-year management, for example, would have the undesirable effect of generally increasing the lag between stock assessments and the consequent implementation of management actions. However if properly structured, multi-year management could offer the benefits of an "off-year" for assessment and review during which assessment scientists and the SSC could work on development of assessment methods and computer software that should, over time, lead to a more state-of-the-art, efficient, and productive process. As such, the SSC recommends that if a change is made to multi-year management, the stock assessments and reviews should be done on same cycle as Council management, e.g., if the Council changes to a 2-year cycle (Table 6 of the draft GMPC report), groundfish stock assessment and review should be conducted every other year with the "off-year" dedicated to improving assessment methods and software, organizing special workshops (e.g., marine reserves), bioeconomic studies (e.g., capacity reduction), etc. The Council should also be aware that a transition period is likely to be necessary if a 2-year cycle is adopted. While certain efficiencies will accrue over time leading to more stock assessments per year, it will not be practical in the short term to double the number of assessments done in the "on-years."

Finally, the "science barrier" or "wall of science" (as depicted in Table 6 of the draft GMPC report) has been the basis of the SSC's groundfish STAR process development. In practice, the barrier has worked better in some years than others, but the SSC remains steadfast in supporting the concept of a science barrier in order to ensure that Council decisions have a solid scientific foundation.

PFMC
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