

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON
FINAL HARVEST LEVELS FOR 2002

As part of the process of setting harvest guidelines for the 2002 groundfish fishery, the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) has undertaken a more comprehensive analysis of bycatch rates than was carried out in the past. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed this analysis in some depth under Agenda Item C.4. With respect to final harvest levels for 2002, the new GMT analysis, including revised bycatch and discard estimates, is considered to be the best way to proceed for the coming year (see SSC Statement on Management Measures for 2002 and Environmental Assessment [EA] for details).

With regard to the 2002 optimum yield (OY) for shortspine thornyhead, the SSC recognizes that it had not provided advice to the Council on a preferred alternative during the September 2001 Council meeting. In many ways, the analysis and data employed in the new stock assessment are improvements over the previous assessment carried out in 1998. However, the SSC notes that the Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel review in July 2001 indicates the assessment and, in particular the 2002 stock projections, remain highly uncertain. If the Council wishes to be risk-averse, the "Low OY" alternative is warranted (751 mt – Exhibit C.3, Attachment 1).

The SSC discussed the results from the National Marine Fisheries Services Alaska Fisheries Science Center (NMFS-AFSC) Shelf Survey conducted during June-August 2001. While it is encouraging to see estimates of incoming recruitment for sablefish at higher levels than in the recent past, the SSC cautions that these early indicators of year-class strength are uncertain, and it will take at least another year or two of data (survey + fishery) to better determine year-class strength. Further, the SSC notes that the results of the 2001 NMFS-Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) Slope Survey, when available, should provide much better indices of exploitable biomass for the Dover sole/thornyhead/trawl-caught sablefish complex (DTS) species than those indices provided by the 2001 shelf survey. In the absence of quantitative analyses of the 2001 survey indices (shelf and slope surveys) conducted in concert with the relevant stock assessment model, the Council should not consider modification of 2002 OY's in response to the newly available 2001 shelf survey data.

PFMC
10/30/01