

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
NMFS REPORT - STOCK ASSESSMENT REVIEW PROCESS UPDATE

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed three topics under this agenda item, namely (1) review of the 2001 Stock Assessment Review (STAR) process; (2) terms of reference for the 2002 STAR process; and (3) terms of reference for an abbreviated review process (e.g., as scheduled for sablefish in May 2002). Drs. Rick Methot and Elizabeth Clarke briefed the SSC on each topic.

(1) Review of the 2001 STAR Process

Three STAR Panels were convened in 2001, and an additional panel (for whiting) was held in February 2002. For discussion purposes, herein, all four panels are considered a part of the 2001 STAR process. Generally, the process worked well in terms of stock assessments being completed, reviewed, and provided to the Council family in accordance with the pre-established schedule. In some cases, the assessment documents, provided to the STAR Panel, could have been more complete. There were also some inconsistencies in the manner in which the respective STAR Panels characterized the full range of uncertainty in assessment results. The STAR terms of reference should be strengthened in both of these areas to further emphasize their importance.

With respect to the whiting STAR panel, it appears the 3-day session was not sufficient to fully explore and evaluate additional modelling scenarios. This has also been an issue with other STAR panels in previous years. The SSC recommends that rather than extending the time period of the STAR meetings, STAT teams should better explore modelling alternatives prior to the STAR panel review. It may be necessary to establish an informal modelling workshop each year prior to the STAR panel meetings. All STAT teams should participate in this workshop to provide informal peer review while assessments are still at the formative stage. This will require support for travel of STAT team members.

(2) Terms of Reference for 2002

The SSC recommends the 2001 terms of reference be used for 2002, and the modifications above be incorporated into the 2003 terms of reference.

(3) Terms of Reference for an Abbreviated Review Process

The SSC suggests that when the Council deems necessary an assessment update outside of the full assessment review cycle, an abbreviated review process may be possible. However, the SSC recommends proceeding with caution on abbreviated reviews. Often what appears to be a simple update can uncover unexpected issues and problems that are difficult to solve in an abbreviated process. In these cases, it may not be possible to simply update the assessment – rather the assessment may need to be revisited in the next full assessment review cycle. The SSC will prepare, for Council consideration at its April meeting, draft terms of reference for an abbreviated review process.

Finally, the SSC is concerned there may be a tendency to schedule accelerated assessment and abbreviated review only for species with apparent high recruitment in recent years. If this indeed becomes the case, the Council's management objectives may be compromised over the long term. To maintain balance, stocks that may be decreasing in abundance should be given equal consideration for accelerated assessment and abbreviated review.

