

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
STOCK ASSESSMENTS FOR BOCACCIO, CANARY ROCKFISH, AND SABLEFISH

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received presentations on the most recent stock assessments for bocaccio rockfish, canary rockfish, and sablefish. Before commenting on the individual assessments, the GAP has comments on the assessment process in general.

A key factor in determining whether a stock is considered overfished is the calculation of virgin biomass or B_0 . Unfortunately, there seems to be no standard method for making this calculation. Indeed, the value of B_0 can change for the same species over the course of assessments. Since, theoretically, B_0 represents an unfished state, the value should be constant over the range of assessments. In addition, the means of calculating it should logically be the same regardless of species.

The GAP has previously recommended the Council convene an independent review utilizing the expertise of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), independent experts, and with appropriate participation by advisory bodies to examine how B_0 should be calculated and whether it is the appropriate value on which to base determinations of overfishing. The GAP is again making that recommendation.

The GAP further notes that groundfish scientists are beginning to consider the possibility of an ocean regime shift and the influence of environmental factors on fish populations. However, not all stock assessments appear to have caught up with this modern concept. The GAP recommends the Council direct stock assessment authors to fully examine environmental influences on fish populations as a reasonable alternative to density dependence and have those results available for review by Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panels.

As a final general comment, the GAP notes that some stock assessments may not fully explore the effect management actions have had on population size. While new data, including historical data, is constantly being uncovered, the GAP believes all stock assessments presented for STAR Panel review include at least one model run using as the base the model previously presented and accepted, updated only with recent data. This will allow the Council to examine whether its management measures are having any noticeable effect on population size. The GAP recommends the Council include such instructions to stock assessment authors.

Turning to the assessments being presented, the GAP notes the author of the bocaccio assessment has recommended the assessment be re-done in 2003 with additional data that were not available to the author this year. This should include in one model run the newly developed analysis of foreign catch data. The GAP also notes that survey data available on bocaccio from the Northwest Science Center may not have been made known to the assessment author. Since the bocaccio population does extend beyond the range of the current assessment, it would be advisable for the two science centers to communicate more fully with each other, so the entire suite of data are available.

The GAP also has concerns with the conduct of the spawning survey conducted by the Southwest Science Center, since it only encompasses a short period of time in the late spring/early summer. Such a limited survey may not - based on anecdotal data presented to the GAP - represent the full range (both temporal and geographic) of spawning activity. The GAP strongly recommends the survey be examined and expanded.

PFMC
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Read by John DeVore