

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
STOCK ASSESSMENTS FOR BOCACCIO, CANARY ROCKFISH, AND SABLEFISH

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) was briefed by Drs. Alec MacCall, Rick Methot, and Steve Ralston on bocaccio, canary rockfish and sablefish (respectively) assessments, Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel results, and rebuilding updates (where appropriate). The SSC endorses all three stock assessments as being the best available science.

Dr. MacCall reviewed Exhibit C.2, Attachment 1 (Status of Bocaccio off California in 2002), Exhibit C.3 (Bocaccio Rebuilding Analysis for 2002) and Exhibit C.2, Attachment 2 (Bocaccio STAR Panel Report). The SSC would like to emphasize several points:

- Although separate assessments were done for central and southern California bocaccio, the STAR Panel recommended a single California assessment.
- The data used in the current assessment are much improved over those used in the 1999 assessment. A number of new data sets were used, and some of the old data sets were extended back in time.
- The only major change from the previous assessment is the estimate of recruitment of the 1999 year-class (Figure 19, stock assessment). The previous assessment set 1999 year-class strength equal to that of the 1988 year-class, since there were preliminary indications that it might be fairly strong. As a result of new data, the current assessment predicts a much lower 1999 year-class recruitment. This represents the best current estimate of the 1999 year-class strength. However, this estimate is still imprecise and should improve in the next several years as new data become available.
- The change in 1999 year-class recruitment extends the rebuilding time to 106 years. Dr. MacCall points out that this should not be a surprise in that this outcome was presented to the Council 3 years ago under a "low 99 recruitment" scenario.

Dr. Methot then reviewed Exhibit C.2, Attachment 3 (Status of the Canary Rockfish Resource off California, Oregon and Washington in 2001), Exhibit C.2, Attachment 4 (Canary Rockfish STAR Panel Meeting Report) and Exhibit C.3, Supplemental Attachment 4 (Rebuilding Analysis for Canary Rockfish: Update to Incorporate Results of Coastwide Assessment in 2002). The SSC notes that in this new stock assessment, natural mortality for female canary is allowed to increase with age and is tied to maturity (Fig 25, stock assessment). In addition, selectivity is dome-shaped and fishery-specific. We note that although progress has been made in modeling selectivity and natural mortality, future analysis of historical unprocessed data may help provide further resolution of this issue.

Dr. Ralston then reviewed the abbreviated sablefish assessment - Exhibit C.2, Attachment 5 (Status of the Sablefish Resource off the Continental U.S. Pacific Coast in 2002) and Exhibit C.2, Attachment 6 (Review of the Updated 2002 Sablefish Stock Assessment). This is the first of the expedited stock assessment updates. It serves to update the last full sablefish assessment conducted in 2001. The terms of reference (SSC Minutes, April 2002) specify that an expedited stock assessment update should "carry forward its fundamental structure from a model that was previously reviewed and endorsed by a full STAR Panel." The SSC discussed this issue at length, in that estimates of the selectivities and catchability (Q) of the slope trawl survey changed markedly from the previous assessment. This was due primarily to the fact the 1999 year-class provides the first real opportunity to estimate age selectivity of the slope survey. When this is done, selectivity of young sablefish is estimated to be low to the slope survey (Fig. 23, Stock Assessment), and survey catchability declines from 0.6 to 0.46. This causes a marked increase in estimated stock biomass (Fig. 21, Stock Assessment). The SSC would like to emphasize that this estimate of Q and the implied estimate of sablefish optimum yield, remain highly uncertain, and this should be taken into account when management decisions are made.

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