

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
PRELIMINARY HARVEST LEVELS AND OTHER SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2003

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) has reviewed the proposed alternatives for 2003 groundfish harvest levels that were developed by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Groundfish Management Team (GMT). Since these alternatives represent a range of possible options for public review and analysis, the GAP agrees they should be adopted with three exceptions.

In the case of yelloweye rockfish, the GAP notes that 2 alternative rebuilding scenarios have been developed: one which suggests a density-dependent stock and one which shows a stock influenced primarily by environmental factors. In order to encompass the full range of alternatives, the GAP believes Alternative 3 for this species should reflect a higher value as represented by a stock influenced by environmental factors.

In the case of Pacific whiting, the GAP notes that the rebuilding analysis provides a range of options. The SSC, in its review of the last whiting assessment, concluded that a harvest rate of $F_{40\%}$ was the default harvest rate for whiting and should be maintained. Both the Council and NMFS agreed with this position when establishing their respective - albeit disagreeing - harvest levels for whiting in 2002.

The GAP understands the SSC has essentially put the whiting rebuilding analysis aside for further deliberation and recommended a continuation of 2003 harvest levels. Absent an approved rebuilding analysis, the GMT has chosen to recommend that the 2003 alternatives reflect various harvest levels in the original stock assessment.

In order to provide the broadest range of analysis, the GAP recommends that Alternative 3 match the $F_{40\%}$ optimum yield with a 60% probability of rebuilding within T_{MAX} as shown on Table 4 of the Whiting Rebuilding Analysis (Exhibit C.3 Supplemental Attachment 5). This is consistent with previous GAP recommendations of using the 60% probability value for other species and follows the recommendations of the SSC regarding the default harvest rate for this species. The optimum yield value shown (for a coast-wide optimum yield) is 414,600 mt.

The GAP understands there have been concerns raised with the high level of harvest projected in this rebuilding analysis. However, if this rebuilding analysis - which was developed by the stock assessment author using models and methods approved by the SSC - is rejected simply because some are uncomfortable with the analysis, then it calls into question whether any of the rebuilding analyses (including those for bocaccio and canary rockfish) are valid, since the same methodology was used for those species. The GAP also notes that Canada has ignored the recommendations of the Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel by rolling over unused whiting harvest from 2001 into the 2002 fishery, thus effectively undermining the conservation measures undertaken by the United States. If Canada - which pushed hardest for conservative harvest at the STAR Panel meeting - thinks that stocks have rebuilt sufficiently since April, then perhaps we should follow their lead.

Finally, the majority of the GAP notes that the extremely low levels of bocaccio called for in the alternatives will result in substantial reductions in net national benefits and that no practical option exists to alleviate this loss. The GAP, therefore, believes that bocaccio should be treated as meeting the exception provided for in 50 CFR 600.310(d)(6) and that Alternative 3 reflect an appropriate optimum yield option.

A minority of the GAP disagrees with the use of the mixed stock exception.