

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
2003 GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT MEASURES: TENTATIVE ADOPTION FOR ANALYSIS

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed the methodology proposed by Dr. Jim Hastie to estimate projected bycatch rates and discards of overfished groundfish species for the upcoming 2003 fishing year. The basic approach is the same as that used for the 2002 fishing year – i.e., for each targeting strategy, bycatch rates of the overfished species are estimated, then discards are calculated, on a vessel basis, as the amount that bycatch exceeds available landings limits for each species. However, for the 2003 fishing year, the approach was extended to allow for depth-based closed areas, (e.g., restricting fishing at depths of 100 fm to 250 fm and other possible depth ranges.

Dr. Hastie reported that the basic approach worked well for the 2002 Dover sole/thornyhead/rawl-caught sablefish complex (DTS) fishery. However, the incorporation of critical depth data from logbook records for the 2003 analysis introduces considerable uncertainty. Bottom trawl tows are often lengthy (5 hours or more) and cover a considerable depth range. However, for each tow, only a single depth is often recorded in logbooks, and consequently, it is difficult to estimate the depth from which any individual animal is taken. Observer data – scheduled to become available in late 2002 – should provide some validation of logbook data, but are unlikely to provide a good understanding of depth-specific distribution. While the first year of observer data will not become available in time for establishing the Council's 2003 management measures, they should be useful for inseason adjustments during the 2003 fishing year.

The discard estimation methodology also assumes that baseline trawl activity in 2003 will be similar to the 1999-2001 level of activity, relies on an ad hoc formula to predict how effort will be redistributed to open areas, and assumes that catch per unit of effort (CPUE) will remain the same after effort redistribution. Recognizing that (1) the GMT analysis is only the first part of a necessary, more comprehensive evaluation and (2) a full SSC review was not possible given the urgency of the work and its immediate application in the 2003 management measures process, the SSC considers the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) analysis to be a reasonable way to proceed for the coming year.

The area closures being considered for 2003 are unprecedented. Effort shifts to the nearshore and slope areas may result in undue pressure in open areas with consequent crowding and safety concerns. A full SSC review of the 2003 environmental impact statement (EIS) was not possible as that document is still a work in progress. It is important the socioeconomics as well as environmental effects of the options be analyzed before the document is distributed for public comment.

The SSC looks forward to working with the GMT on further improvements of the methods and refinements in the data analysis. The Council may wish to sponsor a bycatch workshop to fully review the methodology and address other outstanding issues. The SSC's Economics Subcommittee (with support from the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee) is willing to organize such a workshop.