

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
STOCK ASSESSMENT REVIEW PANEL PROCESS - REVIEW OF 2002 AND PLANNING FOR 2003

The Scientific and Statical Committee (SSC) met jointly with the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) and the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) to review the 2002 stock assessment review (STAR) process and to discuss planning for the 2003 process. Afterwards, the SSC reconvened and continued discussion on this agenda item. Dr. Elizabeth Clarke presented the 2003 STAR process schedule to the joint meeting, and along with Dr. Richard Methot, participated in the SSC discussions.

With regard to 2002, the STAR process appears to have worked well for the most part. Assessments were completed, reviewed, and provided to the joint GMT/SSC Groundfish Subcommittee meeting in accordance with the agreed-upon schedule. Some improvement is needed in completing stock assessment documents in advance (2 weeks) of the STAR panel meetings to ensure all reviewers have adequate time to read documents prior to the start of their respective panel meeting.

The process fell somewhat short of expectations with respect to the yelloweye rockfish stock assessment. The initial stock assessment was revised in a rapid manner between June and September. The SSC recommends that stock assessments not be revised outside of the normal assessment cycle in future years.

With regard to the 2003 STAR process, the SSC has the following specific recommendations:

1. The STAR terms of reference (TOR) should be distributed to all concerned well in advance of the start of the 2003 process (January 2003). All stock assessment team (STAT) members and STAR panel members should re-read and adhere closely to the TOR.
2. Final dates for all STAR panels should be established as soon possible, but not later than November 2002.
3. A single STAR panel should not review more than two full stock assessments within the usual five-day meeting period.
4. In order to assist STAT members in completing their documents on time, the TOR should distinguish between sections of the document that must be completed prior to the document submission deadline, and those sections that could be completed after the STAR panel meeting. The SSC Groundfish Subcommittee will work with the stock assessment coordinator in modifying the TOR accordingly.
5. The section of the TOR regarding uncertainty requires modification. It appears the requirement that STAR panels present the "full range of uncertainty" in assessment results, as used in the TOR, has been generally misunderstood. Revised TOR should distinguish among the various components of uncertainty to include:
 - a. Uncertainty in estimates of recruitment and/or other key model parameters.
 - b. Uncertainty in the estimates of stock numbers and demographics at the end of the assessment period (i.e., the starting point for projections).
 - c. Uncertainty in selection of the proper model structure for the stock assessment.

When multiple results reflecting differences in model structure are brought forward by STAR panels, some comment on the relative likelihood of each model (or state of nature) should be provided. Rough probabilities associated with each state of nature are suggested, but even more qualitative comments on these likelihoods would be helpful in moving the assessment results through the management process.

Finally, the SSC is concerned that the current STAR process may not be capable of providing good scientific review under the any of the various multi-year management proposals under consideration by the Council. Conducting perhaps 25 stock assessments in each of the "on" years is likely to overwhelm the current STAR process with concomitant degradation in the scientific foundation for groundfish management under the revised fishery management plan (FMP). Other processes for stock assessment review may be feasible (e.g., the stock assessment workshop environment used in other parts of the U.S., as well as in some international fora). However, additional resources (both people and money) will be needed to implement any such alternative review process.