

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
STOCK ASSESSMENTS AND REBUILDING ANALYSES FOR 2004 GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) attended the joint briefing on the 2003 stock assessments and then continued discussions on the technical issues surrounding the assessments and the rebuilding analyses.

Before commenting specifically on the assessments, the GAP has some general comments to make.

First, the GAP believes that assessments on transboundary species need to look at all data on the stocks throughout their range. Further, efforts should be made to develop more multi-national assessments and review panels for species such as bocaccio, Pacific ocean perch (POP), canary rockfish, sablefish, and lingcod. An assumption that species such as POP, which are nothing more than a fringe population in the Exclusive Economic Zone off the Pacific Coast, are truly affected only by this Council's management actions is absurd.

Second, data needs for assessments must be analyzed and a program formulated to fill in the holes. Nearly every stock assessment review (STAR) report notes significant data needs, yet no individual entity is charged with filling these holes. A clear plan must be developed which prioritizes the data needs, describes how to meet them, and assigns somebody to carry out the plan.

In this regard, particular attention must be given to developing and utilizing new survey methodology for species found mid-water and primarily in untrawlable locations. The data gaps evident in this year's widow rockfish assessment provide a clear example of the need for new methods; those gaps will only get worse as fishery-dependent data decreases due to harvest restrictions. The GAP notes that submersible surveys are being tried, but they encompass only a small portion of a species range and are expensive. Acoustic surveys, hook-and-line or pot surveys, or surveys using other technology must be put in place immediately.

In regard to the black rockfish assessment, the GAP noted the concerns expressed by the STAR Panel about the catch per unit of effort data obtained from the commercial passenger vessel fleet. Those familiar with the fishery pointed out that the issues of concern are easily explained by the known migration patterns of black rockfish and changes in gear and fishing techniques.

In regard to the widow rockfish assessment, the GAP is concerned there was no more hard data available than in previous assessments, yet the changes in current biomass are significant. The GAP also notes the absence of a potentially significant data set: the larval survey conducted by the Pacific Whiting Conservation Cooperative (PWCC). This survey takes place in an area that encompasses, but is more extensive than, the NMFS survey. Use of the PWCC data is recommended for all assessments in which the Santa Cruz larval survey data are used.

The limited range of the larval survey for bocaccio also raised concerns. Again, survey data should be used which better covers the range of the species, and the surveys must be appropriate for the species being surveyed.