

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
FINAL 2004 HARVEST LEVELS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) discussed proposed harvest levels for the 2004 groundfish fishery. The GAP's recommendations below are based on Table 2.1.1-1, found in Exhibit C.3 Attachment 1.

The GAP recommends adoption of the Council's preferred harvest levels as identified in the table, with the following exceptions:

Widow rockfish: the majority of the GAP recommends the Council adopt an **acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 3,908 mt** and an **optimum yield (OY) of 501 mt**. The widow rockfish stock assessment from which harvest levels are derived suffers from sparse data and inconsistencies between projected abundance levels and actual abundance observed in the ocean.

The proposed OY, which is obtained from the rebuilding analysis, is sufficiently precautionary and has a probability of rebuilding of greater than 50%. The GAP's OY recommendation will barely sustain existing fisheries; the lower OY identified as the Council's Preferred alternative will result in harvest reductions and prevent the fishery from achieving the OY on healthy stocks.

A minority of the GAP recommends the Council Preferred alternative be adopted in order to demonstrate needed precaution.

Bocaccio rockfish: the GAP notes that the ABC figures shown on the table are incorrect. The majority of the GAP recommends an **ABC of 501 mt** and an **OY of 306 mt**, the corrected numbers for the Council's Preferred alternative.

A minority of the GAP recommends adoption of the corrected low value of a 400 mt ABC and 199 mt OY in order to exercise precaution.

Cowcod: For the north of Conception and Monterey areas, the GAP recommends an **OY of 9 mt**. The GAP notes that the assessment area covers only south of Point Conception, and the OY for the northern area was simply adopted to parallel the southern OY. Providing a small OY will have an insignificant effect on stock rebuilding, but will allow some small amount of cowcod to be landed and data obtained for future stock assessments. The cowcod assessment is extremely data-poor, and any additional scientific data will greatly improve our knowledge of overall stock status.

Darkblotched rockfish: The GAP notes that the ABC values shown on the table are lower than the OY values, a situation not allowed by law. The GAP recommends the Council Preferred alternative **ABC of 240 mt** and a corresponding **OY of 240 mt**.

For those species for which no Council Preferred alternative has been identified, the GAP makes the following recommendations:

Pacific whiting: Although a final whiting harvest level will not be determined until after the stock assessment has been completed and reviewed next year, the GAP is concerned that the upper end of the range identified is too low, based on significant evidence of increased whiting abundance in the fishery. As you recall, the range was established by using the 2003 ABC as a base and assuming a 50% range higher and lower. In order to accommodate the likelihood of the stock assessment projecting an ABC above the range in the table, the GAP recommends the high end of the ABC range be increased to **400,000 mt for the U.S. portion of the ABC**, with an OY that corresponds to necessary harvest levels which reflect whiting status in relation to B₀, the Council's harvest policy, and other relevant factors. Increasing the range will provide the Council with necessary flexibility to deal with abundance increases.

Sablefish: The majority of the GAP recommends the Council adopt an **ABC of 8,487 mt** and an **OY of 8,423 mt**, which is identified as the high option, along with the appropriate division between the Conception area and the area north of Conception. This harvest level reflects a sablefish stock which is influenced by a regime shift, rather than density dependence. The evidence for existence of a regime shift and accompanying changes in productivity is too strong to ignore. Fishery observations demonstrate several strong year classes of sablefish. The majority of the GAP believes that harvest levels should reflect this evidence.

A minority of the GAP recommends the medium ABC and OY levels in order to ensure necessary precaution.

Black rockfish: For the Oregon/California area, the GAP recommends an **ABC of 775 mt** and an **OY of 775 mt**, which correspond to the medium levels shown on the table.

PFMC
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