

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
STOCK ASSESSMENT OF CANARY ROCKFISH

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) discussed the issues surrounding the need to conduct a stock assessment for canary rockfish prior to final determinations of 2005 - 2006 harvest levels.

As the Council is painfully aware, the low optimum yield (OY) on canary that results from the most current stock assessment and rebuilding analysis has significant impacts on all sectors of the fishery along the entire coast. If a new stock assessment is not conducted prior to determination of 2005-2006 harvest levels, those impacts will continue for another three years. Given the controversies with the current assessment and the disconnect between modeled data and anecdotal data, the GAP believes we would be failing in our obligations to use the best scientific information available if no stock assessment were conducted before next April.

The GAP has heard several objections raised to conducting a stock assessment. First, the argument that there is no new data doesn't square with the fact that we have a new survey taking place this year and the fact that two states are expending considerable time and effort to assemble aging data.

Second, the concept that we are somehow conducting an assessment "out of cycle" makes absolutely no sense. We have done the same sort of "out of cycle" assessments for Pacific whiting, sablefish, yellowtail rockfish, and bocaccio rockfish. Our management system is designed to be flexible, and we should not consider ourselves slaves to some arbitrary timetable when doing otherwise could have substantial social and economic impacts.

Finally, the complaint that "we don't have the people or the money" is ridiculous. Several sectors of the fishery have already offered to contribute through whatever neutral party is appropriate to the coast of conducting the assessment. There are highly competent scientists within NMFS (in both the Northwest and Southwest Regions), in state agencies, in academia, and in the private sector who could be contacted about performing an assessment.

The GAP holds no illusions a new assessment will magically transform the fishery. We are prepared to live with scientifically valid results; but to refuse to even try to examine new data, and instead live for years on old data, is unconscionable and does a dis-service to the fish, the fishermen, and the Council process.

PFMC
09/11/03