

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON  
GROUNDFISH ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK - FISHING GEAR IMPACT MODEL COMPONENT

Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Groundfish and Economics Subcommittees met May 24-25 to review the fishing gear impact model component of the analytical framework for the essential fish habitat (EFH) environmental impact statement (EIS). Dr. Michael Dalton (Chair, SSC Economics Subcommittee) presented a report of this meeting to the SSC. Strengths and weaknesses of the current version of the fishing impacts model and data were described, recommendations were made concerning appropriate use of the fishing impacts model for EFH analyses, and data needs were considered in view of the ongoing requirements to evaluate impacts on EFH. A final version of the report will be available in time for the Ad Hoc Groundfish Fishery Management Plan EIS Oversight Committee's consideration of preliminary alternatives.

The SSC considered the utility of the fishing impacts model at its current state of development. The SSC concluded that further development of the model and additional data on fishing effort will be necessary before it can endorse use of the fishing impacts model for the purpose of identifying where adverse fishing impacts occur. The SSC does not recommend use of the current EFH fishing impacts model in the development and evaluation of management alternatives.

The report today is to inform the Council's consideration of approving the fishing impacts model. The SSC highlighted the following critical issues about the fishing impacts model:

1. Data from trawl logbooks are the only coast wide source of spatial data on fishing effort.
2. Values for a key tuning parameter in the model are arbitrary.
3. Spatial inconsistencies with the resolution of the fishing impacts model and impacts on habitat.

The SSC acknowledges the complexity of these issues and, specifically, the importance of data gaps. However, each of these issues severely limits the ability of the model to address impacts on EFH.

The Geographic Information System (GIS) package developed by the EFH analytical team contains a wide range of tools for habitat mapping and evaluation of potential fishing impacts. Data used with the fishing impacts model (trawl effort data, gear sensitivity, and habitat recovery matrices) are informative on their own. A useful set of maps based on these data could be developed to aid formulation and evaluation of EFH management alternatives. For example, polygons of the most sensitive habitat types could be overlaid with the trawl start coordinates to provide an index of potential trawl impacts. In addition, maps that associate habitat type to sensitivity and recovery for different gears could be used to develop and evaluate mitigation options.

The SSC examined some of the habitat suitability maps produced by the EFH identification model that are posted on the Council's website. Although the EFH identification model was previously endorsed by the SSC, detailed results were not available at the time of the SSC review. The SSC has concerns about the habitat suitability maps for several species (e.g., cowcod, California scorpionfish, lingcod) which show unexpected patterns that need to be explored further. The SSC recommends that maps for individual species be reviewed before use, and that a formal review process be developed for this purpose, possibly by the EFH Technical Review Committee.

PFMC  
06/16/04