

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR GROUND FISH REBUILDING PLAN REVIEW

There is a need to revise the “Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Terms of Reference for Groundfish Rebuilding Analyses” (see Agenda Item F.3.a, Attachment 1) to fully document current practice. The existing document is now four years old and pre-dates the development of software by Dr. Andre Punt, that has been used to conduct virtually all groundfish rebuilding analyses thus far. The SSC groundfish subcommittee agreed to complete a revision of the document as soon as possible, including an evaluation of compatibility with National Standard 1 Guidelines, when they become available. However, due to the March 16th deadline for the April meeting briefing book, the revision will not be ready until the June meeting. The delay is not anticipated to hamper the stock assessment process.

Discussion by the SSC under this agenda item ranged more broadly to include the operational definitions for determining whether a stock is overfished. Amendment 11 to the fishery management plan established $B_{25\%}$ (i.e., 25% of virgin stock size) as the overfished threshold for groundfish stocks. However, interpretation of results from analytical methods that produce a distribution of values as opposed to a single point estimate could lead to confusion in the application of this criterion. The SSC groundfish subcommittee agreed to address this topic and to recommend a standard approach to status determination, which will be included in the revision at the June meeting.

The SSC also discussed the issue of how to evaluate progress of overfished stocks towards meeting rebuilding targets and the development of a set of policy options that the Council could use to track progress and to implement revisions to rebuilding plans when needed (see Agenda Item F.3.a, Attachments 2 and 3, and Agenda Item F.3.b, Attachments 1 and 2). Substantial progress has been achieved on this topic in the form of developing a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) simulation protocol developed by an *ad hoc* working group of SSC, NMFS, and academic scientists. Given an operating model of stock dynamics and a method of assessment, the MSE simulation evaluates the success of a policy option (set by the Council) in achieving a set of objectives. Thus far a range of operating models has been devised and some plausible policy options described. It would also be useful to consider an assessment model with more complexity and to ensure that policies are consistent with National Standard 1 Guidelines.

At this point in the process it is important for the Council to provide guidance back to the SSC to frame the range of policy options that could be evaluated within the context of the MSE. In addition, a discussion and prioritization of management goals and objectives is needed to help define and evaluate management success. For example, high yields, low catch variability, stability of the management regime, and rebuilding certainty are all desirable attributes of a policy, but they often work in opposition to one another. Also, it was noted that a single policy on revisions might not be appropriate for all stocks (e.g., constraining stocks may have different criteria adopted for revisions than non-constraining stocks). To begin to work through these complex issues the SSC recommends that a joint session involving the Council, SSC, Groundfish Management Team, and Groundfish Advisory Subpanel be held on Monday of the April meeting.