

Pacific Fishery Management Council –
San Diego, California
November 3, 2005

Comments to Council regarding Off year science adjustments

My objective in these comments is simply to raise an issue. After participating in Council decision making for about one year, it is becoming clear to me that this decision making body needs more than simple "off year science adjustments." The Council needs a major new commitment to improvements in our capabilities for planning and decision making. We need a real long run research and development plan.

A renewed commitment to research and development is needed to meet the Council's current mission. A higher commitment to research will be even more important if a renewed Magnuson-Stevens Act increases the Council's responsibilities.

Examples of areas where research and tools development are needed include*:

- Designing and evaluating bycatch reduction strategies
- Designing and evaluating strategies for moving the fishing fleets toward full retention
- Developing models of the linkages between fish landings and community impacts
- Developing ecosystem-based management capabilities including:
 - Delineating and characterizing ecosystems
 - Developing conceptual models of the food web
 - Developing indices of ecosystem health
 - Calculating total removals and showing how they relate to biomass, production, optimal yields, and trophic structure.
 - Developing models of the relationships between climate and ocean monitoring and ecosystem considerations (productivity, non-target species, trophic interactions and ecological indicators)
- Developing models of the relationships between resource surveys (non-target species, food habits, ecology, habitat interactions) and ecosystem considerations
- Assessing how uncertainty is characterized and improving how uncertainty is incorporated in conservation and management decisions.

Note that these activities are supported by data gathering but not driven by it.

Developing a strategic research and development agenda will take valuable Council time and it will take money and talent to execute. Without Council effort it is doubtful that much research and development work of strategic significance will get done, decisions will get made the same way – and the risk of law suits will remain high. In order to break out of this cycle, the Council must make the effort to develop a meaningful research and development agenda -- an agenda that is closely linked to Council decision making needs – current and anticipated.

This is too important a task to delegate to the Science and Statistical Committee (SSC). The focus of R&D agenda setting should be the Council and the Council's advisory structure, with input from the SSC.

Now the \$64,000 question, Why bother to lay out an R&D agenda when there is not enough money to do the R&D? It is a good question. There isn't a simple answer other than citing the axiom that good things come to those who are prepared. The likelihood of securing funding is vastly increased if we know what and why we need it and what we are going to do with it. In addition, we would expect research partners like NGO's and universities to align themselves with us if we have a clear vision of where we are going. With alignment we will benefit from their efforts without having to pay for them directly.

Hopefully these comments will provoke some thought. Hopefully some of you agree with my assessment. It would be reassuring to see the Council's 2006 agenda shaped to accommodate this strategic issue.

* Several of these items were taken from "Considering ecosystem-based fisheries management in the California Current" by John C. Field and Robert C. Francis, published in Marine Policy, 2005. (John Field is a member of the PFMC Groundfish Management Team.)

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