

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON STOCK ASSESSMENT
PLANNING FOR THE 2009-2010 FISHING SEASON

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the first draft of the revised Terms of Reference for the Groundfish Stock Assessment Review process. This document was revised by members of the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee following recommendations developed at the January 2006 Groundfish Stock Assessment Review Workshop. Additional modifications to the Terms of Reference will be made by the SSC. Two new sections were added to the Terms of Reference: 1. STAT Team Responsibilities and 2. Stock Assessment Updates. The STAT Team's responsibility is to produce a stock assessment document that follows a standardized format, an outline of which is provided in appendices B and C.

The draft Terms of Reference document specifies the conditions that must be met for an assessment to qualify for a stock assessment update. Assessments that qualify for updates will be reviewed during a meeting of the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee, scheduled early in the assessment cycle. The Groundfish Subcommittee will determine if the putative update stock assessment followed the Terms of Reference for updates and if there is consistency with previous assessments. If either of these criteria is not met, or if the subcommittee determines that the stock assessment update is inadequate for Council decision making, then a full assessment will be requested and reviewed by the wrap-up STAR Panel. With the return to fewer stocks per STAR Panel, the SSC recommends that the number of STAR Panelists be based on the N+2 rule, the standard for choosing the number of STAR Panel reviewers prior to 2005 (where N= the number of stock assessments). The STAR Panel should include at least one reviewer from outside the Council process.

This current draft will be revised prior to the April Council meeting.

2. Recommended List of Stocks to be Assessed and Schedule

The SSC heard a presentation by Dr. Elizabeth Clark on the proposed list and schedule of stocks to be assessed in 2007, 2009, and 2011. The proposed list was developed following the Groundfish Stock Assessment Review Workshop, which recommended that no more than 8-10 full stock assessments should be conducted in each cycle, and that no more than 2 species should be reviewed by each STAR panel. In setting priorities, overfished species are always assigned a high priority. Higher priority was also given to stock assessments that are more than 5 years old, and stocks whose most recent assessment was conducted with modeling software other than SS2. Given these constraints, only two previously unassessed species can be accommodated in the proposed schedule, longnose skate and spiny dogfish (in 2007).

Dr. Clark also reported that the NWFSC would convene workshops to address the shelf-slope survey, data and modeling, and the juvenile rockfish survey. These workshops would be held in addition to B_0/B_{msy} and Recfin catch estimation procedure workshops.

Although the SSC recognizes that with the current constraints on the number and frequency of stock assessments, very few new species assessments will be possible in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, since stock assessments drive the management process, it is important that new

assessments be conducted on the most critical species. The SSC notes that the current way of prioritizing a list of species for assessments is very informal and is not based on well defined, objective criteria. The SSC recommends that a more formal process be developed for prioritizing species for assessment that would include an evaluation of economic and ecological importance, potential use as ecosystem or habitat indicator species and perceived exploitation status. The SSC is prepared to take the lead and work in conjunction with other Council advisory bodies to develop a set of guidelines for prioritizing species to be assessed in future assessment cycles.

PFMC
03/07/06