

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON STOCK ASSESSMENT PLANNING
FOR THE 2009-2010 FISHING SEASON

Stock Assessment Priorities

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) has discussed stock assessment priorities, based on the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) Report (Agenda Item F.3.b, Attachment 1), and supports the list of assessment priorities and species outlined here. This includes movement of Petrale sole to a full assessment in the 2009 assessment cycle and English sole to an update in the 2007 assessment cycle, as suggested in the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) report.

With respect to stock assessment updates, the GMT recognizes that assessments slated for updates should remain updates under all but the most extenuating circumstances. However the GMT also recognizes that under some circumstances, assessment authors could make a convincing case to the SSC that corrections to previous errors, revisions to data sets, inferences from additional sources of data, or improvements in analyses may have a substantive impact to the perception of stock status or productivity, particularly for rebuilding species. The GMT suggests that the SSC have the latitude to authorize a full assessment review under such circumstances, if necessary in the “mop-up” panel. However, this should not preclude the obligation of assessment authors to arrive at the SSC review for updated assessments with updates that meet the Terms of Reference (TOR) for stock assessment updates.

As discussed in the March GMT report, the GMT continues to recommend that a more strategic planning for the assessment cycles that will follow 2007 be conducted before 2008, in order to more appropriately initiate data collection, port sampling, ageing and other biological studies. The GMT endorses the SSC proposal with respect to this issue.

Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel Terms of Reference

All GMT Comments on this issue refer to Agenda Item F.3.c, Supplemental Attachment 2.

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Responsibilities

The GMT noted that with respect to the timing of Stock Assessment Coordinator’s review of the Executive Summary for consistency (under NMFS Responsibilities, page 3, paragraph 3, line reading “Inconsistencies will be identified and authors requested to make appropriate revisions in time for the GMT meeting at which an assessment is reviewed,”) the reference to the GMT has been replaced with SSC in this sentence in the revised TOR. As the GMT often meets in the period between Council meetings to discuss assessment results, and their progress can be hindered by an incomplete Executive Summary, the GMT recommends that the review and correction of the Executive Summary occur prior to the SSC review or the GMT meeting at which management recommendations are developed, whichever comes first.

TOR for Groundfish Stock Assessment (STAT) Teams

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) would also like to more appropriately formalize the obligation by STAT Teams to identify sources of data that were available for assessments. To do so, the GMT recommends inclusion of the following sentence on page 12, after the first sentence in the second paragraph: “The STAT Team shall include in both the STAR Panel draft and final assessment all data sources that include the species being assessed, identify which are used in the assessment, and provide the rationale for data sources that are excluded.” An appropriate location for this information to be provided in the assessment would be a new subsection under D.1- Data (as described in Appendix B: Outline for Groundfish Stock Assessment Documents, page 14).

GMT and Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) Responsibilities

The GMT discussed the proposal to formalize the role of GMT and GAP representatives at STAR Panel meetings. Given that the primary focus of the STAR Panel is an independent peer review of the technical adequacy of the statistical assessment model, the GMT felt that the continued role of GMT and GAP representatives in an advisory capacity to the STAR Panel is appropriate. However, the GMT does believe that some measures could be taken to more formalize this advisory role, particularly with regard to data workshops that precede the assessment cycle.

Many STAR Panel members are drawn from other countries or other areas of the nation. While it is important that they are conversant with the techniques employed in modeling fish populations, they can't be expected to be familiar with the nuances in management, fishery data collection systems, and the dynamics of the West Coast fishing industry that might affect interpretation of data included in the model. This is the intended function of GMT and GAP advisors.

Currently, the formal members of the STAR Panel draft the STAR Panel report to the Council. While this process has typically served well to incorporate concerns or issues raised by the GMT or the GAP advisors during the STAR Panel meeting, there have also been instances where these concerns may have been somewhat obscure, or absent, in the final STAR Panel report. One available avenue to address this might be to include, within the Terms of Reference for STAR Panel reports, a section specifically addressing management, data, or fishery issues raised by GMT and GAP advisors during the STAR. This could serve to bring the sought after formality to their role, as well as more directly focusing the attention of the SSC and Council on issues they may have raised at the STAR Panel meetings.

GMT Recommendations:

Approve the NWFSC list of candidate species for 2007, with the change to Petrale sole and English sole described above and in the SSC statement.

Provide the support and direction for the SSC's proposal with respect to more strategically considering future assessment priorities.

Recommend that the Council adopt GMT recommendations to the final STAR Panel TOR for the assessments to be conducted in 2007.