

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
NORTH PACIFIC ALBACORE TUNA STOCK ASSESSMENT

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) was given a presentation on the Report of the Albacore Working Group of the International Scientific Committee (ISC) for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean by Dr. Ray Conser (SWFSC).

The stock assessment of albacore tuna was conducted using the processes of the ISC and not those of the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council). It involved the application of the package VPA-2BOX to catch-at-age data inferred from catch-at-length data and seventeen catch-rate indices. Although the current level of fishing mortality ($F_{17\%}$) was estimated to exceed many conventional fishing mortality references points, no agreed reference points currently exist for albacore tuna in the North Pacific. In addition, the spawning stock biomass was estimated to be at a high level at present and increasing.

The information provided in Agenda Item F.4.a, Attachment 2 was insufficient for the SSC to conduct a full review of the assessment. In particular, although eighteen background documents were presented to the ISC Working Group, and typical assessment outputs were examined in detail, the final report did not include this information, being largely a summary document. Therefore, given the lack of information, the SSC is unable to determine whether this assessment represents the best available science. Consequently, the SSC is unable to endorse the assessment at present.

Given the volume of information expected from a full highly migratory species (HMS) assessment, it is not be feasible for the SSC to review an HMS assessment during its normal meeting and a special meeting of the HMS subcommittee would likely be required to conduct a thorough review of the material.

A different approach than the SSC reviewing the summary document of the ISC meeting needs to be taken if the Council wishes the SSC to take a larger, and more rigorous, role in the review of assessments of HMS species conducted by international entities. For example, a member of the SSC could participate in the ISC Working Group and provide a report for Council consideration. This would provide for the maximum amount of direct SSC involvement in the review process. Alternatively, Terms of Reference (TOR) for HMS stock assessments could be developed by the SSC HMS subcommittee. Following approval by the Council, the Council could encourage, through the U.S. delegation, that the ISC modify its TOR for albacore assessments along the lines of the Council-developed TOR. The ISC Working Group would require sufficient lead time to modify its practices in order to satisfy changes to its TOR. Although there can be no guarantee that the ISC would adopt TOR for HMS assessments developed by the SSC, assessment reports produced following such TOR would provide a more rigorous basis for reviewing the assessment, although not to the extent a full Stock Assessment Review Panel Review.

Finally, the Working Group report noted that work is being conducted to apply the Stock Synthesis 2 (SS2) approach to albacore tuna in the North Pacific. The SSC encourages further work along these lines.