

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON MANAGEMENT  
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2009-2010 GROUND FISH FISHERIES – PART I

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed briefing materials pertaining to management measures being developed for 2009-2010 groundfish fisheries, especially Agenda Item D.4.a, Attachment 1, Table 2-1a (DRAFT GMT-recommended alternatives for acceptable biological catch [ABCs] and total catch optimum yields [OYs] for 2009 and 2010). The SSC discussion was facilitated by Dr. John Field, who focused the committee's attention on three topics that are of concern to the Groundfish Management Team (GMT). These were: (1) partitioning the sablefish OY north and south of 36° N lat., (2) establishing a reasonable range of OY for the northern black rockfish stock, and (3) determining the blue rockfish ABC. Beyond these three points of discussion, the SSC concurs with the remaining ABCs presented in Attachment 1 and endorses their use by the Council in developing management measures for the 2009-2010 management cycle.

In the case of sablefish, the coastwide OY has traditionally been allocated to "Monterey north" and the Conception International North Pacific Fishery Commission (INPFC) areas based on recent landings, with 96.5% of the coastwide OY going to areas north of 36° N lat. However, recent trawl survey results collected by the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) indicate that 28% of sablefish biomass is found in the Conception area. Theoretically, the best way to estimate region-specific OYs is to conduct a spatially explicit stock assessment, which might include adult movement patterns and spatial variability in growth, mortality, and recruitment. However, in situations where that type of detailed model is not available (as is the case here), the SSC advises that partitioning stock assessment results into sub-areas based on the distribution of fish observed in a fishery-independent survey is generally preferable to assignments based on the history of catches from sub-areas. In any case, neither of the two methods of allocating catch is ideal. Furthermore, for the allocation option that utilized the NWFSC trawl survey data, the GMT reduced the Conception area OY by 50%, due to concerns about uncertainty in the estimates. Another factor to consider is the Cowcod Conservation Area (CCA), which restricts fishing in large portions of the Conception management area. Due to those prohibitions, the SSC concurs that some reduction in sablefish OY is justifiable.

With respect to a range of alternative OYs for black rockfish north, Dr. Field noted that the GMT was considering a low OY option that departed from the "low" state of nature scenario contained in the revised assessment. While the specifics of the options being considered by the GMT were not available during its discussion, the SSC notes that the range presented in Attachment 1 (125 – 492 mt) is consistent with the most recent version of the stock assessment that was approved by the SSC at the September meeting, being based on the "low" and "base" models in the approved assessment. Moreover, it has been common practice to use the low and base models to establish a range of potential OYs in developing management measures. The SSC advises that a range of 125 – 492 mt for northern black rockfish provides a reasonable starting point for Council deliberations.

The SSC reviewed the newly completed blue rockfish stock assessment under Agenda Item D.3 and endorsed the results of the assessment for use in managing the stock. In situations where a stock assessment has been completed and a base model has been identified, the ABC is drawn from the base model using the Council's default harvest rate (F50% for *Sebastes* spp.). For blue rockfish the estimated ABC in 2009 is 223 mt and in 2010 it is 221 mt, which the SSC endorses for use by management. Dr. Field reported that the GMT is considering an option to keep blue rockfish within the "minor nearshore rockfish south" management unit and avoid actively managing the species. As a general matter the SSC recommends that the Council manage fisheries based on stock targets and thresholds that are defined at a level concordant with stock assessments, not based on an assemblage aggregate. However, if the Council elects to continue managing blue rockfish as part of the southern nearshore assemblage, a point of concern should be identified, should the catch of blue rockfish exceed the ABC. The same concern applies to longnose skate, which was also assessed this year. Given the estimate of the ABC for that species (3,428 mt) it would be sensible to manage to that threshold of catch and to re-evaluate the ABCs for the remaining species in the "other fish" assemblage.

PFMC  
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