

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

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) heard a presentation from Dr. Jim Hastie on the Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers' possible schedule for west coast groundfish stock assessments in 2009 and beyond (F.2.b, Attachment 1). In general the GMT agreed with the proposed schedule, but had some suggestions and comments.

With respect to yelloweye rockfish, the GMT noted that it is not scheduled for a full assessment through 2013. This is of concern for a number of reasons. The increasingly restrictive (ramped-down) optimum yield (OY) continues to constrain a number of fisheries. There is both anecdotal and empirical evidence of regional differences in stock abundance and life history characteristics that would be expected from very different levels of historic exploitation. Also, the previous assessment update uncovered problems in the last full assessment that merit further exploration. Only with a full assessment can convergence of state-specific models be explored with the model inputs corrected. These could help account for the apparent higher abundance in the north that the coastwide model misses. Likewise, incorporation of several years of new longline survey, and perhaps remotely operated vehicle (ROV), data as well as creative ways to incorporate other informative data sources could be examined. The GMT recommends this full assessment be given high priority for this cycle.

The GMT is supportive of the proposed full assessment for widow in 2009, as recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee, given it is likely approaching rebuilt status. The GMT is also supportive of the proposed full assessment for bocaccio rockfish, as was previously scheduled but not completed in 2007. Rather than updating the most recent cabezon assessment, the GMT recommends expanding the assessment area in 2009. While this species is important both commercially and recreationally along the entire west coast, the first assessment was only for that portion of the stock in California waters. Likewise, recreational opportunities in Oregon are frequently curtailed due to approaching a limit that is based more on historic landings than biological information. Finally, the GMT notes that few data are available to inform full assessments of minor rockfish and other management complexes. For these species, scientific advice on setting Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) will likely be based on methods with fewer data requirements (e.g. spawner per recruit, yield per recruit, or lifetime egg production analyses). The GMT notes this is an active area of research and will become more common as we examine non-assessed species from the groundfish Fishery Management Plan. The GMT looks forward to National Marine Fisheries Service guidance with regard to setting ACLs.

The GMT also discussed issues related to longer term planning for stock assessments, and has several comments. Most importantly, we recommend that more strategic planning for the assessment cycles that will follow 2009 be conducted (perhaps in a forum similar to the workshop held last December), in order to more appropriately coordinate data collection, port sampling, aging and other biological studies. This strategic planning could include a review that would evaluate biological and economic criteria, as well as the availability of data, for unassessed stocks and possibly aid in developing uniform criteria for prioritizing assessments for a given cycle. The GMT also intends to thoroughly review the draft Terms of Reference and make recommendations in time for final action at the June Council meeting.

GMT Recommendations:

1. Conduct full assessments for yelloweye, widow, and bocaccio rockfish in 2009.
2. Conduct a full assessment for cabezon in 2009 to examine stock status beyond California waters.
3. Provide direction on coordinating port sampling, ageing and other data collection efforts for future assessments.

PFMC
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