



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northwest Fisheries Science Center
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October 28, 2008

Donald O. McIsaac, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101
Portland, Oregon 97220-1384

Dear Dr. McIsaac,

At its September meeting, under agenda item I.5, the Pacific Council adopted a list of groundfish stock assessments for the coming year, and in so doing dropped a proposed STAR Panel that would have assessed spiny dogfish and either bronzespotted or greenspotted rockfish. At the time the decision was made, a lack of data and workload issues were cited as the reasons for dropping these assessments. Although we agree that it is the Council's prerogative to establish a calendar for groundfish stock assessments, we are concerned by how this decision was reached. For example, if workload was an issue, it was surprising that no discussion about workload was entertained during meeting on assessment priorities. What concerns us the most is that a deliberate lengthy process to establish assessment priorities through consultation with various Council advisory bodies and the NMFS Science Centers was set aside by the Council in reaching this decision.

We are committed to the Council action that established a STAR panel schedule for groundfish assessments in 2009. However, the science priorities of the Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers can extend beyond the Council's top priorities. Therefore, at times we may find it necessary to bring forward some unscheduled but important science that would be of significant interest to the Council. In this specific instance, NMFS may find it necessary to bring forward new science about dogfish, bronzespotted, or greenspotted rockfish that may be of use to the Council. In such an instance, we will be sure to work with the Council so it is informed of our findings.

Looking to the future, we anticipate an ongoing cooperative and collaborative approach to establishing research priorities with the Council. We are very supportive of the



assessment prioritization process used in 2009 and hope that this process will be the approach that we all can rely on for setting priorities.

Sincerely,



Usha Varanasi, Ph.D.
Science and Research Director
Northwest Fisheries Science Center



Norm Bartoo, Ph.D.
Acting Science and Research Director
Southwest Fisheries Science Center

cc: John Stein
Steve Ralston
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Elizabeth Clarke

