

GROUNDFFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
PART II OF STOCK ASSESSMENTS FOR 2011-2012 GROUNDFFISH FISHERIES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed the new petrale assessment and received an overview from Mr. John DeVore on the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) recommendations regarding new reference points for managing the stock. The GAP offers the following comments and recommendations.

The GAP does not believe the new petrale assessment result, especially the very high virgin biomass estimate driven by implausibly high historical catch estimates. The biomass trend in the assessment indicates that extremely high harvest in the 1930s and 1940s reduced biomass to an overfished level by 1951 according to the proxy $B_{25\%}$ threshold. This result suspends belief since the petrale fishery was not fully developed then. The deepwater winter petrale fishery did not even begin on the west coast until the mid to late 1950s leading the GAP to conclude the uncertain catch levels prior to this period to be implausibly high.

The GAP also recommends a lower biomass target than the $B_{40\%}$ proxy for petrale sole. The stock is clearly more productive as evidenced by the stock's continued high productivity under a 60-year harvest regime where the annual harvest has averaged the estimated maximum sustainable yield (MSY) in the new petrale assessment (see attached figure). If MSY was much lower, which is implied with biomass targets as high as $B_{40\%}$, the stock would have been driven to extinction in the 60 years of harvest at the estimated MSY. Specifically, the GAP recommends the estimated B_{MSY} of $B_{19\%}$ from the new petrale assessment as a management target. The petrale STAR Panel recommended the estimated B_{MSY} is a viable target given that the estimate is statistically robust to the assumed stock-recruitment relationship. That is, the B_{MSY} estimates are similar regardless of whether a Beverton-Holt or a Ricker relationship are assumed despite the fact that the current relative biomass or depletion estimates are dramatically different under these two assumptions.

Further, the GAP recommends the overfished level be set at 50 percent of the estimated B_{MSY} level (i.e., $B_{9.5\%}$) for petrale sole, a reference point allowed in the fishery management plan. The GAP is trying to avoid an overfished declaration for petrale sole- first because the GAP does not believe the stock is overfished for the reasons stated above, and second because of the severe negative socioeconomic consequences of a petrale rebuilding plan to west coast fishing communities. Petrale sole is the single most important target stock for the current west coast trawl fishery. An unnecessary overfished declaration and rebuilding plan is likely to eliminate the trawl industry by forcing the fleet into bankruptcy. This is an especially egregious outcome on the eve of implementing trawl rationalization. The threat of losing the entire fleet due to an ill-advised petrale rebuilding plan and the consequent impacts to shoreside processors will ripple through all west coast fishing communities as the groundfish trawl fishery is the foundation for shoreside processing. Losing a petrale target will make the trawl fishery unprofitable, imposing dramatically negative economic impacts to fishing communities that threaten the continued existence of the west coast groundfish fishery and perhaps non-groundfish fisheries as well.

The GAP is aware of the SSC's recommendations for new proxy biomass reference points for flatfish including petrale sole. Beyond underscoring the rationale for using the biomass targets estimated in the new assessment, the GAP is troubled that the SSC's recommendations are based on the lowest estimated values of steepness for flatfish assessed on the west coast. The new recommended flatfish biomass proxies are based on a steepness of 0.8 while the estimated steepness for petrale sole is 0.95. The higher petrale steepness means the stock is more productive and a lower biomass target than the recommended proxy is biologically responsible. The GAP believes the SSC recommendation for a new flatfish proxy biomass target is overly precautionary for petrale and strongly recommends the estimated biomass target from the assessment and an overfished level of half that amount for managing the stock. This recommendation is based on the best available science and avoids the dire socioeconomic consequences of an overfished declaration.

PFMC
09/14/09

The Attachment will be added as soon as I receive an electronic copy.
Thanks for your patience, Sandra.