

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM (GMT) REPORT ON
FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT 23 – ANNUAL CATCH LIMITS
AND ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

Council staff presented the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) with an overview of a proposed schedule for incorporation of the annual catch limits (ACL) requirements and revised national standard 1 (NS1) guidelines into the groundfish fishery management plan (FMP) and implementation of the ACL framework during the 2011-2012 harvest specifications and management measures process. The new ACL framework largely matches with the Council's acceptable biological catch (ABC) and optimum yield (OY) reference points; however, the addition of a new reference point could create some timing issues.

As it has been presented to the Council at previous meetings, the major difference between the new ACL framework and the Council's current groundfish FMP relates to the overfishing threshold. Currently, the Council's best estimate of that overfishing threshold is identified as the ABC. The NS1 guidelines, however, now designate the overfishing threshold as the overfishing limit (OFL), with the ABC reduced from the OFL to reduce the probability of overfishing by taking into account scientific uncertainty around the estimate of a stock's biomass and its maximum fishing mortality threshold.

To facilitate the Council's preferred schedule of finalizing biennial harvest specifications at the April 2010 meeting, Council staff has recommended completion of the ACL framework (Amendment 23) and finalization of ABCs at the March 2010 meeting. The ABC is the upper limit for the ACL. The ACL can be no higher than the ABC yet can be set lower based on considerations beyond scientific uncertainty (e.g., 40-10 adjustment).

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) is currently evaluating alternative methods for deriving ABC control rules that create a scientific uncertainty buffer from the OFL. The GMT understands that the SSC may use these alternative methods to recommend a range of ABCs in November. In past cycles, the Council has identified a single ABC for each stock and a range of OYs derived from that ABC. This cycle will involve consideration of a range of ACLs from a range of ABCs, which could create challenges if the Council chooses to set ACLs below the ABC.¹ The GMT therefore agrees that the identification of final preferred ABCs in March 2010 would likely aid the Council's identification of final preferred ACLs in April 2010. At the same

¹ The GMT does not expect the ACL framework to further complicate the Council's considerations of ACLs for rebuilding species. As occurs under status quo, rebuilding ACLs will continue to be based on estimates of uncertainty in the time to rebuild estimated from the rebuilding analysis and not on the method for factoring in scientific uncertainty between the OFL and the ABC.

time, the GMT understands that the March meeting is traditionally full and focused primarily on non-groundfish items.

In June, the Council asked Council staff and a subgroup of the GMT to evaluate the team's role in Amendment 23, specifically regarding the evaluation of management uncertainty and use of annual catch targets (ACTs). We have had preliminary discussions on this topic and will begin the analysis at our October 5-9 meeting in Portland, Oregon. At that meeting, we also plan to begin an evaluation of the 90+ species in the groundfish FMP, as well as species encountered in the groundfish fisheries but not currently managed by the FMP, against the new NS1 criteria for determining whether a stock should be included "in the fishery" and managed with an ACL. The GMT has reviewed and plans to evaluate the FMP species using an assessment method developed by the NMFS Vulnerability Evaluation Work Group (VEWG) that looks at the susceptibility and resilience (i.e., productivity) of each stock to fishing mortality.² This vulnerability analysis will also help inform an evaluation of the FMP's current stock complexes against the standards in the revised NS1 guidelines and will help guide the Council in deciding whether to incorporate ecosystem component species into the FMP. We have had initial discussion with the NWFSC and West Coast Groundfish Observer Program about data to use in the analysis and will be asking Council staff to make formal requests for data at our October meeting. Lastly, we will also analyze the use of sector-specific ACLs and ACTs and evaluate current accountability measures in the FMP. We will present the results of our preliminary analyses and evaluation to the Council for consideration in November.

PFMC

09/16/09

² See <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/msa2007/vulnerability.htm>.