

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON BIENNIAL HARVEST
SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2017-2018 GROUND FISH FISHERIES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received information from Mr. John DeVore about the range of alternative overfishing limits (OFL), acceptable biological catches (ABC), and annual catch limits (ACL) developed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) at the September 2015 Council meeting. Mr. DeVore identified three decision points for GAP consideration – does the GAP recommend any harvest control rules (HCR) different from the default HCRs? Does the GAP agree with “presumptive” HCRs developed by Council staff? What advice does the GAP have about alternative ACLs? For each question, the GAP offers the following recommendations.

Default Harvest Control Rules

The GAP recommends the Council use the default HCRs described in Agenda Item I.4, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 2 except for California scorpionfish. For California scorpionfish, the GAP recommends a more precautionary ACL of 150 metric tons for both 2017 and 2018. The ACL should provide sufficient amounts to support satisfactory seasons for the recreational and commercial sectors. The GAP views this as an interim measure. If a full stock assessment were conducted in the upcoming assessment cycle, this new information would provide for better-informed management in the next biennial management cycle.

“Presumptive” Harvest Control Rules

Mr. DeVore explained to the GAP the rationale for the “presumptive” HCRs for black rockfish (OR), black rockfish (CA), kelp greenling (OR), kelp greenling (WA), and big skate.

Black Rockfish (OR) and (CA)

The GAP supports using $ACL = ABC (P^* = 0.45)$ for black rockfish in both Oregon and California. The GAP understands that, because of the new stock assessments, it is necessary to establish new HCRs. This HCR is the same as used for black rockfish in Washington. It is logical to use the same HCR for black rockfish managed off the three states. Moreover, the stocks are projected to be above target biomass levels in 2017 and 2018, and projected to remain above target over the time series in the stock assessments.

Kelp Greenling (OR)

At the September 2015 Council meeting, the Council identified two possible sigma values that could be used for kelp greenling (OR) – 0.44 or 0.36. The GAP was informed that the SSC selected a sigma value of 0.44, which results in a smaller ABC as a precaution against uncertainty. The GAP supports using $ACL = ABC (P^* = 0.45)$ for kelp greenling in Oregon. The stock appears to be healthy and stable; thus, there is no reason to set ACL below ABC.

Kelp Greenling (WA)

Similar to kelp greenling in Oregon, the GAP supports using $ACL = ABC$ ($P^* = 0.45$) for kelp greenling in Washington. The stock appears to be healthy and stable based on a low vulnerability score; thus, there is no reason to set ACL below ABC.

Big Skate

The GAP supports using $ACL = ABC$ ($P^* = 0.45$) for big skate. The GAP has identified no conservation concern for this species.

Alternative Annual Catch Limits

Darkblotched Rockfish and Widow Rockfish

For both darkblotched rockfish and widow rockfish, at the September 2015 meeting the Council included two alternatives to the No Action alternative – (1) $ACL = ABC$ ($P^* = 0.45$) and (2) $ACL = ABC$ ($P^* = 0.25$). For both, the GAP recommends eliminating Alternative 2 because it is intermediate between No Action and Alternative 1. If a lower value between No Action and Alternative 1 is desired, then the analysis of these alternatives will inform this decision without the need to specifically analyze Alternative 2. The GAP was informed that the Groundfish Management Team also supports elimination of Alternative 2 for darkblotched rockfish and widow rockfish.

China Rockfish

At the September 2015 Council meeting, the Council developed an alternative ACL approach for China rockfish (both North and South of $40^{\circ} 10'$) that sets $ACL = ABC$ with ($P^* = 0.4$). Council staff posited to the GAP that the Council's rationale for this ACL was to account for uncertainty in stock status. If this was the Council's rationale, then the GAP cautions against using the P^* to add additional precaution because uncertainty is already addressed via this stock's assessment categorization (that is, Category 2) and that category's associated sigma value.

Canary Rockfish

The GAP supports analysis of the current canary rockfish ACL alternatives. The GMT reported to the GAP that they were considering identifying for the Council potential ACL values that are lower than Alternative 1. The GAP believes that the latest stock assessment provides a robust understanding of the uncertainties underlying the stock status estimate. Moreover, the decision tables from the stock assessment fully account for this uncertainty. Therefore, the GAP believes the current alternatives are sufficiently informed by the best available science to guide Council decision-making and management of canary rockfish.