

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
FINAL ACTION ON STOCK ASSESSMENT PLANS AND TERMS OF
REFERENCE (TOR)

Dr. Jim Hastie briefed the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) on stock assessment planning for 2017. The GAP offers the following comments and recommendations on stock assessment planning.

Full Assessments

The GAP is in agreement with the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and believes the following stocks are good candidates for full assessments in 2017:

Yellowtail Rockfish
Lingcod
California Scorpionfish
Blue/Deacon Rockfish
Yelloweye Rockfish
Pacific Ocean Perch

Yellowtail rockfish, which ranks at the top of the advisory stock assessment prioritization list provided by Dr. Hastie, is an important target species in trawl and non-trawl fisheries. While yellowtail rockfish north of 40°10' N. latitude was last assessed in 2013 using data-moderate methods, it is important to assure the best science is available to inform future harvest levels. The GAP believes the incorporation of age and length composition data into a full assessment, which is not allowed in a data-moderate assessment, may improve our understanding of current stock status and estimation of sustainable harvest levels.

Lingcod, which was last assessed in 2009, is another important target species in trawl and non-trawl fisheries. The GAP understands there are more age and other informative data available to improve that assessment. The GAP also understands there are structural changes being contemplated for any new lingcod assessment that cannot be accommodated with an update.

California scorpionfish was last assessed in 2005 and is out date for informing future harvest specifications. In fact, the 2005 assessment was out of date in the last specifications cycle and a catch-only update of the assessment was provided to inform 2017 and 2018 specifications. The SSC also notes that uncertainty in current stock status given the age of the assessment compelled the SSC to downgrade the stock from a category 1 to a category 2. Given the importance of this stock to southern California fisheries and the high attainment of recent annual catch limits (ACLs)¹, the GAP recommends a new full assessment be done next year to improve our understanding of stock status and sustainable harvest levels. Dr. Hastie suggested there may be some 600 new age structures gathered from recent bottom trawl surveys to inform this assessment.

¹The ACL and OFL were exceeded in 2014.

Blue rockfish off California north of Pt. Conception was last assessed in 2007 and is now out of date for informing harvest specifications. In fact, similar to California scorpionfish, a catch- only update of the assessment was provided to inform 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications. While there is no expectation the stock category will be upgraded from category 2 since any new assessment will likely be an assessment of a complex of two species (blue and deacon rockfish), the increasing age of the assessment could result in a future downgrade of the stock category designation. Blue rockfish was estimated to be in a precautionary status compelling the need to better understand stock status and improve estimation of a sustainable harvest level.

Yelloweye rockfish was last assessed in 2011 as an update to the 2009 full assessment with a depletion of 21 percent at the start of 2011. This overfished stock is the binding constraint to most non-trawl fisheries north of Pt. Conception. Given the importance of yelloweye and its depleted status, this stock is considered one of the highest priority stocks for a new full assessment from the GAP's perspective.

Pacific ocean perch (POP) is a constraining species for both the whiting and non-whiting trawl sectors and was last assessed in 2011 with a full assessment. Recent bycatch of POP has increased to the point that it is becoming more constraining to the trawl sector as it is showing up in areas that fishermen have not encountered the species in the past, especially in deeper water. The GAP supports the SSC recommendation to assess POP but has serious concerns about the data or lack thereof that has been used in past assessments. The GAP believes trawl survey data has been giving us a poor signal of what the actual recruitment has been. The GAP requests that any and all potential data sources available be used in the next assessment including any data that may be available from Canadian and Alaskan POP fisheries. It has been acknowledged that POP off the U.S. West Coast is at the southern fringe of the population and an assessment across the species' range would provide the best understanding of stock status, biomass, and productivity.

Update Assessments

The GAP suggests the following stocks for update assessments:

Bocaccio Rockfish
Darkblotched
Rockfish
Arrowtooth
Flounder

Both bocaccio and darkblotched rockfish are projected to be rebuilt this year and new assessments next year are needed to confirm these projections. The SSC recommended updates for both these stocks next time they are assessed.

Arrowtooth flounder was last assessed in 2007 and that assessment is now considered out of date. The biomass projections from that assessment, which were largely influenced by the strong 1999 year class, predicted a steep decline despite evidence in the trawl survey and in trawl catches that stock abundance is increasing at a great rate. Projected overfishing limits (OFLs) from the 2007 assessment are now getting so low that annual quotas for arrowtooth are changing trawl fishery distribution to avoid arrowtooth effectively turning this abundant stock into a constraining species. While a catch-only update of the 2007 assessment was provided last year

to mitigate these impacts for the 2017-2018 management cycle, the increasing age and uncertainty of this out of date assessment could result in a downgrade in the stock category and much less certainty in current status and estimation of OFLs.

Terms of Reference

The GAP also reviewed the revisions to the Terms of Reference and finds those revisions acceptable.

PFMC
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