

**SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
INITIAL STOCK ASSESSMENT PLAN AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Dr. Jim Hastie and Ms. Stacey Miller of the Northwest Fisheries Science Center briefed the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on stock assessment prioritization for Pacific Coast groundfish and the resultant list of stocks that could potentially be assessed in the 2019 and 2021 assessment cycles.

There were several changes made to the factors and factor score calculations from those used for the prioritization process prior to the 2017 assessment cycle. Many of these changes were made in an attempt to improve how well relative factor scores reflect differences in the underlying metrics. An ecosystem importance factor was developed for inclusion for this cycle, whereas non-catch value, which remained difficult to quantify, was removed.

The SSC found that the updated framework continues to provide a useful way to identify factors to consider in developing stock assessment priorities. The scoping of available data continues to be useful in understanding the data gaps that constrain the ability to assess some highly ranked species.

Initial Stock Assessment Plans for the 2019 and 2021 Assessment Cycles

The SSC and Dr. Hastie agreed that the maximum possible number of assessment units for the 2019 assessment cycle is likely to be eight (four Stock Assessment Review [STAR] panels). However, some assessments of nearshore species could require the development of multiple models, and thus could need more than one “unit” of assessment and review effort.

The SSC discussed the ranked list of species for assessment, focusing on the top sixteen. The SSC agreed that sablefish, cabezon, longnose skate, big skate, cowcod, and gopher rockfish (potentially assessed as a complex with black and yellow rockfish) are all good candidates for full assessments in 2019. The SSC did not identify any species as high priority for update assessments in 2019, though the petrale sole assessment is appropriate for updating if desired.

Cabezon would presumably be assessed in multiple areas, and therefore would likely require an entire STAR panel to itself for adequate review. This would leave one spot open in a STAR panel should the above list of six species be adopted.

Other potential species to be assessed include 1) Dover sole, for which the SSC did not see a critical need at this time; 2) Pacific cod, for which delaying until 2021 would provide more lead time for developing data, particularly ages, and to consider a transboundary assessment with Canada; and 3) vermillion rockfish across two areas (presumably as a complex with sunset rockfish south of Point Conception, and as a single species to the north).

Brown, copper, quillback and bank rockfish were all considered good candidates for assessment in 2021 as more lead time for age reading, data mining and analysis would provide a better basis for those assessments. Black rockfish has been assessed recently (2015) and is not seen as a high

priority for assessment in 2019. More information for these and certain other nearshore species could potentially be available in future cycles pending the results of the remotely operated vehicle (ROV) methodology review scheduled for later this year.

One limitation of the prioritization process is that it is conducted at the species level rather than by assessment unit. In 2017, an assessment of yellowtail rockfish north of 40°10' N. latitude was endorsed for management use, but the southern assessment was not. Yellowtail rockfish south is considered a good candidate for a full assessment in 2021, which will provide more time to address the backlog of otoliths for ageing and to develop a longer index time series.

Revisions to the Terms of Reference

The SSC also discussed revisions to the terms of reference (TOR) for stock assessments ([Agenda Item H.4, Attachment 3, March 2018](#)), rebuilding analyses ([Agenda Item H.4, Attachment 4, March 2018](#)), and methodology reviews ([Agenda Item H.4, Attachment 5, March 2018](#)). The SSC endorses the recommendations in the bulleted list on pages 10-11 of the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee report on the December 2017 Groundfish Stock Assessment Process Review Workshop ([Agenda Item H.4, Attachment 6, March 2018](#)), and the recommendations will be incorporated into the revised draft stock assessment TORs (for the June Briefing Book) or the SSC's accepted practices document, as appropriate. The SSC discussed approaches and rules to improve and ensure the timeliness of various steps within the stock assessment and review process. These include having a written request from the Groundfish Management Team for deviations from default removal assumptions during projections, to be finalized at the STAR panel; final assessment documents (for those not included in the mop-up) posted on the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) website by the beginning of the November meeting; and the list of catch-only updates finalized by September in even years, among others. The SSC also discussed the need to maintain flexibility in the SSC's ability to request post-STAR analyses and changes in order to arrive at an assessment that is acceptable to the SSC. Various other minor edits will be included as track changes in the TORs for June.

For the rebuilding analysis TOR, the SSC agreed to add language requiring that authors include parameter uncertainty in rebuilding analyses, as has been done in various ways in the majority of rebuilding analyses performed for the PFMC. Additionally, new language will require that all quantities for all runs needed for management decisions, including OFLs, be presented in tabular form.

PFMC
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