SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT (EFH) AND ROCKFISH CONSERVATION AREA (RCA) AMENDMENT 28 - FINAL ACTION

The Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) review of the Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Amendment 28 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (Agenda Item F.3.a, Project Team Report 1) focused on the Supplemental Appendices D-1 and D-2 (Agenda Item F.3.a, Supplemental Project Team Report 3), with a specific focus on three items requested by Council staff: (1) the process used to select data sources for evaluating economic impacts; (2) the approach used to assign fish ticket data for landings and revenues to spatial locations; and (3) the method used to identify "hotspot" locations for overfished species. Kerry Griffin and Brett Wiedoff (Council staff) and other members of the Groundfish EFH Project Team were present to answer questions. The documentation was provided as supplemental materials, which limited the time available to conduct a comprehensive review.

Data source selection process

As described in Appendix D-1, the Project Team selected two time periods to form the basis of their analyses of potential impacts of EFH openings and closures and RCA reopenings, 1997-2001 and 2011-2014. The potential data sets considered by the Team were previously discussed with the SSC's Economics Subcommittee via webinar during February 2017. The Project Team's choices for the particular data sets (1997-2001 and 2011-2014) adequately addressed the recommendations made by the Economics Subcommittee and endorsed by the full SSC in March 2017.

Spatial assignment of fish ticket data for landings and revenues

The Project Team considered various methods for assigning fish landings and associated revenue to spatial locations. Although Appendix D-1 provides no analysis to support the Team's decision to use only the tow start points, the SSC considers it to be a reasonable approach given the large technical hurdles posed by the alternative approaches.

Overfished species "hotspots"

At its November 2016 meeting, the SSC considered an "Overfished Species Hot Spots Analysis Tool" that applied a spatial clustering algorithm to fishery-dependent catch rate data to identify discrete areas that could potentially be closed, to protect overfished species. The SSC recommended "not basing identification of hot spots on fishery-dependent data, because few of the fishery-dependent data will have been collected from within the RCA." The SSC also had concerns about the analysis tool and recommended "using the results of habitat suitability modeling or a geostatistical hurdle approach". The Project Team's Discrete Area Closure Methodology/Hotspot Analysis presented in Appendix D-2 uses two methods that are both consistent with the SSC's recommendations. The models produce maps that depict areas with high probability of finding darkblotched rockfish, Pacific ocean perch, and yelloweye rockfish

off Washington. Of these species, only yelloweye rockfish are still considered to be under rebuilding. Further, the data supporting the projected hotspots for yelloweye rockfish off Washington are not based on any direct observations off Washington of yelloweye rockfish on hard-substrate habitats due to the lack of visual submersible survey data.

Conclusions

As requested by Council staff, the SSC evaluated the three approaches applied by the Project Team. The SSC endorses the rationale for these approaches.

The SSC suggests that before the next review of groundfish EFH, the Council provide policy guidance on how to gauge the importance of EFH. All waters off the U.S. are essential habitat for some species. Analyses of EFH need direction on what species and habitat features the Council considers to be important, as clear goals and objectives will facilitate the scientific analyses of the available data.

PFMC
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