

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
FINAL STOCK ASSESSMENT PLANS AND TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR
GROUNDFISH AND COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES

Dr. Jim Hastie briefed the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on considerations for prioritizing groundfish stock assessments in 2019 and 2021 and the potential schedule for stock assessment review (STAR) panels. The SSC also discussed the proposed changes to the three Terms of Reference (TOR) for stock assessment, rebuilding analyses, and methodology reviews (Agenda Item E.3, Attachment 3, Supplemental Revised Attachment 4, and Attachment 5).

Stock Assessment Plans for the 2019 Assessment Cycle

At the March Council meeting, the Council identified a preliminary list of stocks for benchmark assessment in 2019 including sablefish, cowcod, cabezon in Oregon and California, longnose skate, big skate, gopher rockfish (potentially including black and yellow rockfish in a single assessment as a complex) and Dover sole. The SSC endorses the assessment of these species with the exception of Dover sole. Due to substantial time and staff commitments for ageing, the SSC agrees with the proposal by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) in Attachment 1 to move the consideration of a Dover sole assessment to the 2021 assessment cycle.

In place of the Dover sole assessment, Pacific cod or southern yellowtail rockfish could be assessed in 2019. Due to the expectation of additional age data, the SSC recommends conducting a benchmark southern yellowtail rockfish assessment, to be combined with the sablefish review panel, and developing a data poor or data-moderate assessment of Pacific cod. The SSC reviewed and supports the proposed STAR panel schedule for review of full assessments in 2019 provided in Attachment 1.

Update assessments proposed for 2019 include petrale sole and widow rockfish; however, the NWFSC advises that only one can be completed due to limited ageing capacity. As the petrale sole index from the NMFS trawl survey indicates an increasing trend in 2017 for most areas, this may indicate less urgency for an update in 2019. Additional research regarding the ecosystem drivers of recruitment will also be available for potential use in a full assessment in 2021. The SSC recommends prioritizing an update of the widow rockfish assessment in 2019, given age data from the trawl fishery is available. The SSC recommends a full assessment of petrale sole in 2021. The Council identified vermilion and sunset rockfish (as a complex with two assessment areas), brown rockfish, copper rockfish, quillback rockfish, bank rockfish, black rockfish (previously with three assessment areas) and Pacific cod as candidate species for full assessments in 2021. Brown rockfish was inadvertently excluded from the list of species in Attachment 1. If Pacific cod is assessed in 2019, NMFS has indicated the potential for two additional full assessments to be conducted, which could include either lingcod (with two assessment areas) or petrale sole and Dover sole. Lingcod was last assessed in 2017, although age composition data were excluded due to technical considerations that could be addressed in a full assessment in 2021. These potential improvements to the lingcod assessment should be weighed against the need for a new assessment of Dover sole and the aforementioned potential advancements to the petrale sole assessment.

The Council will need to identify stocks for catch-only projections and catch reports for consideration, at the September Council meeting. The SSC recommends a catch report be produced for yelloweye rockfish in 2019.

Revisions to the Terms of Reference

The SSC discussed revisions to the Terms of Reference (TOR) for stock assessments, rebuilding analyses, and methodology reviews (Agenda Item E.3, Attachment 3, Supplemental Revised Attachment 4, and Attachment 5). The methodology review TOR is largely unchanged. The SSC endorses the proposed changes to the rebuilding and methodology review TORs with the following two changes. Regarding the revisions to the rebuilding analysis TOR:

- On page 7, proposed language indicating “the rebuilding analyses should assume full ACL removals” should be revised to “the rebuilding analyses should assume, as a default, full ACL removals”, as there are instances where alternative values may provide a more reasonable assumption.
- On page 7, the statement, “Rebuilding analyses need to include the model and parameter uncertainty in the stock assessment” should be revised to, “The rebuilding analyses need to include uncertainty from multiple models or parameter uncertainty where practicable and justify exclusion of known uncertainties.”

The SSC was informed of some substantial proposed changes to the stock assessment TOR from NMFS NWFSC and forthcoming comments from the Groundfish Management Team (GMT). The SSC requests additional time to consider these comments and provide subsequent revisions to the stock assessment TOR. At present, no agenda items are scheduled at the September Council meeting to provide an opportunity for further review other than a Methodology Review agenda item or a separate agenda item. Alternatively, the Council may delegate finalization of the stock assessment TOR to the SSC.

PFMC
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