

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

Dr. Jim Hastie briefed the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) at the March and April meetings on progress toward implementation of a stock assessment prioritization process for Pacific Coast Groundfish, and in April there was additional discussion of the list of stocks that could potentially be assessed in the 2017 assessment cycle based on that process.

**Stock Assessment Prioritization for West Coast Groundfish**

The SSC discussed draft scores for prioritization factors developed for 71 stocks in the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The list excluded stocks not currently included in the FMP, stocks with cumulative 2010 to 2014 landings less than 1 mt, and ecosystem component species. Some factors in the guidance document were either excluded (ecosystem importance) or heavily downweighted (non-catch value) due to challenges in scoring those factors. Factors that could be incorporated in the future include indicators of “unexpected change” (observed trends that diverge substantially from those predicted by the most recent assessment), but these were not available for review.

SSC discussion continued from the last meeting regarding the sensitivity of prioritization rankings to the relative weighting of commercial vs. recreational fisheries. Specifically, it was noted that virtually all important recreational species are also important to commercial fisheries, although the reverse is often not true (largely due to depth constraints and other factors). Consequently, a substantial number of commercial species are of no substantive importance to recreational fisheries, leading to a greater relative priority ranking for recreational over commercial species when the commercial and recreational importance factors are “evenly” weighted. Dr. Hastie explored a wider range of alternative weights for these factors in advance of the April meeting, which revealed the consistencies, differences, and sensitivities to various weighting schemes. The SSC found that this framework, which is still in the preliminary stages of development, provides a useful way to identify factors to consider in developing stock assessment priorities. The SSC also recognized that the scoping out of available data that followed this exercise proved useful in understanding the data gaps that constrain the ability to assess some highly ranked species.

**Initial Stock Assessment Plans for the 2017 Assessment Cycle**

The SSC and Dr. Hastie agreed that the maximum possible number of assessment “units” for the 2017 assessment cycle is likely to be eight. 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. Two assessments on that list, bocaccio and darkblotched rockfish, were good candidates for update assessments (and were recommended as such following the last full assessments). Blackgill rockfish, last assessed in 2011, is another candidate for an update assessment.

The SSC agreed that yellowtail rockfish, lingcod, California scorpionfish, cabezon, blue/dacon rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish are all good candidates for full assessments in the 2017 cycle. A vermilion/sunset rockfish complex assessment is desirable, but is associated with challenges that include multiple species and complicated population structure. As cabezon attainment has been well below the ACL, this could reduce the importance of a full assessment for this species. Assessments for both longnose skate (in the top 20) and big skate (not in the top 20) were discussed. Substantive progress on several ongoing efforts (improvement of aging methods for longnose skate, better catch reconstructions of historical skate landings to the species level) is needed prior to conducting assessments for these species. Moreover, conducting both assessments together would be optimal.

The SSC discussed the need to ensure continued progress in assessing previously unassessed species. However, very few of the previously unassessed species in the “top 20” list appear to have sufficient data to develop an abundance index. Brown rockfish does have adequate data, and was assessed previously using data moderate methods. Some species that ranked low in this draft prioritization process, such as bank rockfish, may nonetheless be good candidates for the next or future cycles.

### **Revisions to the Terms of Reference**

The SSC also discussed revisions to the terms of reference (TOR) for stock assessments, methodology reviews, and rebuilding analyses (Agenda Item F.7, Attachments 5-7). Current draft revisions are based on discussions and recommendations from the December 2015 “post-mortem” meeting (Agenda Item F.7, Attachment 8). Most of these are changes to the TOR for stock assessments, with methodology and rebuilding analysis TOR essentially unchanged. The SSC endorses the proposed changes in these attachments with the following exceptions:

- The suggested list of “best practices” should be removed from the final adopted TOR, which should instead refer to a list of either “accepted” or “standard” guidance regarding the benefits and shortcomings of various methods that will be distributed to Stock Assessment teams and STAR Panels following the November 2016 meeting.
- Inclusion of an executive summary should be optional for draft assessment documents prior to STAR panel reviews, rather than required.
- The hard deadline for data provision to assessment authors should be seven weeks in advance of the review panel, and additional details concerning data workshops should be added to the TOR.

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