

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON ADOPTING STOCK ASSESSMENTS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed the information on the adoption of stock assessments to be used to inform management in 2023 and beyond. The GAP offers the following comments and recommendations on stock assessment adoption.

Spiny Dogfish

The GAP is grateful to the Council for acting on our recommendation for additional work on the dogfish stock assessment. We also appreciate the time spent by the Stock Assessment Team in addressing the Council request. Mr. Corey Niles (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife) merits specific recognition for the analysis he provided to the Mop-up Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel because it clearly and succinctly addressed the issue at hand, that is, catchability (“q”) in the West Coast Bottom Trawl Survey. Mr. Niles’ analysis was critical to informing the Mop-up Panel’s conclusion about survey q.

The 2021 dogfish assessment is in some ways an improvement from the previous assessment; specifically, in the updating of how stock fecundity is parameterized. Importantly, the assessment also shows that the dogfish stock has remained relatively stable over the past decade under current harvest levels and that the stock is expected to remain stable into the future under various harvest levels including annual catch limits similar to recent year average annual catches.

Where uncertainty remains is in the scale of the population, and this scale is directly tied to survey q. In adopting the dogfish assessment, the GAP recommends the Council be cognizant of the management implications associated with annual catch limits across the range of q values (for example, the potential need for sector allocations and inseason management tools at higher q values) and to balance those against the projected stability of the stock that shows a low conservation risk.

California Copper Rockfish, south of Point Conception/California Quillback Rockfish

The GAP is appreciative of the further evaluation and analysis undertaken by the Scientific and Statistical Committee and Stock Assessment Team at the September “mop-up” review panel. The GAP understands that the current Data Moderate assessments are considered the “best scientific information available” per the terms of reference for these types of assessments. However, fishery participants continue to believe that these assessments do not accurately reflect what fishermen are experiencing. In northern California, the estimated status of quillback rockfish does not match what fishermen see in their catches. Participants south of Point Conception believe there are significant inconsistencies in the model data trends that suggest recent declines in copper rockfish populations. This is not at all consistent with population trends we have observed in many other stocks that have been assessed in the southern California Bight

in recent years such as cowcod, bocaccio, chilipepper rockfish, and blackgill rockfish.

The GAP continues to believe there should be immediate action taken to have both California copper rockfish and quillback rockfish in California assessed as full benchmark assessments as soon as possible. The GAP believes incorporation of comprehensive age data and fishery-dependent indices in a full assessment is warranted given the serious fishery impacts that will likely ensue under rebuilding plans for copper and quillback rockfishes. This could easily shut down the deeper nearshore fishery for both sport and commercial fishermen, resulting in millions of dollars in losses to both sport and commercial fisheries. We expect to address financial impacts in detail in subsequent statements.

PFMC

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