

**Suggested topics for the post-mortem meeting on 2021 assessments  
from the Science Centers' stock assessment teams**

*January 6, 2022*

Data

1. Pre-assessment data workshops (2-fold)
2. Information on Fishery Regulations

Review

3. Better policy for data-moderate stock assessments
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Process

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# Data

## 1. Pre-assessment data workshops (2-fold)

**Issue:** Pre-assessment data workshops are not required by the TOR. During this cycle the vermilion STATs met with the GAP and GMT (twice), which the STAT leads have done for several past cycles. However, there was a misconception that this was a pre-assessment workshop rather than discussions with management bodies.

**Suggestion:** A decision should be made as to whether a pre-assessment workshop is justified or not when the species are identified. An alternative is to require a pre-assessment workshop in the TOR.

**Issue:** Decisions made at pre-assessment workshops were later revisited without new information. There were requests during STAR panels, and during Council deliberations of SSC approved data moderate assessment models, to make modifications to model characteristics and/or data that were agreed upon at pre-assessment workshops (e.g. copper rockfish Point Conception assessment delineation; California quillback rockfish catch; quillback and copper rockfishes growth in California).

**Suggestion:** Pre-assessment data workshops should be revised in a manner where items are discussed in detail and such that decisions agreed upon during the pre-assessment meetings have some binding authority, thereby limiting the ability to re-open or change positions on previously discussed decisions unless issues with modeling fits to the data or other data complexities arise that would warrant reconsideration. The assessment authors should come into these meetings prepared to discuss some of the finer decisions (e.g. fleet grouping, especially for low/small gear data sources, area definitions, combine growth or keep separate).

- There needs to be substantial attendance at the pre-assessment workshops by the interested parties, as topics such as stock delineation, fleet structure, and initial data and parameterizations are all discussed at them. However, attendance was low at each of these workshops this cycle.
- Institute, as part of the pre-assessment workshop meeting, an opportunity to not just establish the stock assessment units, but to discuss how the STAT, STAR Panel, and other advisors would recommend that those units be used in management. Stock structure may need to be defined prior to

the pre-assessment workshops, and sub-stock management will remain an important issue.

- Establish a terms of reference for advising the Council on management units (stocks) in general, and how to determine stock assessment units given management units and other factors, and possibly hold a workshop to discuss the state of knowledge and provide guidance and recommendations for defining stock management units.
- Include a section in the TOR (possibly under data deadlines) requiring a table in the assessment that lists the catch streams, the date they were finalized/approved by the state (commercial and recreational) and by whom. This will ensure that STATs have documentation of the catch stream approvals by each state. This is similar to the suggestion to document aspects of the modelling frameworks agreed upon during the pre-assessment workshop (if there is one).

## 2. Information on Fishery Regulations

**Issue:** Regulations can be difficult to find, especially historical regulations that affect each species. Changes in the commercial hook-and-line fishery that did affect selectivity south of Point Conception were brought to light during the Vermilion/Sunset STAR panel. The changes may also affect the fishery north of Point Conception, but available length data were inadequate to make that determination. During the vermilion STAR panel, there were also a number of questions regarding regulations in Oregon and Washington and their effects on fleets.

**Suggestion:** Have the states provide the regulation history for each fishery (recreational and commercial) that affects a stock. The states could also provide years in which there were significant changes to the fishery that we may explore for time blocks.

## Review

### 3. Better policy for data-moderate stock assessments

**Issue:** Data-moderate stock assessments can report stock status below the overfished level. If this is done with data left on the table, this can create distrust in the assessment results, especially if they lead to an overfished determination.

**Suggestion:** More discussion is needed on the role of data-moderate assessments in cases when more potentially informative data sets are available and not used. Should it be the case that these data-moderate assessments not

be used for stock status determination, and therefore should an estimate of overfished stock status (or otherwise adverse result) trigger a full assessment rather than lead to an overfished determination. Recall that there are two different data situations which exist for data-moderate assessments. First, those that consider all possible (informative) data, which, in these cases, happens to be very limited, and for which data moderates are the best available methods used to assess these stocks, including stocks that may be overfished. Second, data-moderates that leave (potentially informative) data on the table. A data-moderate may not be a good choice for a stock that shows possible indications of overfishing or being overfished. Those should ideally be assigned full assessments. However, one cannot always predict the outcome of a data-moderate (or full) assessment.

#### 4. Data moderate review process

**Issue:** This cycle, data moderate assessments were in a continual state of review for months after the initial groundfish subcommittee review in June. Data requests and modeling choices were revisited after SSC approval (at the request of the Council), and new data were sought after review to reconsider decisions made at the pre-assessment workshops. The review process for the Data-moderate assessments did not have clear mechanisms for addressing these additional review requests, which complicated the process of finalizing the reports.

**Suggestion:** Revise the TOR to include clearer guidance for the review process and role of mop up for data moderate assessments. Alternatively, consider having a STAR panel for data moderate assessments with clear guidelines around what would be reviewed during the meeting (e.g., as a counter-point, the 2013 DM STAR panel spent the majority of the review time evaluating XDB-SRA and XSSS which had already been SSC reviewed and approved) and what can and cannot be considered (e.g., a process for exploring or including otherwise non-TOR approved data). Also, articulate in the TOR who the final approver is of the data moderate assessment documents (e.g. the STAR panel chair approves the final documents for full assessments).

#### 5. Requests for additional analyses

**Issue:** Many requests for additional analysis were perceived as ambiguous by members of the STAT teams, and at times GFSC members as well.

**Suggestion:** Ensure requests are specific. Remind all participants that request and rationale language is to stand alone, and not be informed by additional information. If additional information informs the request, specifically add it to the request, or to the rationale.

**Issue:** Apart from STAR panel reviews, requests for additional analyses (model runs, extra analysis, projections) can come from many different individuals. Because of this, it is unclear if “requests” from an individual are formal and have the full weight of the respective body on which the individual sits, particularly when that individual serves in multiple roles. Furthermore, requests do sometimes occur during meetings and show up in committee reports or decision statements rather than being sent directly to the STATs. In these cases, unless the STATs are alerted to the requests, it is therefore easy for requests not to reach the proper individuals and therefore be unaddressed.

**Suggestion:** All requests should be sent from a single individual to a single individual (with the entire STAT cc'd, perhaps) and be identified as a formal request, as is done in STAR panels. John DeVore, or more generally, the Council SSC staffer, would be the obvious individual for sending the notice with Jim, Owen, or John (e.g. the appropriate supervisor(s) of the STAT) receiving it, though it could be another individual (such as the lead of the STAT) instead. There should be confirmation of reception and understanding of the request as well.

## 6. SSC Review

**Issue:** In the June GFSC SSC meeting the STATs were expected to present the model results, while in the August meeting the STAR panel chair presented the model results and issues that arose during review. STATs were also asked to present stock delineation material to the November SSC meeting.

**Suggestion:** TORs could specify who is responsible for presenting model results to the GFSC.

## 7. Decision Tables

**Issue:** Decision tables take a lot of time to develop and are often conducted or revised at the end of the STAR panel (or end of the SSC/subcommittee meeting for data-moderate assessments reviewed in that manner), and often in a rush. Further review by the SSC or changes to anticipated catch during the current

management cycle may require changes to the decision table, and during this cycle these things occurred very late in the calendar year. While exploration of alternative states of nature is appropriate, it seems premature to construct full decision tables before the SSC determines the stock category and alternative catch streams are more thought through. It can also be challenging to finish them at the end of a STAR panel.

**Suggestion:** Determine states of nature in the STAR panel, and provide projections from a single catch stream, but reserve the projections and completion of decision tables for another time to be determined. We would need to discuss when this would make most sense in terms of having complete information needed and the needs of the Council.

## 8. More complete review of catch-only projections

**Issue:** The SCC/GFSC spends very little time on these, and therefore errors which are not obvious might be missed.

## Process

### 9. Deadlines

#### Report deadlines

**Issue:** The lingcod and vermilion/sunset STATs were not aware of the short turnaround time (originally 6 business days for vermilion, resolved by including vermilion in the supplemental) for a request for a modified post-STAR assessment document.

**Suggestion:** At the beginning of the assessment cycle, the STATs and Council staff should agree upon all deadlines through final document preparation. SSC or Council officers should also be identified for the review process, to communicate changes and requests made during SSC/Council meetings, and communicate new deadlines to the STATs (this could be done through a Google calendar with invites). When turnaround times are tight (less than two weeks), planning to have documents in the supplemental briefing book should be explicit. Preferably, no less than two weeks should occur between the end of a STAR panel or other review and the briefing book deadline. This could be explicitly taken into account in STAR panel planning.

**Issue:** Data-moderate reports were submitted three weeks before the June groundfish subcommittee meeting, and two weeks before the August groundfish

subcommittee meeting. Comments on these were provided on the Thursday-Sunday before the meetings, with one exception. On more than one occasion SSC members made comments indicating there was not enough time to review the documents, nor enough time to have a reasonable back and forth on issues raised.

**Suggestion:** Remind people of the opportunity between time of report submission and time of review to ask questions, and that the data-moderate assessments are intended to have a different review process than full assessments. Alternatively, if the expectation is to have a STAR panel like level of review, consider having a STAR panel for data moderate assessments.

#### Data deadlines

**Issue:** The data moderate assessment reviews were bogged down by the presence of data not made available to the STAT until well after the data deadline, not clearly articulated to the STAT until during review, and not even generated until after review and after SSC acceptance.

**Suggestion:** Have PFMC staff enforce the data deadlines, and reiterate to data providers their roles to make important data available to the STAT in a timely manner. Also see suggestion with respect to data workshops (item 1).

### 10. Assessment calendar

**Issue:** Need for increased communication regarding timelines.

**Suggestion:** This relates to #9. We can use the calendar put forward to the Council when exploring STAR panel weeks throughout the entire assessment process. An official and public assessment calendar will ensure better communication of deadlines and important dates across assessments. The calendar can be finalized and updated after the June Council meeting and circulated among the Council (GMT, GAP, SSC, etc.), reviewers, and all other parties providing data/input to STATs, and could be posted on the Council's website. Adding the data deadlines and dates for data workshops to the calendar would be helpful. In addition we can also take a look at available data for the preliminary list of species from the March Council meeting to allow for better planning by the assessors and the ageing labs.

## 11. State representative participation

**Issue:** There are usually a number of questions relative to state-provided data and it may not always be clear who to contact. State representatives should also ensure all data sources are available to STATs prior to the data delivery deadline, and MOUs (if necessary) are signed prior to the start of the assessment cycle (TBD).

**Suggestion:** State representatives provide an invaluable resource on details of the fishery and data that the STAT do not have. Have PFMC staff provide names of state representatives for each STAT to contact regarding data, questions, and guidance on state-specific issues at the same time assessed species are identified.

## 12. Lack of in-person discussion with partners

**Issue:** When Council meetings were in-person, we were able to have significant conversations outside of the meetings-- in hallways, at lunch-- that were often spontaneous and impactful. This assessment cycle we could have used those types of opportunities to better address the many issues that cropped up with some impromptu discussions to clarify misunderstandings and actually have conversations.

**Suggestions:** If we anticipate a similar situation next cycle, we will want to figure out how to encourage more such informal and impromptu interactions.

## 13. Stress and workload

**Issue:** We need to find a way to dial back the stress level that assessors have to cope with, whether in STAR Panels or when results suggest status issues. STAR Panels often require 12-15-hour work days for STATs. This leads to burn-out and increases opportunities for errors to be introduced by fatigued staff. The federal government created a process whereby an employee could take additional paid time off, if needed, for issues related to COVID-19. However, the Council process did not provide any such relief to the detriment of all involved.

**Suggestions:** Avoid having analysts lead multiple assessments or reports. Recognize that DM and update assessments typically require a substantial time investment, despite the intent for such products to be simple to produce and document. In these trying times, the Council should work harder at making a clean, streamlined process without unnecessary burdens that in other non-pandemic years could be taken up with less stress. Resolving other issues

as raised in this document related to review, data, and deadlines, will help to mitigate stress levels as well.