

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON INITIAL STOCK ASSESSMENT PLAN AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed planning for new groundfish stock assessments for 2023 and 2025 and revisions to the three Terms of Reference (TOR) that guide the stock assessment process. The upcoming stock assessments will inform the harvest specifications and management measures decisions for groundfish fisheries in 2025 and beyond. Drs. Jim Hastie and Chantel Wetzel (Northwest Fisheries Science Center) presented information and analyses that support the proposed stock assessment priorities and responded to questions. These analyses remain largely unchanged since 2020. The SSC appreciates the analyses and reports completed for this agenda item.

The SSC provided Dr. Hastie with minor suggestions for modifications to the stock assessment prioritization workbook for future cycles that include a better explanation of the range and rationale for the scores used for each category of information ranked in the prioritization and provision of a consistent rationale for the calculation of the factor scores for each category.

The SSC discussed the interaction between the species prioritized for stock assessments, many of which are nearshore species, and the Council action on groundfish stock definitions and future Fishery Management Plan amendments that will define regions for management units and stock status determinations. Despite this uncertainty in future stock definitions, stock assessment considerations for a few more highly prioritized stocks were discussed. Black rockfish is an important recreational species with new data to inform future assessments. Rosethorn and Redbanded rockfishes could be assessed as full or data-moderate assessments, but both of these assessments will need to address the higher than usual uncertainty in the catch data given these species are very minor components of rockfish fisheries. Treefish is likely to only be possible to assess using data-moderate methods. Brown rockfish would likely need to be conducted as a full single-area assessment in California waters because this assessment would depend on recreational catch per unit effort for an index of abundance; there is limited age data for Brown rockfish. Rex and English soles are good candidates for length-based data-moderate assessments.

While update assessments require less time for review, they require nearly the same amount of time to complete for the analyst. Catch-only projections could be completed for stock assessments that cannot be updated due to limited staff capacity for full and update assessments. Alternatively, data-poor methods could be applied to such stocks or a less intensive update method, such as those informed with just lengths and indices, could be considered.

The SSC reviewed marked-up versions of the three TOR that will guide the groundfish stock assessment process for 2023-2024. The changes reflect the outcomes from the 2021 Groundfish Stock Assessment Process Review Workshop held in January 2022, including input from stock assessment authors. The SSC recommends that future data-moderate assessments be reviewed in a stock assessment review (STAR) Panel. The SSC recommends that suggested changes to the TOR be available for public review. The SSC did not recommend changes to the Methodology Review TOR. The SSC Groundfish Subcommittee intends to hold a webinar during April 2022 to

resolve comments in the current draft TOR. The SSC concurs with the CPS Management Team plan for revised CPS TORs that could be considered during the June and November Council meetings.

PFMC
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