

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON STOCK DEFINITIONS – SCOPING

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed scoping for Amendment 31 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan that defines stocks, focusing on the scoping questions and considerations in [Agenda Item F.4, Attachment 1](#). Amendment 31 will provide refined definitions for actively managed stocks, Ecosystem Component Species, stock complexes, and the area delineations used for determining stock status and harvest specifications. The definitions of stocks involve scientific and policy considerations. The SSC discussion addressed scientific considerations only.

The SSC endorses a multi-phase approach to establishing stock definitions and notes that the priority species should be those assessed in 2021 and that are planned for assessment in 2023 and 2025. It was also noted that stock definitions for several species (e.g., sablefish and petrale sole) are coastwide and there is no evidence for changing these definitions. Assigning these stock definitions should also be a priority for the first phase. Similarly, it may be possible to select stock definitions for stocks that constitute very small overfishing limit components ([Attachment 1, Table 2](#)) and could be designated as Ecosystem Component Species during the first phase given lack of evidence that they require conservation and management.

Subsequently, the Council could consider a more comprehensive evaluation of species co-occurring in the nearshore, shelf, and slope, as well as delineation of stocks in each. As part of this process the Council should evaluate the current stock complexes to determine whether they comply with National Standard 1 guidelines and can benefit from sharing of information on connectivity and distribution among species with stock definitions being refined over time.

The SSC supports the establishment of a working group to work on analyses informing stock definitions that includes members of Council advisory bodies and outside experts, including scientists from the Science Centers. The working group should review the approaches used by other Councils, and whether their approaches can be applied for West Coast groundfishes. The SSC is willing to review the products produced by the working group.

The SSC encourages the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to lead an update of the Productivity and Susceptibility Analysis, which is needed due to the rebuilding of shelf stocks and associated increases in acceptable biological catches, expanded access to some rockfish conservation areas, and climate-related range shifts.

Agenda Item F.4, Attachment 1 states that the SSC had extensive discussions on aggregating assessments across stock boundaries in November 2021. However, those discussions occurred on a limited timeline and were focused exclusively on copper, quillback, and vermilion and sunset rockfishes. Stock delineation should take genetic data, adult movement, and larval dispersal into account, but other factors, including the ability of available data to distinguish biological stocks, should be included in any biological framework for stock definition. The biological factors used for stock definition, and how they are ranked, should be considered broadly by the proposed working group.

The SSC recommends the working group follow the National Standard guidelines to take into account economic, social, and ecological factors in determining management units and stock complexes. Analyses of stock complexes conducted in 2013 by the GMT are still informative and provide a starting place for consideration of additional analyses by a working group, with subsequent review and comment by the SSC.

PFMC
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