

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON STOCK DEFINITIONS UPDATE

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed scoping for Amendment 31 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan, as well as the documents prepared for this agenda item (Agenda Item G.5, Attachments [1](#) and [2](#)). As in the SSC's June 2022 statement on this agenda item, defining stocks through an amendment to the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) involves a combination of scientific and policy considerations, and the SSC limited discussion to scientific considerations only.

The SSC continues to endorse a multi-phase approach for establishing stock definitions, recognizing the need for decisions in the relatively near future for species assessed in 2021 and those that are planned for assessment in 2023. The decision roadmap provided in Agenda Item G.5, [Attachment 1](#) seems adequately defined with respect to the need for Amendment 31, given that an FMP amendment is necessary to implement previous SSC recommendations regarding stock assessment results and status determinations. The SSC also agrees that Table 1 in [Attachment 1](#) provides an appropriate starting point for a number of additional species in the FMP that is consistent with historical management approaches and presumed stock structure assumptions. The SSC recognizes that some modifications to these stock definitions may be appropriate (such as the Pacific ocean perch area designation discussed in the document) as some area definitions may be management or assessment artifacts.

The SSC recognizes that while it is unlikely that new data or information will be available to inform stock structure decisions for these (and other) stocks in the near term, there is likely benefit in improved organization and interpretation of existing insights and data to support upcoming decisions. This would include a synthesis of approaches taken by other Regional Fishery Management Councils in addressing these questions. Consequently, the SSC continues to be supportive of a working group or team to compile and synthesize such information.

With respect to the proposed timeline for a preferred preliminary alternative (PPA) for copper and black rockfish stock structure in November, the SSC notes that this provides very little time for any formal or informal effort to synthesize information to support these decisions. The SSC continues to recommend that stock assessments be conducted as consistently as possible with likely or tentative stock definitions suggested by stock assessment analysts (recognizing the benefits of stratifying assessments at finer-scale spatial areas when appropriate). Past SSC recommendations have generally been consistent with the recognition that nearshore rockfish are more likely to have finer-scale stock structure than shelf or slope groundfish species. Consequently, the SSC concurs with the recommendations of assessment analysts with respect to stock boundaries for copper and black rockfish, who have discussed the available information to inform stock structure in the relevant assessment documents. Analysts have subsequently structured these and many other nearshore rockfish assessments around state boundaries and indicated the likelihood of at least some level of stock structure among those areas. The briefing materials for this agenda item did not suggest any basis for reconsideration of previous recommendations regarding likely or plausible stock structure of nearshore rockfish.