

CDFW REPORT ON 2022 STOCK ASSESSMENT CHECK-IN AND PLAN –  
FINAL ACTION

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) appreciates the collective efforts of the Council participants in identifying data available to inform stock assessments for 2023. During the ageing coordination meeting for 2023 stock assessments held August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff clarified that a portion of lengths collected in Washington’s recreational fisheries used to inform growth rates are carcass lengths rather than whole fish lengths, which was unknown by some stock assessors. CDFW has been of the understanding that carcass length data could not be included in stock assessment models. Meeting minutes were not supplied for the September Council meeting but are expected at the November Council meeting.

Carcass lengths are known to have variable measurement techniques that can yield different results and carcasses are subject to post-mortem tissue shrinkage. WDFW indicated their internal studies have found up to a maximum of two-centimeter difference between the length of carcasses and whole fish for black rockfish.

This difference between carcass vs. whole length measurements for use in stock assessments has implications for growth rates. In a recent report, the Groundfish Subcommittee of the SSC noted that “The performance and stability of SS-CL was better with smaller model dimensions (e.g., fewer fleets) and is sensitive to errors in the fixed values for  $L_{\infty}$  and the coefficient of variation (CV) of length-at-age, which, if fixed, should be explored in sensitivity analyses” (Agenda Item F.2.a Supplemental SSC Report 1 June 2020). Given the sensitivity of assessments to growth rates, especially for data-moderate assessments, after learning of this situation, CDFW has new concern regarding the 2021 California Length Based-Data Moderate assessments for both quillback and copper rockfish, as these assessments utilized Oregon and Washington growth data as the basis for proxy estimates of growth in California. While concerns had previously been expressed regarding the use of proxy growth data from colder northern waters for California, the revelation that the data may have incorporated unadjusted carcass length measurements only deepens the concern.

CDFW appreciates and supports current work of NMFS staff to explore adjustments for correction of carcass lengths for select species. While it is better to derive growth from whole fish, conversions can be used to correct the bias. CDFW has and continues to collect lengths and otoliths from carcasses and strongly supports utilizing these data for assessments to fill known data gaps (as identified by STAR panel reports). CDFW supports the use of carcass length data where conversion factor studies support their use, as opposed to using proxy data or none at all. CDFW has the expectation that if lengths from carcasses in assessments is deemed appropriate, carcass lengths should be utilized in assessments coast wide.