

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
AMENDMENT 31 GROUND FISH STOCK DEFINITIONS

Mr. Todd Phillips (PFMC staff) briefed the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on an analytical document for the range of alternatives (ROA) for Amendment 31 ([Agenda Item F.7, Attachment 1](#)), which would define stock units, including geographic delineations, for thirteen priority species: black rockfish, canary rockfish, copper rockfish, Dover sole, lingcod, Pacific spiny dogfish, petrale sole, quillback rockfish, rex sole, sablefish, shortspine thornyhead, squarespot rockfish, and vermilion/sunset rockfish. The SSC also reviewed a report that details potential approaches for determining the acceptable biological catch and annual catch limits for stocks with multiple sub-area assessment models ([Agenda Item F.7.a, NWFSC Report 1](#)). As noted in the SSC's prior statements 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.

The SSC commends the project team for completing the ROA analyses on a short timeline and endorses the report for Council consideration. In recognition of both the complexity and the uncertainty regarding the scientific evidence for alternative stock determinations, the SSC continues to recommend a workgroup to evaluate processes for future work on stock definitions for the remaining species in the Groundfish FMP, and to review new scientific information that may lead to a reconsideration of the stock definitions for the priority species. This evaluation can be incorporated into the groundfish stock assessment prioritization process in Figure 8 of Agenda Item F.7, Attachment 1.

The SSC continues to recommend that stock units be defined and assessments be conducted at finer geographic scales when the stock boundaries are uncertain and there are reasons to assume there may be finer than coastwide scale population structure.

Based on scientific information related to spatial population structure ([Agenda Item F.7, Attachment 1](#), Appendix 1) the SSC finds support for the following alternatives for the stocks currently under consideration for Amendment 31:

The SSC finds scientific support for Alternative 1 defining canary rockfish, Dover sole, Pacific spiny dogfish, petrale sole, rex sole, sablefish, and shortspine thornyhead as single coastwide stocks and Alternative 2 for lingcod as two stocks (North and South of 40° 10' N. lat.). The SSC recognizes that squarespot rockfish are generally limited in distribution to Southern California, and sees little scientific basis for considering an alternative other than a single stock. The SSC finds scientific support for Alternative 3 (stock delineation at state boundaries) for black and quillback rockfishes. For copper rockfish and sunset/vermillion rockfishes, the SSC finds scientific support for a scale finer than coastwide, but does not find scientific justification for selection of a particular alternative.

For copper rockfish, the results of the southern and northern California assessments were combined for status determination in 2021 (see [Agenda Item E.3.a, Supplemental SSC Report 1, November 2021](#)), however, the SSC recommends Alternative 4 be under consideration for copper rockfish due to uncertainty in stock delineation. This will preserve the option for the delineation

of two, three, or four stocks (southern California, northern California, Oregon, and Washington) at the Council's discretion.

The Northwest Fisheries Science Center provided an analysis of alternative approaches for setting catch limits when a stock is assessed using multiple independent sub-area assessment models. The report proposed potential processes for assessment authors to conduct projections for SSC review and Council consideration under Alternative 1a and 1b. The SSC did not have sufficient time to fully evaluate these alternative approaches, and would benefit from additional guidance, such as Council's preliminary preferred alternatives, prior to the April SSC meeting. This will help the SSC have a more fruitful discussion about the short- and long-term implications of the alternative approaches. Given that the California copper rockfish assessments are to be reviewed in early June, there is a need for guidance by April if projections are needed during the Stock Assessment Review panel.

PFMC
03/06/23