

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON ADOPTING STOCK ASSESSMENTS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) offers the following comments and recommendations on the adoption of stock assessments.

The current assessments appear, on average, to be more pessimistic than the prior assessments. As we note below, funding for an expanded Hook and Line Survey, and/or survey coverage in shallower depths, would provide a more complete picture for several important species.

Full Assessments

California Copper Rockfish

The GAP supports the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) endorsement of the 2023 full assessment of copper rockfish in California as providing the best scientific information available (BSIA) suitable for informing management decisions for 2025 and beyond. The GAP notes that the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFS) Hook and Line survey is the only long-term fishery-independent survey in untrawlable habitat in the Southern California Bight but that this survey has traditionally focused on shelf rockfish species. Funding an expansion of this survey into shallower waters in the bight should strongly be considered so that more nearshore species such as copper rockfish might be better sampled to inform future assessments. Future nearshore assessments in California would also greatly benefit from additional California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) remotely operated vehicle (ROV) surveys which could increase the power of these data to better inform assessments. The GAP strongly supports the Stock Assessment Team's (STAT) 14 recommendations suggested under the Research and Data Needs portion of the copper rockfish stock assessment.

Black Rockfish

The GAP supports the SSC endorsements of the 2023 full assessments of black rockfish in California, Oregon, and Washington as providing BSIA and finds it suitable for informing management decisions for 2025 and beyond.

Canary Rockfish

The GAP accepts the SSC endorsement of the 2023 full assessment of the canary rockfish assessment as providing the BSIA and suitable for informing management for 2025 and beyond. Anecdotal information shared from participants in coastwide fisheries during the GAP's discussion indicates higher canary abundance seen on the grounds than is reflected in the results of the assessment. The GAP notes there continues to be a problem with the West Coast Groundfish Bottom Trawl Survey having very low encounter rates of canary rockfish, which is likely because the survey has limited access to rocky habitat. The GAP believes most of the large spawners tend to congregate in these areas of rocky habitat. As was suggested in the Stock

Assessment Review (STAR) Panel report, there is a need for non-trawl coastwide fishery independent surveys to improve abundance indices. The GAP recommends funding an expansion of the Hook and Line Survey into the northern waters to sample canary rockfish in those non-trawlable areas. The GAP also strongly supports the STAT's seven recommendations suggested under the Research and Data Needs portion of the canary rockfish stock assessment.

Petrale Sole

The GAP supports the SSC endorsement of the petrale sole assessment as providing BSIA and is suitable for informing management for 2025 and beyond. The GAP notes that the petrale stock is healthy and nowhere near minimum stock size threshold, but there continues to be questions about recruitment strength. The GAP notes the survey may be missing areas where the juveniles are found, shallower than 40 fm. An environmental index has been developed that could be used to better inform estimates of recruitment and cohort strength in recent model years. Both the STAR Panel and petrale STAT agreed that this promising tool needed more evaluation before using it as an index of abundance. The GAP strongly encourages continuing the development of this index.

Data Moderate Assessments for Rex Sole and Shortspine Thornyhead

The GAP supports the SSC endorsement of both the rex sole and shortspine thornyhead data moderate assessments as BSIA and is suitable for informing management for 2025 and beyond. The GAP notes there continues to be an absence of aging methods for shortspine thornyhead and that makes it very difficult to estimate growth. The GAP hopes that National Marine Fisheries Service will continue to pursue aging methodologies for shortspine, as it is assumed to be a very long-lived species.

Sablefish Update Assessment

The GAP supports the SSC endorsement of the sablefish update assessment as BSIA and is suitable for informing management for 2025 and beyond.

Catch-Only Projections of Widow and Yelloweye Rockfish Reports

The GAP reviewed the widow and yelloweye rockfish catch-only projections reports. The GAP understands that T_{target} has been extended one more year, following the correction to the P^* values in the harvest specifications.

PFMC
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