

## INITIAL STOCK ASSESSMENT PLAN AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

This agenda item covers initial planning for groundfish stock assessments which are anticipated to be completed in 2025 and 2027 to inform the harvest specifications and management measures for fisheries in 2027 and beyond. Additionally, the Council will consider draft Terms of Reference for the stock assessment process conducted in 2025-2026.

The Council is scheduled to adopt a preliminary list of groundfish species to be assessed in 2025 and 2027. The decision on which stocks to assess in the next two assessment cycles entails whether the assessment should be a full assessment, a data-moderate assessment, or an update assessment, and whether they require peer review by a Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel or only a review by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Council policy on this subject in the past has been to schedule no more than ten full assessments in a given year, with no more than two full assessments reviewed at each STAR Panel. A maximum number of STAR Panels should be considered for next year (2025).

Drs. Jim Hastie and Chantel Wetzel, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Northwest Fisheries Science Center, will report on proposed stock assessment priorities (Attachments 1 and 2). While the proposed stock assessment priorities are helpful in deciding which stocks are assessed next year, it is important to note these “priorities” are informative, not prescriptive. NMFS plans to provide two items for the Supplemental Briefing Book; a summary of data availability, and a report detailing current issues in conducting assessments and the ability to conduct assessments at target assessment frequencies.

An [online groundfish assessment prioritization tool](#) was developed to present the overall scoring by species and for each factor. The webpage replaces the Excel workbook provided in previous cycles. The webpage allows the user to navigate between the overall rankings, ranking by each of the ten factors, access the methodology information, and contains the preliminary 2025 planning calendar for potential STAR Panels.

In June 2022, the Council adopted a list of candidate species for assessment in 2025 as follows: full assessments: aurora rockfish, canary rockfish, China rockfish, Pacific spiny dogfish, quillback rockfish, rougheye/blackspotted rockfishes, sablefish, yelloweye rockfish (full or update assessment), and yellowtail rockfish.

There are three Terms of Reference (TOR) that guide the stock assessment process; a.) specifies how stock assessment reviews should occur and defines the roles and responsibilities of various entities contributing to this process, with a supplemental accepted practices guidelines document; b.) guides the development of rebuilding analyses used to develop harvest specifications and rebuilding plans for overfished and rebuilding species; and c.) guides how new methodologies that inform analyses used in groundfish and coastal pelagic species management decision-making are reviewed.

Recommendations to the full SSC on process improvements to the stock assessment process and proposed revisions to the relevant TORs are provided in an SSC Groundfish Subcommittee report

from their January 17-18, 2024 review meeting (see SSC Materials section of Briefing Book). Only the stock assessment review process and rebuilding analyses TOR documents have recommended edits for the next cycle. Preliminary draft 2025-2026 TOR documents will be provided for the Supplemental Briefing Book. Updates to the accepted practices guidelines are anticipated in the fall by the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee (via a public meeting), after any methodology reviews and/or workshops have occurred. A revised accepted practices guidelines document is planned for the March 2025 Council meeting.

The Council will consider the input from NMFS, state and Tribal agencies, advisory bodies, and the public before providing a preliminary decision on 2025 and 2027 stock assessment priorities by species, type of assessment (full, data-moderate, or update), and the three draft 2025-2026 TOR documents. The Council is scheduled to make final decisions on groundfish stock assessment planning at their June 2024 meeting.

**Council Action:**

**Adopt for public review:**

- 1. A preliminary list of species for assessment (by type) in 2025 and 2027,**
- 2. A draft Terms of Reference for groundfish stock assessments,**
- 3. A draft Terms of Reference for rebuilding analyses, and**
- 4. A draft Terms of Reference for methodology reviews.**

**Reference Materials:**

1. Agenda Item F.3, Attachment 1: Groundfish Assessment Prioritization to Inform the Selection of Species for Assessment in 2025 and Additional Considerations.
2. Agenda Item F.3, Attachment 2: Groundfish assessment prioritization methodology to inform the selection of species for future assessments.
3. Agenda Item F.3, Attachment 3: California Collaborative Fisheries Research Program: Data availability for stock assessments.
4. If received, Public Comments are electronic only.

**Agenda Order:**

- F.3 Initial Stock Assessment Plan and Terms of Reference Marlene A. Bellman
- a. Reports and Comments of Management Entities and Advisory Bodies
  - b. Public Comment
  - c. **Council Action:** Adopt for Public Review a Preliminary List and Schedule of Stocks for Assessment in 2025 and 2027 and Draft Terms of Reference for Assessments, Methodology Reviews, and Rebuilding Analyses

PFMC  
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