

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
INITIAL STOCK ASSESSMENT PLAN AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed 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. These discussions included a review of the draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for the stock assessment process to be conducted in 2025-2026 and the need to develop a code of conduct for all SSC meetings, including stock assessment review (STAR) panels.

After the 2023 stock assessment cycle, the SSC recognized a need to develop a code of conduct that identifies the expectations of all participants in the stock assessment process. The SSC will work with Council staff to develop a code of conduct for all SSC meetings, including those related to stock assessment reviews and meetings of SSC subcommittees.

The 2025 stock assessments will inform the harvest specifications and management decisions for groundfish fisheries in 2027 and beyond. Drs. Jim Hastie and Chantel Wetzel (Northwest Fisheries Science Center) were present to answer questions regarding the framework for identifying the highest priority stocks for assessment in the upcoming cycle. This year, an [online groundfish assessment prioritization tool](#) for ranking species replaces the Excel workbook that was used in previous cycles. Notable changes include updates to Tribal and recreational rankings, and how the constituent demand factor is calculated. The SSC agrees that the online assessment tool is ready for use.

The SSC offered guidance to Dr. Wetzel on how the tool could be improved in the future. For the next cycle, the SSC recommends considering using the productivity susceptibility analysis (PSA) as an alternative to or in combination with stock status for previously assessed stocks, as well as re-evaluating how the PSA is used for stocks that have not yet been assessed. The SSC also recommends adding more climate and ecosystem information in the future, including an exploration of how the risk tables developed under the Fisheries Ecosystem Plan Initiative 4 may be used in the stock prioritization process. Additionally, the SSC recommends that for stocks where the most recent assessment was an update, the time since the last benchmark assessment be considered as well.

To facilitate decisions regarding assessment prioritization related to workload, the SSC has taken the prioritization table from Attachment 1 and added two columns denoting which assessments could be candidates for updates relative to benchmark assessments, and the likely number of models that might need to be developed for each species (recognizing that these are estimates pending stock definition analyses). Note that several assessments listed in Table 2 of Attachment 1 are also candidates for update assessments, but are not ranked in the top 25 species from the prioritization effort. The SSC could provide additional information on the potential use of assessment updates for species and stocks determined to be Council priorities in June.

The SSC reviewed the three draft TORs. The TORs for methodology reviews and for rebuilding analyses (Agenda Item F.3, Supplemental Attachments 6 and 7) are largely unchanged since 2022. The changes to the TORs that will guide the groundfish stock assessment process during 2025 and 2026 reflect outcomes in the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee ([GFSC](#)) report from the Groundfish Assessment 2023 Process Review meeting held in January 2024, including recommendations from

stock assessment authors. The need to better integrate input from the Groundfish Management Team and the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel during the last cycle was noted, and revisions have been proposed to address this. The report also noted the need for greater communication between advisory bodies, stakeholders and Council members prior to adopting assessments (e.g., pre-assessment data workshops and the “evening sessions” for stock assessments). The GFSC will continue work on updating the draft TORs for finalization at the June 2024 Council meeting. The TOR should be updated to note that SSC members who served on a STAT or STAR panel are welcome to contribute to discussions but would be required to recuse themselves if details of their assessments come up for a vote.

The SSC requests guidance from the Council on the usefulness of the stock assessment 1-page summaries and whether the Council would like the assessment teams to produce them.

Table 1: Top 25 ranked species for stock assessment priorities with additional information regarding the potential to conduct updates, and likely or plausible number of models/stocks.

Species	Rank	Last Assessed	Recommended assessment type	Likely number of assessments
Quillback rockfish	1	2021	benchmark	1 to 3
Brown rockfish	2	2013	benchmark	unknown
Yellowtail rockfish	3	2017	update and/or benchmark	2
Widow rockfish	4	2019	update or benchmark	1
Chilipepper	5	2015	benchmark (?)	1
Redbanded rockfish	6	-	benchmark	unknown
Vermilion/Sunset rockfish	7	2021	update or benchmark	4
Bocaccio	8	2017	update or benchmark	1 to 2
Lingcod	9	2021	benchmark	2
English sole	10	2013	benchmark	1
Sablefish	11	2023	benchmark	1
Rosethorn rockfish	12	-	benchmark	unknown
Petrale sole	13	2023	update or benchmark	1
Kelp greenling	14	2015	update or benchmark	1 to 3
Greenstriped rockfish	15	2009	benchmark	1
Greenspotted rockfish	16	2011	benchmark	2
Rougheye/Blackspotted rockfish	17	2013	benchmark	1
China rockfish	18	2015	benchmark	3
Canary rockfish	19	2023	update or benchmark	1
Black rockfish	20	2023	update or benchmark	3 to 4
Longspine thornyhead	21	2013	benchmark	1
Starry rockfish	22	-	benchmark	unknown
Treefish	23	-	benchmark	unknown
Yelloweye rockfish	24	2017	update or benchmark	1
Pacific sanddab	25	-	benchmark	1