

COUNCIL MEMBER REPORT ON DATA COLLECTION OF STATE AND FEDERAL CALIFORNIA GROUND FISH (RIDINGS)

Background

NOAA Fisheries (NMFS) Science Centers and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) both collect data and maintain databases of biological information relevant to fisheries science, management, and policy-making. This collection, collation, maintenance, and communication of data is frequently done in collaboration with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC), academic partners, and private sector partners. Because of the physical size, diversity and number of species, and highly variable ecosystem off the coast of California, this “enterprise” of data collection, management, and communication can be difficult to access and use, particularly for those unfamiliar with the data storage systems. As a result, this can lead to a lack of awareness by those involved in the management process. This can mean that managers, the public, Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) members and staff are likely unaware of the depth of good work that is being done and/or the data sources available to them.

The goals of this request are:

- increasing awareness, transparency, accountability, and understanding of our fisheries data collection “enterprise” by the Council, Council stakeholders, and public as well as the larger scientific community, and
- identifying gaps in data collection, and
- creating buy-in from stakeholders, the public, and the scientific community to help fill possible funding deficits and data gaps.

Council Request

Specifically, this request is for a joint report from CDFW and NMFS that describes what data is being collected for groundfish species in both state and federal waters off California and how the public can access it. The report should include all significant datasets used by NMFS and CDFW that inform stock assessments and/or management measures at the federal and state levels. Examples of such information include, but are not limited to, the types of data collected, years/months of collection and availability, use, and funding source. For example, the report could identify fishery independent data on the density and abundance of various nearshore groundfish species collected by CDFW using remote operated vehicles inside and outside state Marine Protected Areas. This report does not need to include actual data or data analysis, but a description of the data available, both historical and current (where practical), and in a format that is in terms that can be understood by managers, the public, Council members, and staff. It is understood that much of this reporting is already done through various reporting mechanisms at the Council and other sources - for example PacFIN, RecFIN, California Recreational Fisheries Survey, or the *Summary of available data to support U.S. West Coast groundfish stock assessments*¹ presented by NMFS to the Council biennially - however there is no single overview of the collection and the history of such collection in a stakeholder-friendly, user-friendly platform. The report could help identify stock assessment data needs and how adjustments to the data collection enterprise could

¹ Summary of available data to support U.S. West Coast groundfish stock assessments. Agenda Item F.3, Supplemental Attachment 4, March 2024.

fill these needs. For example, the report could help inform how a systematic approach to collecting and analyzing otoliths from recreational and commercial fisheries could provide regional age-length data to fill current data gaps in this information.

The author recommends that the Council request feedback from the Science Centers and CDFW relative to what a reasonable timeframe to receive such a report would be. The hope is that such a report could be provided to the Council in third or fourth quarter 2024 to inform future action on groundfish, data collection and research priorities of multiple parties, and can serve as a platform for engagement of Council management teams and advisory bodies, and the public, towards improving transparency of collection, management use, and funding sources.

Ideally this request is coastwide as there is likely substantial benefit to having Oregon, Washington, and Tribal co-managers included in this exercise, however California is identified in this member report as the priority geography.