

## GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON RESEARCH AND DATA NEEDS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) supports the concept of streamlining, organizing, and prioritizing the Council’s research and data needs list in order to more effectively communicate and advertise these needs to potential research partners. The GAP recommends that the Council proceed with the direction outlined in the framework and draft list of challenges ([Agenda Item D.3, Attachment 2, November 2024](#), [Agenda Item D.3, Attachment 1, November 2024](#)) and offers the following comments and/or modifications.

Groundfish fisheries are facing unprecedented challenges, but within the Council context, research and data feeding into the stock assessment process is critical for setting harvest specifications that reflect reality on the water and provide for optimum yield and the needs of communities. The GAP has previously expressed that:

1. Fisheries-independent and -dependent data are not capturing the full picture on juvenile populations and adult populations in difficult to survey areas, which is affecting stock assessment outcomes;
2. Lack of funding and staff time for survey, aging, and stock assessment work increases uncertainty;
3. Fishermen have volunteered to collect and/or report data that could be used to reduce uncertainty, but there is no clear nexus to incorporate this data into our process;
4. There is excessive layering of precaution in our harvest specifications process through the time-varying sigma, maximum P\* of 0.45, and other built-in reductions;
5. Stock assessment outcomes and our two-year harvest specifications cycle often lags behind current fishery conditions, with little flexibility and few green-light options;
6. Each of these individual factors comes with a cost to catch limits, but in some cases the compounding of these factors results in drastic cuts to catch limits that do not match actual conditions on the grounds, and this is eroding trust in the management outcomes.

Something is broken when fishing participants and Council members acknowledge that there are data and funding gaps contributing to the declining specifications, when buffer upon buffer is imposed on harvest opportunity, when data we volunteer to collect and contribute can’t be incorporated into the process, and when fishing sectors have to fight each other for limited access to stocks that are prevalent on the grounds.

The GAP is hopeful that the Council’s streamlined and prioritized research and data needs can begin to address some of these concerns and is appreciative of the work that was conducted to compile these ongoing challenges.

With respect to the list of challenges, the GAP recommends adding “Integrating additional fisheries-collected data, cooperative and collaborative research, and participatory science” as a fifth challenge. While there are mentions of incorporating “citizen science” into stock assessments, there is a broader challenge on how fishing industry members can get needed and valuable information into the fishery management process. Members of the GAP and fishing industry have often volunteered to collect and/or provide information we’re already collecting to the data collection process. For example, with regards to the “Data Limited Stocks” challenge,

recreational fishermen on the GAP shared that while the retained catch they bring in is counted at the dock, they would be willing to provide more information and even collect measurements, photos, or other information on what they released. If anglers recorded the species, quantity, and size of their released fish, that would provide additional information that is missing right now. Similarly, within ecosystem considerations, fishing participants are already collecting information (such as temperature) and making observations (such as shifts in stock distribution, new species appearing in new areas, weather changes, etc.) that could be utilized to track trends over time.

#### 1. Data-limited Stocks

- The GAP appreciates the inclusion of “Survey limitations to assess groundfish populations (e.g. coastwide fixed gear survey)” and continues to place this as our highest priority research and data need.

#### 3. Socioeconomic Resilience

- Consider combining “Improvements to assessing management risk (P\*) assumptions” with “Time-varying sigma review/revisions” into a more holistic description such as “Quantifying uncertainty and assessing risk in fisheries management and harvest specifications setting processes”. This could include considerations of changing the upper limit of P\* and looking at a national review of how uncertainty and risk are applied in other Councils.
- The GAP recommends adding: impacts to fishing and processing sectors when there are drastic changes to catch limits from year to year.

#### 4. Intersection of Ecosystem Dynamics and Fishery Science/Management

- With respect to the “Time-varying sigma review/revisions” challenge, see note above (under #3 Socioeconomic Resilience) on describing this more holistically

The GAP does not support the Habitat Committee recommendation ([Agenda Item D.3.a, Supplemental HC Report 1, November 2024](#)) to capture habitat within the description of challenge bucket #2 (Fishery Impact Projections), especially if habitat will be identified as a separate challenge.

The Council formally transmits research and data needs recommendations to the Science Centers, and GAP recommends that the Council consider explicitly notifying West Coast universities with fisheries programs of the research and data needs database. It’s exciting to see students at University of Washington working on the Update Assessment for Yelloweye Rockfish Coastwide and Widow Rockfish Coastwide ([Supplemental Informational Report 9, November 2024](#)), and students at Oregon State researching yelloweye rockfish and black rockfish. We hope the Council’s revised research and data needs list will not only attract more work on these priority challenges, but also bring new participants and research partners into the fishery management process for the long term.