

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON PHASE 2 STOCK DEFINITIONS – FINAL ACTION

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed (1) the stock definition alternatives for the Phase 2 groundfish stocks; (2) combining sub-area assessments with different category designations; (3) previous SSC recommendations regarding population structure and its interaction with partial inclusion versus exclusion of spatial components of a species in the Fishery Management Plan (FMP); and (4) the 10-factor analysis for determining whether a species is in need of conservation and management in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Todd Phillips (PFMC) and Katrina Bernaus (PFMC) provided a summary of the issues of interest to the analysts and were available for questions and discussion.

Phase 2 stock definition alternatives

The SSC agrees that the stock definition alternatives are consistent with the available scientific information, except for cowcod, where Option 2 should be north and south of Point Conception.

Combining sub-area assessments with different category designations

The SSC discussed methods for making status determinations and for deriving Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs) when sub-area assessments with different category designations need to be combined.

The SSC recommends that status determinations be made when combining Category 1 and 2 sub-area assessments by dividing the summed current abundance estimates by the summed unfished abundance estimates. Status determinations when assessments for Category 3 sub-area assessments are combined with Category 1 or 2 sub-area assessments should generally be based on the results for the Category 1 and 2 sub-area assessments. This can be done when the abundance within or OFL from the areas with Category 3 designations is low relative to that in areas with Category 1 or 2 designations, which is typically the case.

The SSC revisited the approaches proposed for deriving ABCs when combining sub-area assessments with different category designations ([Agenda Item H.3.a, NWFSC Report 1, June 2023](#)) and revisited its previous preference for the “weighted sigma” approach ([Agenda Item H.3.a, Supplemental SSC Report 1, June 2023](#)). Going forward, the SSC recommends the more straightforward approach of setting the total ABC as the sum of the sub-area ABCs calculated based on each assessment.

Previous SSC recommendations about population structure and its interaction with partial inclusion versus exclusion of spatial components of a species in the FMP

The SSC was asked to clarify its previous recommendations for defaulting to finer-scale stock structure for nearshore rockfish species when stock structure is uncertain ([Agenda Item H.5.a, Supplemental SSC Report 1, November 2022](#)) and previous recommendations against state-specific exclusion of a species from the FMP when it is included in other states ([Agenda Item H.6.a, Supplemental SSC Report 1 March 2025](#)). The SSC notes that this issue is not directly related to whether a species is in need of conservation and management within the EEZ. Rather it relates to when one or several spatial components for a species have been designated as being in need for conservation and management within the EEZ.

The SSC reiterates that nearshore rockfish species typically have finer-scale population structure than shelf or slope species. Management based on the assumption of finer-scale population structure reduces risks of localized depletion relative to the assumption of no population structure. The absence of evidence of stock structure is not evidence of lack of stock structure, particularly for nearshore species. Additionally, the locations of potential stock boundaries are generally difficult to identify. Thus, the SSC maintains its recommendation to keep all spatial components of a species in the FMP if at least one component qualifies for inclusion. Doing so would account for considerable uncertainty in stock structure and maintain data collection and research coordination for the would-be-excluded spatial components. Consistent data collection and research on these components will be vital to increase confidence in stock boundaries, now and under changing ecological conditions.

10-factor analysis for determining whether a stock is in need of conservation and management within the EEZ

The SSC appreciates the work by Council staff to develop the 10-factor analysis. The SSC recognizes the importance of the 10-factor analysis for informing upcoming Council decisions related to including or excluding species from the FMP and identified some key considerations for future work. The SSC had limited time for review of these supplemental materials, which merit a more comprehensive review before the Final Preferred Alternative (FPA) is determined. Several minor comments and recommendations are provided to Council staff within our italicized notes.

The SSC discussed the rationale for why some species might be more likely to be considered “universally unimportant” to the fishery than others. Specifically, the bin developed to facilitate the analysis for shallow shelf rockfish contains a number of dwarf rockfish species with very low catches, which might be candidates for Ecosystem Component (EC) species. Larger-bodied species such as flag, rosy, and speckled rockfishes would best be considered in a separate bin. Similarly, larger but more rarely encountered species in the deeper shelf rockfish bin (e.g., bronzespotted, Mexican, and pink rockfishes) might not be considered explicit fishery “targets” but may be locally abundant in some habitats and would presumably be valued and retained by

commercial and recreational fishermen when encountered. A more robust identification of fishery “importance” would consider size and desirability or marketability from the perspective of the likelihood of retention. Consistent with the Productivity-Susceptibility Analysis referred to in the March 2025 SSC statement ([Agenda Item H.6.a Supplemental SSC Report 1, March 2025](#)), the SSC continues to recommend that species identified as having high vulnerability to fishing impacts not be considered good candidates for EC designation.

Although Supplemental Attachment 2 presents information in ecological bins, the SSC recommends species-specific consideration for inclusion or exclusion from the FMP.

PFMC

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