

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
STOCK ASSESSMENT TERMS OF REFERENCE - SCOPING

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) recommends that the scope of proposed changes for the stock assessment-related terms of reference (TOR) include the below items. For ease of Council review, where our items aligned or related with those identified by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in [Agenda Item D.9.a, Supplemental SSC Report 1, March 2026](#), we referenced the SSC item number. We also provide a cross-walk table at the end of our statement.

1. **Effective Stakeholder Engagement:** Provide meaningful opportunities for stakeholder input throughout the stock assessment process, prioritizing the incorporation of fishermen’s knowledge. For example, during pre-assessment workshops there is limited information made available on how the draft stock assessment is looking. It would be helpful to have another workshop (or shift the timing of the current workshop) once more information is available and can be shared, but prior to the draft assessment being finalized. (SSC #5)
2. **Off- and On-Ramps:** Provide “off-ramps” to defer an update or benchmark assessment when there is a drastic change up or down, and “on-ramps” to upgrade an update assessment to a benchmark when further analysis is needed. The TOR could also provide more flexibility to update certain parameters within an update assessment. (SSC #4)
3. **Post-Assessment Data Gaps Workshop:** More formal process to follow-up on data gaps after a stock assessment is completed. Initially, this could potentially consist of a workshop that would have the right people in the room for that species (including stock assessors, observer program, fishery managers, and fishing/processing participants), to review the written research and data needs section of the assessment and plan how to effectively fill some of those data gaps before the next assessment. While this is currently occurring informally, it would be more efficient and effective to have an outlined process. For example, the GAP heard about several potential ideas for widow rockfish data gaps, including a voluntary logbook supplement, acoustic hard drive recording, catch per unit effort (CPUE) index workshop, etc. but these conversations occurred between different groups at different times. It would be helpful to dedicate time to sit down together to consider such ideas and how they could support stock assessment data gaps holistically. It would be helpful to have the observer program participate in these workshops to provide their expertise about sampling protocols and how observers could contribute to data collection. The GAP also discussed that this would be a good avenue to consider pathways where citizen science could provide meaningful support to fill data gaps.
4. **Longer Term Planning:** Under Agenda Item D.8, Initial Stock Assessment Plan for 2027-2028, the Science Centers presented their plan to provide a draft ten-year outlook for groundfish stock assessment planning to the Council in June 2026. The GAP agrees that it would be beneficial to think beyond our current ad hoc two to four year approach and conduct longer-term planning, so we look forward to the information the National Marine Fisheries Service plans to bring in June and we think it could fit nicely into the TOR considerations.

5. **Data Transparency:** Provide more of the raw data for items such as abundance indices or survey data, and where possible, more information for non-stock-assessors about how certain data influences the model. This could even occur through a preliminary post-survey presentations to stakeholders (similar to what occurs in the Gulf of Alaska). If personal communication is the source for analytical/quantifiable information that underpins part of an assessment, this data should be made public. The GAP discussed an example that more information from the 30 bottom-trawl survey hauls that included widow rockfish (with haul locations and age information, etc. from those hauls) would have been helpful to stakeholders during the widow assessment process.

6. **Availability of Information:** Continue to improve ways to easily find documents, especially those from past assessment cycles. (SSC #7)

The GAP recommends keeping risk tables out of the TORs until such time that the process for including them is mature.

We are grateful that NWFSC staff as well as two Monterey-area fishing participants were able to join a meaningful GAP discussion around some of the concerns over the stock assessment process and trends. Major themes coming out of that discussion included:

- the desire by fishing and processing participants to have long-term sustainable stocks;
- a downward trending of some recent stock assessments that does not align with fishermen’s experience and knowledge;
- the resulting enormous socio-economic impacts of those downward trends;
- the urgency of gathering more information to fill data gaps; and
- the willingness of fishing participants to help gather that data in a way that will be helpful to the process.

Table 1. Compilation of SSC and GAP Recommendations for Scoping

	SSC Item #	GAP Item #
Better organize TORs and related documents	1	
Intended purpose of stock assessment reports	2	
Timelines for coordination, review, adoption	3	
Off- and on-ramps	4	2
Effective stakeholder engagement	5	1
Merge TORs for groundfish and CPS	6	
Availability/posting of assessment documents	7	6
Follow-up workshop post-assessment to make a plan for filling data gaps		3
Longer-term assessment selection planning		4
Data transparency		5