GROUNDFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON ADOPT STOCK ASSESSMENTS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) offers the following comments/suggestions.

Catch only projections

The GAP supports endorsement of catch-only projections for Oregon black rockfish and bocaccio.

GAP suggestion for widow rockfish supplemental review

The GAP sees the proposed supplemental review, as noted in the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) statement under this agenda item (F.2.a, Supplemental SSC Report 1, November 2025) as a chance for the Stock Assessment Team (STAT) to answer questions raised in the October supplemental review, have the latitude to address other issues as they see fit, and make model runs to inform specifications in the case that the 2025 model is not adopted as best scientific information available (BSIA).

Specifically, the GAP recommends:

1) Review October simplification of fleets in more detail to determine if it is still appropriate for inclusion in its current state or at all.
2) Relative to SSC requests to the STAT for supplemental review, the GAP is especially interested in focusing on requests 3 and 4 that include the two most impactful factors from the 2025 model, which are natural mortality changes and hook and line correction.

Additionally, the GAP agrees with the points made in the Groundfish Management Team's (GMT) F.2 statement (F.2.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1) and recommends the following model runs to inform harvest specifications if the 2025 model is not adopted as BSIA. These could be used in conjunction with each other:

1) 2023 catch only projections
2) 2015 benchmark stock assessment
3) 2019 updated stock assessment
4) 2019 updated stock assessment with error corrected
5) 2025 updated stock assessment

The GAP hoped the SSC would include some creative thinking about the next steps for determining an overfishing limit (OFL) for widow rockfish. For example, using the 2019 model but including the 2019 hook-and-line correction, with the results being projected forward as an alternative consideration to the updated assessment results, as noted below.

The estimated OFLs for these runs added to the Table shown above are below.

OFL catch	2025 model	2019 model, actual catches	2019 model, HKL adjusted, actual catches	2019 model, HKL adjusted, 2025 M, actual catches	2015 model, actual catches	2015 model, 2025 M, actual catches
2015					12,259	7,424
2016					13,487	8,260
2017					14,346	8,876
2018					14,221	8,796
2019		14,670	11,701	8,775	13,499	8,272
2020		15,774	11,970	8,918	12,983	7,901
2021		16,116	11,983	8,879	12,600	7,633
2022		15,533	11,451	8,404	11,904	7,127
2023		14,439	10,601	7,687	11,061	6,508
2024		13,326	9,806	7,039	10,379	6,007
2025	6,271	12,421	9,219	6,573	9,893	5,649
2026	5,200	11,582	8,669	6,125	9,365	5,245
2027	4,533	10,957	8,290	5,815	8,983	4,943

Unnumbered table from the *Proposed new widow rockfish base model and changes from August 2025* document under this agenda item, Page 24.

The GAP remains concerned about underlying issues and assumptions included in the updated model and some of the proposed model runs. For perspective, we provide the following information for Council consideration for the full SSC Supplemental Review.

Macro Look at Widow Stock Assessments

A macro look at four things are informative to draw conclusions: the stock itself, the fishery, the 2025 model (both August and October models), and the 2019 update stock assessment (which could include 2015 benchmark)

1) Stock:
    a) The stock ranges the entire West Coast and is very healthy from off central California to the Canadian border; and
    b) Widow are historically known by fishermen to have widespread congregations throughout this range, rarely encountered by the post-2000 bottom trawl fishery or trawl survey.

2) Fishery:
    a) The stock-dominant midwater fishery is largely congregated in two areas directly west of the two major processing ports with vast other known widow aggregations in areas lightly fished or not fished at all; and
    b) Fishing mortality is about 10,000 mt over the last eight years, with fishing catch per unit of effort (CPUE) still robust in 2025 and still concentrated in the two locations.

3) 2025 model:
    a) A 40%+ coastwide spawning biomass ten-year decline is modeled through 2026;
    b) Low biomass and productivity values leading to a more than 50% allocation cut; and
    c) Productivity modeled so low that 10-year forward projections show stagnant spawning biomass and stock status, even with greatly reduced allocation projections.

4) 2019 assessment:
    a) A maximum sustainable yield (MSY) of 8,200 mt.

When taking a macro look at the four above points in conjunction with one another, some conclusions can be drawn:

1) A comparison of the 2019 updated model with 8,169 mt MSY for the entire coast and about an actual eight-year 10,000 mt average on a subsection of stock range with a species that estimates 50% maturity at 5.47 years suggests the 2019 model might be conservative to what a real-world sustainable yield might be;
2) The 2025 update model seems improbable in that fishing primarily on a small subsection of widow congregations could drive spawning biomass down 40+% over ten years. The 2025 model would seem to require the theory of hyperstability in drawing fish from California, southern Oregon, the shelf throughout Oregon, and many parts of Washington without being "replaced" very much by local recruits. This seems unlikely;
3) The 2019 update model may have a technical error, but its product generated in terms of informing fishery management has withstood the real-world test of time for the past several years; and
4) Which model is better science: the one that has a technical error but appears closer to modeling the stock conditions in the ocean or the one that has technical merit but appears to be far off from modeling stock conditions?

This macro look leads to the conclusion that the 2025 update assessment should not be adopted as BSIA and is beyond minor tweaks to put it in a position of being adopted as BSIA.

Micro Look at 2025 Widow Stock Assessment Sensitivity

Following are four points of note demonstrating sensitivity of the 2025 draft update widow assessment. Points 1 and 2 are the main drivers of the 2025 downgrade of productivity and biomass. Points 3 and 4 are two negatively impactful changes in the October model runs relative to the August model:

1) Older fish are driving down productivity:
    a) A proportional increase of older fish in recent years' bottom trawl survey data drove natural mortality (M) down and therefore productivity down;
    b) Removing the bottom trawl age composition data from the 2025 model increases 2027 OFL by 74%;
    c) The model is hypersensitive to age data; and

d) Fishery participants understand the bottom trawl survey finding some more 25 year old fish is reasonable since widow fishing was curtailed in 2000 with the bottom trawl fishery remaining a non-factor ever since. So this dynamic should not be a game changer to the tune of 74% on the 2027 OFL.

2) Hook and line data change driving down biomass:
    a) Majority of biomass downgrade due to discard change for hook and line discards which is about 0.2% of fishing mortality;
    b) This changed revised down estimates of 2010's recruits, especially in 2013 and 2014;
    c) Recruits revision in turn drove down the biomass and stock status; and
    d) This correction of 2019 update assessment led to a large biomass downgrade has not been validated by results of the fishery. Model assumption of overestimation of biomass does not seem to be the case because the fishery operating on a small subsection of coastal widow congregations has demonstrated a healthy biomass, not a coastwide drastic decline of biomass.

3) Simplify fleets change in October model:
    a) Reduces 2027 OFL from 4,239 to 3,096 mt; and
    b) This is a large change for something that would not seem warranted.

4) Fecundity change in October model:
    a) Reduces the 2027 OFL 9%.

The four points above show the 2025 update model is extremely sensitive to data that seems, to those with a knowledge of the fishery and the stock, to be well beyond what would seem reasonable.

The GAP remains concerned about a number of stock assessments during the last two cycles diverging significantly from on-the-water observations and knowledge of stocks. There is substantial negative economic consequences to communities that have resulted from these changes and are projected to result from these occurrences.

PFMC
11/14/2025