GROUNDFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON STOCK ASSESSMENT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR 2027-2028 - FINAL

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) recommends adopting the stock assessment terms of reference (TOR) shown in Agenda Item G.5, Attachment 1, November 2026.

The TOR currently references these general items that would be helpful for the GAP-Led/Authored Document (GLAD) to include:

- Changes in fishery operations
- Changes in participation
- Changes in spatial and temporal dynamics
- On-the-water observations over recent years, including specifics about stock dynamics, environmental trends, catch rate trends, socioeconomic considerations, and any other relevant information
- Describe how (e.g., gear types), when (e.g., years, time of season, time of day), and where (e.g., locations, depths, nearest ports) applicable sectors operated, (ii) provide any context needed to understand trends or anomalies in catch (e.g., key management actions, changes in fish processing, shifts in target species or species avoidances), and (iii) additional on-the-water observations. The document should also list the fisheries, sectors, ports, and other fishing groups that were consulted to produce the information therein.

The GAP discussed that we plan to create a template to cover these items and any other relevant information collaboratively. However, we do not want this process memorialized in the TOR because this will be our first formal iteration of creating this document (although former GAP member and current Council member Jeff Lackey paved the way with something similar for the widow rockfish, shortspine thornyhead, and yellowtail rockfish assessments).

The GAP recommends hosting a virtual meeting where the GAP representatives to the STAR Panel can receive information from other GAP members and fishery stakeholders that would go into the GLAD, the first draft of which would need to be completed two weeks prior to the pre-assessment workshops. We would envision this occurring as a one-day GAP virtual webinar over the winter, dedicating about one hour to each species with a benchmark assessment, and thirty minutes for each species with an update assessment. The redbanded pre-assessment workshop is the first up on January 20, 2027, so the GLAD would be due by January 6, 2027. That means we would need to hold this webinar sometime in December 2026 or January 2027.

We also had a long and helpful discussion with Dr. Aaron Berger, Dr. Kristin Marshall, and Dr. Cheryl Barnes about transparency in the stock assessment process. In line with the SSC, the GAP recommended "STAT office hours" for question and answers during the two-week period between the release of the stock assessment and the STAR panel (in our Stock Assessment Process Review Adjustments for 2027 statement Agenda Item G.4.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1, November 2026). However, under this agenda item, we discussed that our original intent with that concept was to have more transparency throughout the stock assessment development - prior to the draft stock assessment publishing - as occurs in other regions such as Alaska and the Southeast.

Dr. Kristin Marshall used a chocolate cake analogy for the stock assessment process that we thought would be helpful for the Council. The pre-assessment workshop is when all of the ingredients are laid out in bowls on the table. The mixing and baking are when the stock assessment is in development. And when the cake is baked, it's the draft assessment. In the words of GAP member Poggy Lapham, the GAP has been looking for a temperature probe while the cake is still in the oven! We are looking for transparency during the process, although we acknowledge that the STAT teams are incredibly busy during this time. While the Science Center cannot commit to increased transparency while the stock assessment and models are being developed (or a peek into the oven during the cake-baking process), the GAP continues to hope there are ways that we can move towards this in the future – such as releasing draft tables before the draft assessment is published, or even a signal as to how the assessment is developing compared to prior assessments (is the cake center rising or falling?). Dr. Berger pointed out that some of these general trends, such as the draft survey index or other key indicators presented at the pre-assessment workshop, might be a helpful temperature probe.

The GAP also agreed that it is incumbent on GAP members to ensure that industry and GAP members participate in all the additional outreach steps that we have advocated for.

PFMC
11/15/26

Appendix I. Terms of Reference for the Groundfish Stock Assessment Review Process for 2027-2028 - Sections Related to the GAP-Led/Authored Document (GLAD)
(Agenda Item G.5, Attachment 1, November 2026)

Section 3.1 Pre-Assessment (Data and Stakeholder) Workshops (page 7)
The workshops provide an opportunity for stakeholders, fishery participants, managers, and scientists to exchange information and perspectives regarding the stock and fishery. Particular emphasis should be placed on documenting changes in fishery dynamics through time and across geographic areas, as well as identifying information that may improve assessment development and interpretation. To support these discussions, the GAP advisor associated with the assessment will coordinate preparation of a summary document describing relevant context, including changes in fishery operations, participation, and spatial and temporal dynamics. The working document will be provided to the STAT prior to the workshop and distributed to workshop participants with other meeting materials at least two weeks before the meeting. This document will serve as the foundation for the GAP-authored document (described in Appendix B) included in the draft and final assessment documents, consistent with the timelines and guidance described in Appendix A.

4.4 Stock Assessment Team (STAT) (page 31)
STATs should make themselves available for discussions and meetings with industry and interested parties to discuss data and stock assessment issues as needed. The STAT should initiate contact with the GAP representative(s) early during the assessment process, including discussion around on-the-water observations and development of the GAP-authored document, planning the pre-assessment data workshop, and keep the GAP informed of the data being used and respond to any concerns that are raised. The STAT should also contact the GMT representative and Council staff early in the process for information about data uses, changes in fishing regulations and spatial management issues that may influence model structure and the way data are used in the assessment. The latter is particularly important for nearshore groundfish stocks, for which each state has different regulatory histories. A GMT representative should also be included on data-related communications and meeting invitations.

4.8 Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) (page 34)
Up to two GAP representatives who may or may not currently serve on the GAP, usually appointed by the GAP chair, attend the STAR panel meeting and serve as an advisor to the STAT and STAR panel. Participation in planning the pre-assessment workshop is expected to facilitate stakeholder engagement and provide input on directions of the assessment early in the process. The GAP representative(s) should review the data sources being used in the assessment prior to development of the stock assessment model and ensure that industry concerns regarding the adequacy of data used by the STAT are communicated and addressed early in the assessment process. Any requests from the GMT or GAP should be conveyed to the STAT through their respective GMT or GAP representatives for the STAR panel and should include Council staff for awareness of the request.

The GAP representative(s) (along with STAT and STAR panel chair, if requested) is expected to attend the GMT meeting at which preliminary ACL, HG, and/or ACT recommendations are

developed. The GAP representative is also expected to attend subsequent GMT and Council meetings where the relevant harvest recommendations are discussed.

The GAP representative(s) to the STAR panel should be the lead coordinator of the GAP-authored document that will be included in the final stock assessment document. This appendix should describe on-the-water observations over recent years, including specifics about stock dynamics, environmental trends, catch rate trends, socioeconomic considerations, and any other relevant information. The GAP representative(s) will provide a draft of the document on fishery-relevant information to the STAT prior to the pre-assessment workshop so the STAT has time to consider local ecological knowledge (LEK) early on during assessment development. The GAP representative(s) will deliver the final document to the STAT prior to the draft assessment deadline (i.e., 4 weeks prior to the STAR panel; see Appendix A). Additionally, the GAP advisor(s) to the panel should contribute to the "Management, Data, or Fishery Issues raised by the GMT or GAP Representatives During the STAR Panel Meeting" section of the STAR panel report and should have an opportunity to review the final language in that section of the panel report.

Appendix B: Outline for Stock Assessment Documents
Q. Appendices (page 46)

- GAP-authored document that summarizes the spatiotemporal dynamics of relevant target fisheries and/or incidental catch. At minimum, this document should (i) describe how (e.g., gear types), when (e.g., years, time of season), and where (e.g., locations, depths, nearest ports) applicable sectors operated, (ii) provide any context needed to understand trends or anomalies in catch (e.g., key management actions, changes in fish processing, shifts in target species or species avoidances), and (iii) additional on-the-water observations. The document should also list the fisheries, sectors, ports, and other fishing groups that were consulted to produce the information therein.

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