SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON STOCK ASSESSMENT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR 2027–2028

Diana Perry, Council staff, briefed the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on proposed changes to the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Groundfish Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Process for 2027–2028 (Agenda Item G.5, Attachment 1). The revisions respond to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) June 2026 motion (Agenda Item G.4, Attachment 1) and SSC input from September 2026 (Agenda Item G.5.a, SSC Report 1). The SSC appreciates the work by Council staff to incorporate these extensive revisions.

The SSC identified the following clarifications and editorial revisions for the current cycle:

- Clarify the request process described on page 17. The TOR should specify that requests to changes in assessment classification or timing may be submitted by the Stock Assessors Team, STAR Panel chair, or Groundfish Subcommittee (GFSC) chair and are subject to SSC review.
- In Appendix C, the risk table and evaluation of scientific uncertainty are indistinguishable and should be combined into one item.
- Rename Appendix E (formerly referred to as "Risk Tables") to "Characterization of Scientific Uncertainty" to better reflect its use when designating sigma rather than risk.
- In Appendix E, change "high species productivity" to "conditions for favorable recruitment" in the description of ecosystem and environmental conditions for a Category 1a stock. Similar wording changes are required for the other categories that refer to "species productivity".
- Although the Council has not implemented the risk table for management and has paused the transition to alternative stock assessment types during the assessment review process, the revised TOR lays the groundwork for future implementation of the table. Specifically, Appendix E will be used during SSC discussions and characterization of scientific uncertainty (sigma). These changes may require future fishery management plan amendments.
- Add language stating that choices of priors for model parameters, such as steepness and natural mortality, should be risk neutral. Sigma is a risk neutral estimate, and adjustments to acceptable biological catch-annual catch limit buffers for management risk should occur within the risk framework rather than within the assessment.
- Clarify the description of the composition of assessment teams such that "the lead should be a professional stock assessor" applies to all assessment types.
- The SSC recommended additional editorial changes and removed residual language regarding the GFSC post-STAR review.

The SSC recommends the following items for the 2029–2030 assessment cycle:

- The TORs for rebuilding analyses and methodology reviews have not been revised for two assessment cycles. Revisions should be conducted in isolation of changes to the TOR for the Groundfish Stock Assessment Review Process and conducted before the 2029–2030 assessment cycle.
- Further refine the text on roles and responsibilities and move some of that content into the Council Operating Procedure for 2029 assessment cycle.
- Define the criteria for classifying an assessment as a research-track assessment.

The SSC recommends incorporating these revisions into the final 2027–2028 TOR and identifying process issues for consideration before the 2029–2030 assessment cycle.

PFMC
11/14/26