SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FLEXIBILITY – FINAL

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the revised Draft Impacts Analysis for Groundfish Harvest Specifications Flexibility (Agenda Item G.7, Attachment 1). The SSC previously reviewed a draft analysis in September 2026 and offered a number of comments and suggestions at that time (Agenda Item G.7.a, SSC Report 1).

In September, the SSC requested additional information on three items: 1) more explicit connections between the problem statement and proposed policies; 2) projections based on various carryover scenarios; and 3) a table that describes cumulative effects and incompatible combinations of multiple policies. The revised document addresses these concerns, including an improved connection between the problem statement and the proposed policies within an executive summary (item 1).

The simulations of carryover scenarios provide case study examples for four stocks; two in which catches were simulated to achieve full acceptable biological catch (ABC) or annual catch limit (ACL) attainment in aggregate (petrale sole and sablefish) and two with more substantial under-attainment (canary rockfish and shortspine thornyhead). The simulations include approaches with and without a natural mortality (M) adjustment to reduce the allowed carryover. For petrale sole and sablefish, there were small deviations in the carryover scenarios from simulations in which the full ACLs were attained in each year, such that future overfishing limits (OFLs) were slightly lower without the natural mortality correction (reported in Attachment 1, Tables 17, 18, 20, and 22). If the magnitude of these differences are not a concern, the natural mortality correction (depreciation) may not be essential in the implementation of the carryover, noting that these carryover scenarios represent the greatest possible impact of carryover over the 8-year projections.

The simulations of high attainment stocks, petrale sole and sablefish, suggested that these provisions would likely provide modest benefits given the limited amount of carryover available from one cycle to the next. The canary rockfish and shortspine thornyhead simulations provided assurances that the carryover provisions were likely to achieve the stated objective of increasing aggregate attainment to levels that more closely approached the ACL and/or ABC values, with relatively modest risk for stocks that are considered to be constraining ("choke") stocks. In general, the simulations and associated analysis supported the claim that the carryover provisions do not enable an ABC to exceed an OFL, and that the risks to productivity and long-term yields are not substantially greater than the existing risk posed by current harvest control rules that assume full ACL attainment. The simulations also suggest that while the carry-over provisions may increase total catch they may actually decrease stability in catch from year to year. However, the simulations did not evaluate the overall stability in landings of co-occurring target species. The SSC thanks the Northwest Fisheries Science Center for the additional simulation work, which provided a greater understanding with respect to the potential impact of carryover scenarios.

The SSC found the table of cumulative effects (Table 28; item 3 from the September SSC statement) to be useful with respect to the compatibility (or lack thereof) of various interactions

and their associated cumulative risks, although biological effects of combining multiple measures were not explored in the simulations. It was recognized that some scenarios still require case-specific consideration of biological and socio-economic impacts. Some of these analyses could be complicated and lead to increased workload for relevant advisory bodies and Science Center staff. The SSC also recognized that the framework may reduce overall workload by providing for a more predictable process in most scenarios, given more recent *ad hoc* evaluations for emergency rules and other actions.

With respect to the harvest specifications process, the SSC found that it would be efficient to specify and adopt ABCs and OFLs for an extended period (10 years). Doing so would focus the biennial process on the review of new assessments and unique management scenarios.

The SSC notes that recent reductions in the number of federally managed groundfishes (47 species remaining compared to 86 species prior to 2025) is likely to increase the frequency of stock assessments for stocks with a higher management profile (e.g., higher value or volume, or constraining stocks), and will better track changes in population size and structure over time. The SSC also reiterates the need to identify ways that would balance phase-in/out and red/green light approaches.

PFMC
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