

CONSIDERATIONS FOR A NEW STOCK ASSESSMENT TERMS OF REFERENCE

The draft terms of reference for the groundfish stock assessment and review process for 2011-2012 (Attachment 1) is a revised version of the previous terms of reference with proposed edits from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. While this draft of the new terms of reference addresses many relevant issues that have emerged in recent years, the Council staff notes a few issues that might benefit from further discussion and consideration. Council staff is recommending that Council advisors and Council members consider the following issues when recommending or deciding a final version of the stock assessment terms of reference.

- **Whiting Assessment Review:** It is possible this version of the terms of reference may be used to guide the Pacific whiting assessment and review process in 2011 and possibly 2012, if all of the necessities of the international treaty with Canada are not fully in place. Given the problems associated with the two competing assessment situation in 2010, and the potential problems of conducting a negotiation process with representatives of Canada at some point later this year if formal international solutions are not in place, should there be some consideration for the greater specificity in review process for the Pacific whiting assessment in the new terms of reference than what is shown in a footnote in Appendix A?
- **Estimating B_0 :** The 2005 and 2009 petrale sole assessments considerably changed our understanding of stock status, largely driven by new estimates of unfished biomass (B_0). The new estimates of B_0 from these last two assessments were strongly influenced by highly uncertain estimates of historical catch as long ago as 1876. While the historic estimates were properly calculated given the state of the data at hand, it does underscore how highly uncertain historic catches directly influence assessment results. Should the terms of reference include a specific review of whether adding historic catch estimates many years ago actually improve the overall confidence in resulting B_0 estimates? Notably, this issue is not limited to the petrale sole stock assessment.
- **STAR Reviews Should Not Be Workshops:** In the opinion of some of the participants and observers of the 2010 Pacific whiting assessment review, the review panel may have exceeded review standards in removing a substantial amount of data due to beliefs these data were biased. Further, new core analyses were added beyond the original submission during the Stock Assessment Review (STAR) process. While STAR panels often recommend some revision to assessments they are reviewing, the terms of reference recommend against a STAR panel doing a drastic overhaul of the assessment. Should more stringent language regarding the role of the STAR panel be considered for the terms of reference regarding STAR panel meetings being review panels, not workshops, beyond what is contained on pages 8-10 in the current draft?
- **Completeness of Pre-STAR Draft Assessments:** The completeness of draft assessments has improved in the last two cycles with more attention paid to critical elements that need to be included in pre-STAR draft assessments. Further, there has been the benefit of the internal review process that the Northwest Fisheries Science Center has used before distributing their assessments. However, further consideration of the consequences of receiving an incomplete assessment might be useful, beyond what is shown on pages 10 and 12 in the current draft.