

## GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON STOCK ASSESSMENT PLANNING FOR MANAGEMENT SPECIFICATIONS IN THE 2015-2016 FISHERIES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the items under Agenda Item F.5 and were briefed by Dr. Jim Hastie of the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) on National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) stock assessment priorities ([Agenda Item F.5.b, NMFS Report, March 2012](#)) and offer the following comments.

### *Benchmark Species*

The NMFS Report (Table 1) provides a list of benchmark species, along with categories that can be used for prioritizing potential stock assessments in 2013. The NMFS Science Centers have stated that they will be able to conduct eight full assessments during this cycle and suggested five as priorities: darkblotched rockfish, petrale sole, cowcod, and longspine and shortspine thornyheads. The GMT also suggests that NMFS look at data availability from other fishery-independent surveys (e.g., AFSC Triennial Survey) between now and June. Dr. Hastie informed us time was not available to do so for this meeting.

The GMT supports NMFS' intent to set prioritization criteria, as shown in Table 1 in the NMFS report. However, the GMT supports efforts to continue progress on this front and consider other metrics such as the probability of recent removals exceeding DB-SRA overfishing limits (OFLs), and whether or not the species has been of high bycatch concern. Dr. Hastie informed us there is an effort to do so at the national level within NMFS.

### *Additional Potential Full Assessments*

For the remaining three stock assessments that the Science Centers may be capable of completing in 2013, the GMT recommends that aurora rockfish be considered for a full assessment. Of the unassessed slope rockfish species put forward by NMFS, this species has the most available data, is regularly landed in the trawl fisheries, and has a high vulnerability score. In addition, there may be some recent and historical otolith data available to inform this assessment. If enhanced data-poor methods become available, aurora could also be considered for those applications instead of a full assessment.

### *Update Assessments*

The Science Centers may be able to accommodate 2-3 updated assessments and recommend Pacific ocean perch (mandatory) and bocaccio rockfish as candidate species (Table 1, NMFS Report). The GMT agrees with these selections. The GMT also recommends sablefish be considered for inclusion as an update in 2013, because it is a highly valuable commercial species, may be slow to recover if it becomes overfished, and recent stock assessments have shown a recent downward trend and an uncertain forecast of stock's trajectory.

### *Data Poor Stock Assessments*

The GMT recommends that a high priority be placed on developing enhanced data poor methods and identifying sources of abundance indices (whether fishery independent or fishery dependent) to be used in applying these methods. While use of the correlation between data, PSA scores, and depletion for assessed stocks may improve the accuracy of DB-SRA and DCAC methods, actual trends in abundance indices provide a more reliable direct indication of a stock's relative

depletion level. Application of such abundance indices with enhanced data poor methods could raise a species from category 3 to category 2, resulting in a lower reduction in the OFL. Enhanced data poor assessments may also be the appropriate approach for re-visiting assessments with limited data.

#### *Status Reports*

The NMFS report recommends that for some of the rebuilding species, assessments (full or updates) could be skipped and data or status reports be completed instead, in certain conditions.

The GMT agrees that this may be appropriate for species such as canary and yelloweye rockfish that are very long-lived, have low productivity, have not shown high recruitment events, are not expected to be rebuilt for decades, and have little new information to inform stock assessments every two years. The SSC can still advise the Council on whether stocks are making adequate progress on rebuilding using a data report, as they did with cowcod this cycle.

#### *Fish Stock Sustainability Index (FSSI)*

One of the criteria listed in Table 1, NMFS Report is “on the FSSI list”. This index (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/SOSmain.htm>) has a role in the Federal program evaluation and budget process and can affect decisions made at those levels. This list does not include many of the species in the groundfish FMP (e.g., aurora rockfish), The GMT did not have time to research the origin of the FSSI list of stocks and so does not know why stocks were included or excluded. The list was created before the most recent vulnerability analysis of stocks in the Groundfish FMP using the productivity and susceptibility approach. We do not know the process for or willingness to update the FSSI list. For now, we point out that there might be a mismatch between the FSSI list and the Council’s priorities.

#### *Review of the Terms of Reference (TOR)*

The GMT did not have time for a thorough discussion on the TORs included under this Agenda Item. We will continue our review and communicate with the Council and the SSC between now and June if necessary.

#### *Schedule*

The GMT supports finalizing the list of full and update stock assessments in June 2012 to facilitate data preparation. The GMT also supports the NMFS Report’s recommendation that the Council allow itself the flexibility to delay finalizing the 2013 schedule until its September 2012 meeting, in order to accommodate the development of Terms of Reference and a list of species for which enhanced data-limited assessments would be conducted.

PFMC

03/05/12