

STATUS DETERMINATION CRITERIA FOR DATA-MODERATE STOCKS

In September 2012, the Council adopted a final groundfish stock assessment plan and Terms of Reference (ToR) for the upcoming biennial cycle, which includes nine candidates for data-moderate assessments to be reviewed at an April 2013 Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel. Data-moderate assessments are more data-limited than full assessments, with inclusion of historical catches and abundance indices allowed, but not age or length composition data. Data-moderate assessments are designed to provide more information than data-poor situations, where catch-only methods are used only to determine overfishing limits for stocks with information that falls far below what is necessary to conduct a full assessment. One of the benefits of creating a the new category of data-moderate stock assessments as described in the ToR is that it provides for the expeditious review of more stock assessments.

Data-moderate assessments produce more information than data-poor methods, including an estimate of relative stock depletion (the ratio of current spawning output or biomass relative to initial, unfished spawning output or biomass). This is the metric used in a formal status determination of west coast groundfish stocks relative to an overfished threshold; an overfished status designation triggers the requirement for a Council to adopt a formal rebuilding plan. However, the Data-Moderate Assessment Methods Review Panel that met in June 2012 recommended that data-moderate assessment results should not be used in formal stock status determinations, based on concerns that this more uncertain analytical result could cause a stock to be declared overfished when, in fact, it may not be (i.e., a false negative status estimate) (see [Agenda Item H.3.a, Attachment 1, September 2012](#)). In this case, the Review Panel recommended that a two-stage process be developed where, if a data-moderate assessment estimate indicates a stock is overfished, there would be an evaluation of composition data followed by a full assessment if it is decided there is sufficient data. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) statement at the September Council meeting generally agreed with the Panel on this matter, stating that stock status estimates from data-moderate assessments should not automatically be accepted for use in status determinations and recommending a formal process be developed on how to use the estimates of stock status from data-moderate assessments in management (see [Agenda Item H.3.b, Supplemental SSC Report, September 2012](#)).

In September 2012, the Council also heard concerns from National Marine Fisheries Service scientists regarding potential problems with avoiding a stock status determination based on estimates from a data-moderate assessment. The Council indicated its intent to look at possible status determination criteria for data-moderate stocks and adopt a protocol for the current biennial cycle in advance of the April 2013 data-moderate assessment STAR Panel. The Council tasked staff to convene a workgroup of scientists from the Science Centers and the SSC to develop recommended stock status determination criteria and protocols and report back to the Council. The workgroup was formed and their recommendations were developed during a December 21, 2012 online webinar (Attachment 1). Figure 1 in Attachment 1 depicts a flow chart with a recommended protocol for making a stock status determination from a data-moderate stock assessment. The essence of this recommendation is to look more closely at the information on a data-moderate stock whose status is calculated to fall below the overfished threshold and, if more information can be secured, to conduct a full assessment in the next cycle;

if there is not more information that can be secured, then a stock status determination for an overfished designation would be adopted and development of a formal rebuilding plan would begin.

The Council task at this meeting is to consider the workgroup recommendations as well as those from the SSC, other advisory bodies, and the public before deciding status determination criteria for data-moderate stocks.

Council Action:

- 1. Approve status determination criteria and protocol for data-moderate stocks for use in this biennial cycle.**

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item H.2.a, Attachment 1: Draft Summary Minutes of the Data-Moderate Status Determination Webinar.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview John DeVore
- b. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies and Management Entities
- c. Public Comment
- d. **Council Action:** Approve Status Determination Criteria for Data-Moderate Stocks

PFMC
02/14/13