

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON  
AMENDMENT 24 (IMPROVEMENTS TO GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT PROCESS)

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the report of the Ad Hoc Amendment 24 Workgroup (Agenda Item I.2.a, Attachment 1), which was tasked by the Council to develop alternatives and recommendations on how to improve the process for setting groundfish biennial harvest specifications and associated management measures. Dr. Kit Dahl provided an overview of the report and was present to answer questions.

The Workgroup report proposed that National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements could be addressed more effectively and efficiently by developing a Tier 1 framework that specifies the Council's routine actions (e.g., setting annual catch limits [ACLs], adjusting routine management measures) and analyzes the impacts of those actions over an extended time period (e.g., 10 years). Biennial actions or adjustments to management measures would require less burdensome Tier 2 documents (Environmental Assessments or Supplemental Information Reports) if impacts of the actions or adjustments are within the range of outcomes previously analyzed in the Tier 1 NEPA document and could support a "finding of no significant impact." To implement this new harvest specification process, the Council's suite of routine actions and management measures would need to be fully detailed in either an amendment to the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) or by means of revisions to the Council's Operating Procedure 9, which outlines the biennial process more completely than the FMP and which the Council can more easily change.

The SSC agrees that it would be advantageous to develop a set of default harvest specification policies. The SSC recommends that the process continue to include a biennial cycle of stock assessments to allow the regular infusion of new scientific information. A Tier 1 document could specify default  $P^*$  values for deriving acceptable biological catches and a process for adjusting sigma based on additional information on scientific uncertainty. Developing a process and set of rules for the automatic revision of rebuilding plans for overfished stocks is more problematic. Given that assessment estimates are subject to considerable uncertainty, a new stock assessment of an overfished stock is likely to result in a changed estimate of the probability of rebuilding. Further, the pace of rebuilding will depend on the actual sequence of annual recruitment events, whereas a previous rebuilding analysis will reflect the median trajectory of random recruitment events. How to automatically adjust a rebuilding plan when new stock assessment information becomes available is not clear at present and will require additional analyses to establish appropriate mechanisms to accommodate changes in rebuilding parameters that new stock assessments would be likely to generate. If the Council would like to take an automatic approach to making revisions to rebuilding plans, analyses should be conducted, similar to the ones conducted by Punt and Ralston (2007), to explore different options and the trade-offs that would likely be required.

Punt, A.E. and Ralston, S. (2007). A management strategy evaluation of rebuilding revision rules for overfished rockfish stocks. Pages 327- 351 in *Biology, Assessment, and Management of North Pacific Rockfishes*, Alaska Sea Grant College Program, AK-SG-07-01.