



**Joint Plan Teams for the
Groundfish Fisheries of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) and
Bering Sea Aleutian Islands (BSAI)**

MINUTES

North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 W 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501

November 13-16, 2018

Committee Members in attendance:

BSAI Team

Grant Thompson	AFSC REFM Chair
Diana Stram	NPFMC (Coordinator)
Kirstin Holsman	AFSC REFM
Andy Kingham	AFSC FMA
Chris Siddon	ADF&G
Alan Haynie	AFSC REFM
Jane Sullivan	ADF&G
Brenda Norcross	UAF
Mary Furuness	NMFS AKRO
Cindy Tribuzio	AFSC ABL
Allan Hicks	IPHC
Kalei Shotwell	AFSC ABL

GOA Team

Jim Ianelli	AFSC REFM (co-chair)
Chris Lunsford	AFSC ABL (co-chair)
Jim Armstrong	NPFMC (coordinator)
Sandra Lowe	AFSC REFM
Pete Hulson	AFSC ABL
Dan Lew	AFSC REFM
Nat Nichols	ADF&G
Obren Davis	NMFS AKRO
Jan Rumble	ADF&G
Paul Spencer	AFSC REFM
Kresimir Williams	AFSC RACE
Craig Faunce	AFSC FMA
Ben Williams	ADF&G

Administrative

September 2019 Team meeting: The September 2019 Plan Team meeting will be held September 10-13, 2019 at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Seattle.

November 2019 Team meeting: The November 2019 Team meeting will be held November 12-15, 2019 at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Seattle.

Documents and presentations: All documents provided prior to or during the meeting as well as presentations given during the meeting were posted to the Team's agenda.

WebEx broadcast: Remote participation via WebEx was available for all sessions.

Introductions: The Joint meeting of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) and Bering Sea Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Groundfish Plan Teams convened Tuesday November 13 at 9:00 am at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center in Seattle, Washington. Introductions were made. New Plan Team members were welcomed. The Teams expressed their utmost appreciation for the service of Team coordinators Diana Stram and Jim Armstrong, for whom this will be their last meeting in that capacity. A colorful and thematic cake in honor of Diana and Jim was served during the morning break.

ABC below maxABC

The Teams received a presentation from Martin Dorn on the trial risk matrix for developing a more transparent and consistent approach for cases where ABC is recommended to be set below the maximum permissible value. He noted the five cases where this was applied (EBS pollock, BSAI Atka mackerel, sablefish, GOA pollock, and GOA Pacific cod), four of which resulted in the authors making recommendations for selecting ABC below the maximum permissible level under the FMP. Due to time limitations and the tight agenda to cover 40+ stocks in less than 4 days, the Teams were unable to conclude discussions on this topic and agreed to try to summarize discussions with each of these assessments as they arose during their presentations. The Teams found that the use of the risk matrix was helpful in summarizing the concerns and issues that are present in every assessment, although there was a wide range of methods used in assigning the amount of reduction.

The Teams found that implementation of the risk matrix approach was hampered by challenges associated with how to translate an overall score for the risk matrix into a percent reduction in ABC, and it was not clear that any of the five assessments that included the risk matrix ended up recommending an ABC that was different from what would have been recommended without having completed the risk matrix. For EBS pollock, the authors followed past SSC practice in recommending use of Tier 3 rather than Tier 1 for the ABC recommendation, resulting in a 30% buffer. For sablefish, the authors recommended rolling over last year's ABC, resulting in a 45% buffer. For GOA pollock, the authors recommended a 15% reduction as an approximate central tendency of the Teams' previous reductions over the last several years. For GOA Pacific cod, the authors' recommended reduction of 13.6% was obtained by evaluating whether the stock would drop below 20% of unfished spawning biomass under various future catch levels. A downside to this case-by-case approach is that the authors' recommended reductions are almost entirely unrelated to the level of concern.

The Teams also discussed whether it was appropriate to use the historical distribution of ABC reductions as a guideline for current recommendations as the GOA pollock assessment did, but no consensus was reached.

For the next cycle, the Teams recommended that the risk matrix be used whenever there is a recommendation to reduce the ABC from the maximum permissible ABC.

The Teams proposed that we continue to evaluate this table during 2019, and request further guidance from the SSC regarding the mapping of "concern" levels into ABC reductions.

Sablefish

The Alaska sablefish presentation was given by Dana Hanselman remotely. There were no changes to the assessment model. The authors recommend an ABC for 2019 that is equal to the 2018 ABC. Reasons for reducing the ABC from max ABC were presented in the risk matrix approach. Dana's presentation included the following points:

- Significant increase in bycatch of small sablefish in GOA and BSAI trawl fisheries
- All time low for the fishery RPW abundance index, while the survey RPN index is slightly up (survey RPW which is no longer used in the assessment is low)
- Lack of old fish in the population
- Fishery dominated by age-3 individuals
- Estimates of spawning biomass remain low, and are even lower than was forecasted last year
- Author expressed desired goal of rebuilding spawning stock biomass
- Persistent positive retrospective bias is concerning
- Estimates of the 2014 recruitment event decreased by 30% since last year's assessment

- Entering a marine heatwave that started in September of 2018 and projected for 2019 which has unclear implications for natural mortality and selectivity
- Not currently enough data to examine changes in growth of the 2014 year class, but preliminary analyses of length-weight residuals show condition is below average
- Variability in maturity curves over time may have implications if we rely on a single year class.
- Status quo fixed apportionment

Discussion points included the following (these are comments/questions made/asked by individuals present at the meeting and do not necessarily reflect Team consensus):

- Comment that divergent trends in survey RPN and RPW may be the result of changes in size-at-age condition of fish. Exploring these relationships may help explain the poor model fit to the RPN and RPW when included
- Current prices in the ESP are based on a scarcity of fish and that as the 2014 year class grows, the prices may drop
- Apportionment may become a concern as young fish grow and move eastward
- Comment from one industry member that the sperm whale depredation index (low) does not match what fishermen are seeing on the grounds (increasing and changing behavior)
- Comment from one industry member that there were equal amounts of age-1s and 2s as age-3s and 4s in pot gear
- Comment from one industry member that expressed concern about low catch rates
- Discussion from the Team that, due to the lack of fit to survey indices, the level of concern in the “assessment” category of the risk table should increase from 2 to 3.
- High abundance of small fish and current ABC are placing constraints on trawl fisheries, both in the Bering and GOA (currently the problem is primarily in the Central GOA)
- Pollock fleet was using Sea State communication tools primarily designed for salmon avoidance to avoid sablefish
- Once trawl allocations are exceeded, the fishery is placed on PSC status The distribution of small fish should be explored
- Hook competition related to high abundance of small fish should be explored

The authors recommended ABC for 2019 was set equal to the recommended ABC in 2018 and is 45% lower than maximum permissible ABC. The authors used the risk matrix approach to assess reductions, which resulted in an overall score of level 4 that indicates “extreme concern.” Additionally, a second ABC adjustment was recommended, based on estimates of whale depredation occurring in the fishery in the same way that was recommended and accepted in 2016 and 2017.

There was some discussion on apportionment strategies, and changes in harvest behavior and growth of the 2014 year class may require a need to reassess apportionment. The Teams discussed the timing, and their desire to see results, of the ongoing spatial apportionment analysis. The author-recommended apportionments remain the same as last year, so the ABC is the same (proportionally) over all of the areas. This was accepted by the Teams.

Based on the arguments laid out by the authors, the Teams agree with the authors’ recommendation to keep the ABC, before adjusting for sperm whale depredation, constant at the 2018 level. The authors’ recommended ABC, with the depredation adjustment, was also accepted, and the stock remains in Tier 3b. The Teams recommend exploring model fit to the survey RPN and the alternative survey index, RPW, specifically related to changes in size-at-age or length-weight relationships. The Teams look forward to seeing the spatial apportionment analysis next year.

Economic SAFE

Ben Fissel presented the Economic SAFE. At the time of the meeting, the report was still in draft form because the data and tables had only recently been finalized. The final version is scheduled to be completed in late November or December. The data (updated through 2017) will be made available on the AFSC website soon.

The Economic SAFE contains updated estimates for 2017. Overall, the 2017 trends indicate total groundfish catch was down slightly (<1%) from 2016, while value was increasing or stable across most regions and sectors. Groundfish wholesale value was up 4% over 2016 and ex-vessel value increased from the previous year's level by approximately 7%. A factor negatively influencing exports was a strong U.S. dollar driving unfavorable exchange rates.

Value, price, and quantity indices were presented. Groundfish ex-vessel and real first-wholesale indices were up slightly over 2016. Values in BSAI fisheries increased compared to 2016 in the Atka mackerel, Pacific cod, flatfish, and rockfish fisheries, while values were stable in the pollock fishery. In GOA fisheries, values decreased for the Pacific cod, pollock, and rockfish fisheries, but increased for the sablefish and flatfish fisheries. Increased value in GOA flatfish was largely driven by arrowtooth flounder.

The general structure of the Economic SAFE is similar to last year's. However, Ben highlighted two significant changes in this year's Economic SAFE: (1) a revised communities section that addresses several comments the SSC had suggested and (2) new ex-vessel price projections. The revised communities section includes more quantitative measures (i.e., indices) of community engagement in groundfish fisheries in terms of both harvesting activity and processing activity. The section also includes individual profiles (or sketches) of "highly engaged" communities that include information on demographics, infrastructure, school enrollment, fishing history, and the current economy. The ex-vessel price projections for 2018 are statistically estimated using raw fish ticket information through September 2018 and account for projected post-season adjustments. Seven projections are included in this year's Economic SAFE (BSAI and GOA pollock trawl, BSAI and GOA Pacific cod trawl and fixed gear, and GOA sablefish fixed gear). These projections are intended to provide current year information on ex-vessel prices, which had not previously been available in the Economic SAFE due to the typically year (or more) lag in economic data availability. A comparison of estimated projections calculated for previous years with the actual ex-vessel prices indicates a close correlation (particularly for the GOA Pacific cod fixed gear fishery). Ben also noted that a section on the Gulf Trawl Economic Data Report is planned for next year.

Discussion about the Economic SAFE included the revised community profiles, the differences between the Economic SAFE reports, EPRs, ESPs, and ESRs; the motivation for the ex-vessel price projections, and the usage of information in the Economic SAFE. Ben was asked about the absence of pollock in the (draft) revised Kodiak community profile used as an example in the presentation, which he said would be investigated. The difference between the detailed economic information in the Economic SAFE and the LME-oriented economic indicator information in the Ecosystem Status Report was discussed and clarified. And finally, an AFSC Observer Program scientist indicated the Economic SAFE content was useful for predicting revenue in the fisheries monitoring program.

The Teams did not make a formal recommendation, but discussed the value in potentially making current-year projections of revenue based on the price projections. Ben indicated that he will explore this possibility.