Stock structure and spatial management policy

Grant Thompson presented an update on recent Team and SSC comments regarding stock structure. He reviewed two "scales of concern:" 1) a three-level scale, which was adopted for provisional use by the BSAI Team in September 2013; and 2) a four-level scale (shown below), which was discussed but not adopted by the Joint Teams in November 2013, but which was used at the same meeting by the BSAI Team.

The Teams recommend that the following scale of concern be adopted in the context of the Council's stock structure and spatial management policy (with the understanding that all actions described here would be contingent on SSC concurrence):

1. *Little or no concern*, in which case no action needs to be taken
2. *Moderate concern*, in which case special monitoring (e.g., frequent updating of the template) is required at a minimum and Steps 2 and 3 of the Council's process may be activated
3. *Strong concern*, in which case Steps 2 and 3 of the Council's process must be activated
4. *Emergency*, in which case the Team will recommend separate harvest specifications at the ABC level, the OFL level, or both, for the next season (straight to Step 4 of the Council policy)

In October of this year, the SSC requested that the Teams assign a level of concern to all stocks for which the stock structure template has already been completed.

The Teams recommend assigning the following levels of concern to stocks for which the stock structure template has already been completed (shaded cells indicate levels established at this meeting):

FMP	Chapter	Stock	Author	Level
BSAI	1A	AI pollock	Barbeaux	Little
BSAI	2	BS Pacific cod	Thompson	Little
BSAI	4	Yellowfin sole	Wilderbuer	Little
BSAI	6	Arrowtooth flounder	Spies	Little
BSAI	13	Northern rockfish	Spencer	Little
BSAI	14	Blackspotted/rougheye rockfish	Spencer	Strong
BSAI	15	Shortraker rockfish	Spencer	Moderate
BSAI	16	Other rockfish	Spies	Moderate
BSAI	17	Atka mackerel	Lowe	Little
BSAI	18	Skates	Ormseth	Little
BSAI	21	Sharks	Tribuzio	Little
GOA	1	Pollock	Dorn	Little
GOA	7	Arrowtooth flounder	Spies	Little
GOA	9	Pacific ocean perch	Hanselman	Little
GOA	12	Dusky rockfish	Lunsford	Little
GOA	13	Rougheye/blackspotted rockfish	Shotwell	Little
GOA	17	Atka mackerel	Lowe	Little
GOA	18	Skates	Ormseth	Strong
GOA	20	Sharks	Tribuzio	Little

The Teams noted that, in some cases, "little" concern was identified in part because sufficient data were lacking to indicate otherwise.

In October 2014, the SSC also made the following recommendation:

> "The SSC recommends that the current stock structure policy include a requirement for a recommended maximum area specific catch level when a stock or stock complex is elevated to

the level of 'concern.' This would provide a clear guide to industry regarding what reductions in catch would be needed to alleviate the 'concern.' This area specific catch level would likely be estimated by the assessment author with review and comment by the Plan Teams and SSC."

The above request was prompted by the case of BSAI blackspotted/rougheye, in which the fishing fleet expressed an interest in voluntarily taking steps for reducing incidental catch in the WAI for 2014, but a WAI ABC had not been adopted. In fall of 2013, a representative of the fishing fleet obtained an unofficial potential WAI catch level directly from the assessment author, and interpreted this number as a *de facto* ABC to guide fishing operations. Team members felt that it is laudable for the fishing industry to have taken steps to reduce catch. However, the process followed in 2013 resulted in a recommended harvest level that was not scientifically reviewed and was inaccessible to the general public.

The Teams noted that, since the policy in question is a Council policy, it will be up to the Council to consider the SSC's request for an amendment to that policy. However, the Teams did discuss some features that such an amendment might include.

The Teams recommend that any suggested subarea catch level be reviewed by the respective Team, be obtained in a transparent process, and be accessible to the public so that progress in meeting management goals can be easily monitored. The term "maximum subarea species catch" was proposed as a label for subarea harvest recommendations that are not included in the OFL/ABC specifications.

The Teams also noted that several of the outstanding issues and questions of clarification identified at the November 2013 Joint Team meeting do not appear to have been addressed.

The Teams recommend that the following outstanding issues and questions of clarification be forwarded to the appropriate body (SSC, Council, or both):

- Does the Council's policy apply only to spatial structure, or does it also apply to stock structure? For example, does it apply to the process of splitting a stock out from a complex, or only to spatial management of the complex?
- Need for specific guidance on the role of the Teams.
- Need for a proactive default policy that covers both of the following cases: 1) data are insufficient to determine whether a biological concern exists, and 2) sufficient data exist to make such a determination but time or other resource constraints are anticipated to prevent those data from being analyzed for several years.
- Clarification of whether the current inconsistencies in spatial management between the two FMP areas that were summarized by the Stock Structure Working Group should be further examined or revised (and to whom such a charge would be assigned).
- How much time is allowed for acceptance (by the Council or SSC) of an industry response to a management concern?
- What is the relationship between evidence of stock structure and degree of concern? Two possibilities have been discussed: 1) degree of concern is synonymous with strength of evidence of stock structure, and 2) degree of concern is a function of both the strength of evidence of stock structure and the extent to which the fishery **is impacting that structure**.