

Draft SSC Report December 2023



Balance of SSC Report

Administrative Discussion

IRA Funding Workplan

- The SSC received an update from Diana Evans (NPFMC) on the IRA funding proposal to enhance the Council's climate readiness
 - Programmatic EIS initiated in June 2023
 - Analytical work/workshops to further work identified in the SSC February 2023 workshop
- The SSC supports the proposed projects
 - Notes that the scope would need to be limited to meet constrained timelines
- The SSC suggests an SSC-only workshop in February 2024 to outline case studies from the North Pacific to bring to SCS8

Administrative Discussion

IRA Funding Workplan

- The SSC also suggests an additional workshop in April
 - Broader participation
 - Scope an analysis focused on including socioeconomic information for sablefish in a climate change context
 - Could be extended to include spatial considerations such as apportionment
 - Results potentially broadly applicable

B1 Plan Team Nominations

- The SSC considered the nominations for:
 - Dr. Lukas DeFilippo to the BSAI groundfish plan team
 - Mr. Ethan Nichols to the BSAI crab plan team
- The SSC finds these nominees to be well-qualified and recommends the Council approve their nominations

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Overview

- Alaska wide - 1 full/update assessment (sablefish)
- GOA - 5 full; 3 update; 7 harvest projections; 5 catch reports
- **No stocks were subject to overfishing and, for Tier 1 - 3 stocks, none are overfished or approaching an overfished state**
- Stocks where the SSC recommended harvest specifications or area allocations differed from GOA GPT were:
 - GOA pollock
 - Shortraker rockfish
 - Other rockfish

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Walleye pollock

- Annual full assessment
- An ESP was included and indicated neutral ecosystem and socio-economic conditions
- Spawning biomass is higher than last year and above $B_{40\%}$
- Tier 3a for in W/C/WYAK, Tier 5 in SEO
- The SSC **recommends** Model 23.0 for W/C/WYAK, in agreement with authors and PT
 - Change to new modeling platform
- The SSC **supports** author and PT recommended OFL for W/C/WYAK and ABC/OFL for SEO, but a reduction from max ABC for W/C/WYAK

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Walleye pollock

- The SSC was concerned with the mixed signals from the abundance indices and rapid increase then decline in ABC, and **recommended** ABC halfway between 2023 ABC and the 2024 maxABC (18% reduction from max)
- The SSC **agrees** with the previously accepted methodology for apportioning the ABC between areas and between the new A (formerly A&B) and B (formerly C&D) seasons.
- The SSC **recommends**
 - Further exploration of biomass scale changes and potentially further constraining catchability
 - Further exploration of recruitment variability and investigating extreme low recruitment estimates
 - Evaluation of inclusion of fishery weight at age in the new model platform

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

GOA Pacific Cod

- Operational update assessment
- Projected 2024 spawning biomass the stock is estimated to be at B29.7%, less than B40%
- The 2023 bottom trawl survey index increased by 53% compared to 2021, and the 2023 longline survey increased by 32%, suggesting improvement in stock status
- Both indices remain below their long-term average.
- Authors presented two models, Model 19.1a, a strict update, and model 19.1b, a model where conditional age-at-length minimum sample size was adjusted from 1 to 0.001, to correct for an earlier oversight.

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

GOA Pacific Cod

- The SSC **recommends** Model 19.1b, in agreement with the authors and GPT, based on:
 - Reasonable response to new assessment data
 - Correction to previous weighting of conditional age at length data.
- The SSC **agrees** with the recommended harvest specifications and area allocations.
 - No reduction from maxABC

C3 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

GOA Pacific Cod

- The SSC ***recommends:***
 - Consider whether information from the IPHC setline survey and NMFS longline survey, alongside the NMFS bottom trawl survey, may provide a improved basis for apportionment recommendations,
 - The SSC supports the GOA GPT recommendation to work up the backlog of maturity data

C3 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

GOA Pacific Cod

- The SSC ***recommends:***
 - Given the increasing proportion of the pot fishery catch and the relatively low observer coverage in the pot fishery, observer coverage priorities for the different GOA cod fisheries should be reevaluated in the annual observer deployment plan by AFSC Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis program.
 - A thorough reevaluation of the current modeling approach for survey selectivity and catchability.

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Deepwater Flatfish Complex

- Update assessment.
 - Complex includes Dover sole (age-structured Tier 3a)
 - Greenland turbot, Kamchatka flounder and deepsea sole (Tier 6)
- Catches are very low relative to the OFL (2022 was 5%)
- The SSC **agrees** with the author and Plan Team recommended Model 19.3.1.
- Other species: No changes in the Tier 6 methods
- The SSC **agrees** with the author and Plan Team recommended 2024 and 2025 OFLs and ABCs and area apportionment.

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Deepwater Flatfish Complex

- The SSC ***supports*** the GPT recommendations:
 - Investigate how to account for the variance from unsampled survey strata
 - Re-evaluate estimation of the historical catchability using data through 2013
 - Use 2011-2023 as the period for calculating average catch of Kamchatka flounder
 - Develop GOA-specific ageing error matrix for Dover sole
 - Consider a geostatistical approach to addressing survey gaps and consider dropping the 700-1000m strata.
 - Examination of natural mortality options

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Pacific Ocean Perch

- The SSC received an update assessment for GOA POP.
- The SSC **supports** the authors' and GOA GPT's recommended
 - model (Tier 3a),
 - OFLs and ABCs (no reduction from maxABC)
 - Area allocations
- The SSC **supports** the PT recommendation for a single OFL applied across the GOA.

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Shortraker rockfish

- Tier 5 full assessment, no concerning trends in stock size
- Estimated 2024 biomass ~8% decrease from 2023
- Two models presented:
 - 19* - updated version of most recently accepted full assessment
 - 23.3 – model 19* but uses an alternative index weighting approach
- The SSC **recommends** model 23.3 in agreement with the author and plan team
 - Addresses SSC recommendation to more objectively weight survey indices

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Shortraker rockfish

- The SSC **agrees** with the recommended GOA-wide ABC and OFL
 - No reduction in maxABC
- The SSC **disagrees** with the author and plan team on the recommended apportionment method used to set sub-area ABC's
 - New method, while supported for other stocks, reduces the central GOA ABC by ~9%, very likely limiting the 2024 fishery
 - No conservation concern currently exists at the sub-region level and the stock structure is likely larger than the unit of management

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Shortraker rockfish

- The SSC ***supports*** the PT recommendation that the Council consider engaging in step 2 of the spatial management policy for this stock in conjunction with other rockfish stocks (RE/BS, thornyhead, and possibly Other rockfish)
- Should the Council choose, the SSC ***recommends*** looking to the DSR spatial management paper as an useful example

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Rougheye/Blackspotted

- Full biennial tier 3 assessment. Exploitation has been well below ABC and catch is incidental in fisheries targeting other species.
- Spawning biomass is higher than last year and above $B_{40\%}$
- Five models considered that updated natural mortality and priors, maturity schedules, the ageing error matrix, growth assumptions, and constrained recruitment deviations
- The preferred model improved retrospective bias, but still did not fit compositional information and recent longline survey trend data well
- The SSC **recommends** the author and GPT recommended model
 - Improved retrospective patterns and addressed some assessment model concerns (e.g., estimatibility issues among parameters)
 - Tier 3a

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Blackspotted roughey

- The SSC **agrees** with the recommended harvest specifications
 - Approximately 20% reduction from maxABC was the result of a “stair step” to the new assessment model
 - Calculated as half the value from the 2024 maxABC specification (done in 2023) and this year’s maxABC.
 - Specified for 2025 using the same method
 - Risk table: poor fits to recent longline survey and all compositional information resulted in level 2 assessment concern.
 - maxABC would be a large increase (68%) from the 2023 specification

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Blackspotted roughey

- The SSC ***recommends***
 - The authors plan to investigate survey and fishery selectivity parameterization, weightings of compositional information
 - Continued investigation of skip spawning

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Other Rockfish

- Full operational assessment. Biomass stable (Tier 4+5:18% from 2021 survey)
- Tiers 4/5/6, catch below ABC and overfishing is not occurring (catch exceed sub-area ABC for WG/CG third consecutive year)
- Tier 4 *rema* model (15.2, sharpchin), Tier 5 *rema model* (23.1, 4 species), Tier 6 (23.1, 21 species) max catch using expanded years (2013–2022)
- The SSC **recommends** Tier 4 and Tier 5 models in agreement with authors and GPT
 - Tiers 4 and 5 transitioned to *rema* framework
 - Tier 5 modified weight M for OFL calculation – dampen survey uncertainty
 - 12 species moved to Tier 6 – poor ability to estimate biomass

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Other Rockfish

- The SSC **agrees** with the recommended OFL and maxABC
- The SSC **recommends** WY sub-area ABC be combined with WG/CG sub-area ABC 2024 fisheries

Stock	Sub-area ABCs		
	2023	2024	2025
Other Rockfish	WG/CG	WG/CG/WY	WG/CG/WY
	WY	EY/SEO	EY/SEO
	EY/SEO		
DSR	EY/SEO	EY/SEO	WG/CG/WY EY/SEO

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Skates

- Update Tier 5 assessment:
 - Biomass trends for skate species appear to be stable
 - other skates showing a plateau at low biomass levels after a decade-long decline.
 - Overall fishery harvest is dominated by incidental catch and has been well below the GOA-wide ABC
- Tier 5 assessment with updated catch and trawl survey biomass
- The SSC **recommends** the author and GPT recommended model and apportionment methodology

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Skates

- The SSC ***agrees*** with the recommended harvest specifications with no reduction from maxABC
- The SSC ***recommends***
 - Coordinating with the BSAI author to investigate natural mortality parameterization and updating the stock structure template given recent work showing connectivity between the GOA and BSAI

C4 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications

Harvest Projections and Catch reports

- Harvest projections (formerly called Partial Assessments) including fishery trends, survey trends and updated catch for:
 - Shallow-water Flatfish Complex
 - Rex Sole
 - Arrowtooth Flounder
 - Flathead Sole
 - Northern Rockfish
 - Dusky Rockfish
- The SSC **supports** the authors' and GOA GPT's recommended OFL, ABC, and area apportionment for these stocks.
- Catch reports were reviewed

D2 Bering Sea FEP Climate Change Taskforce

- The SSC appreciates the opportunity to comment on the BS FEP Climate Change Taskforce (CCTF) proposal for Climate Scenario Planning Workshop to occur in 2024.
- The SSC is impressed by the amount of thought that has already gone into planning for this workshop
- The SSC is excited to see this project moving forward.
- The goal of the workshop is to consider potential tools and solutions both within and outside the current management process to address climate impacts on marine resources and communities dependent on these resources in the North Pacific.

D2 Bering Sea FEP Climate Change Taskforce

- Still, useful results should be produced from the planned CCTF workshop
- There should be a focus on:
 - Careful planning
 - Development of pre-meeting briefing materials
 - Efficient use of time during the meeting
 - Robust outreach activities following the meeting

D2 Bering Sea FEP Climate Change Taskforce

- The SSC had extensive discussion on the two-by-two table of scenarios (matrix) proposed by the CCTF
- The scenarios being proposed include:
 - One axis for climate variability (as well as market variability)
 - A second axis contrasting single species management and a multispecies ecosystem-based approach (these are policy choices)
- In other scenario planning exercises, the scenarios usually represent external drivers, rather than policy choices.

D2 Bering Sea FEP Climate Change Taskforce

- Overall, the SSC found the scenario matrix somewhat complicated and difficult to understand
- The SSC agreed on the importance of simplifying the material as much as possible.
- One possibility is a focus on set of case studies, rather than a two-by-two matrix of scenarios.
- These could be hypothetical future cases, or actual situations in the North Pacific, e.g., Bering Sea crab

D2 Bering Sea FEP Climate Change Taskforce

- SSC discussed the pluses and minus of a 2-day meeting in June associated with Council's Kodiak meeting.
- Would allow for broad participation of the Council, the AP, the SSC, and other stakeholders
 - Council and the AP by design represent a diversity of stakeholders and perspectives
- Potential shortcoming is that Council meetings are intense and time-consuming for many participants
 - Finding the needed attention and creativity required of the workshop may be difficult.
- Development of multiple formats for outreach after the meeting is important and could bring other groups into the discussion.