Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Shortraker Rockfish

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Stock Overview

- Shortraker rockfish (*Sebastes borealis*, SR), Tier: 5
- Area: Eastern Bering Sea (EBS) Slope and Aleutian Islands (AI)
- Not being subject to overfishing
- Data changes: updated catch, bottom trawl survey (BTS) biomass estimates (AI 2026), AFSC longline survey (LLS) relative population weights (RPWs) on EBS slope (2026)
- Update Assessment: no changes to assessment methodology, using Model 22 with updated data = Model 22_2026
- Recommended ABC: 463 t, 2% decrease from last year's ABC

Teams or SSC Comments in General

- The SSC recommended consideration of timing adjustments to the existing groundfish review process that might help complete more stocks within a single cycle. These might include adjusting the schedule to review some preliminary model runs in June and moving catch reports to October. (SSC, December 2025)
  - Assessment on biennial cycle to coincide with new survey data for most of the assessment history.
  - Also now aligns with both the AFSC AI bottom trawl survey and the new longline survey schedule for the BSAI
  - Appropriate for BSIA and do not recommend any changes

Teams or SSC Comments Specific to Assessment

- No new PT or SSC comments specific to this assessment following the 2024 assessment cycle, existing comments remain as:
  - Encouragement to simplify and combine SBS stratum with AI in future (SSC, December 2022)
  - Re-evaluate current estimate of *M* in light of recent tech memo (SSC, December 2022)
- Plan to combine the stratum and evaluate in next full assessment and use team approach with rockfish authors to determine how best to use new *M* estimates from tech memo

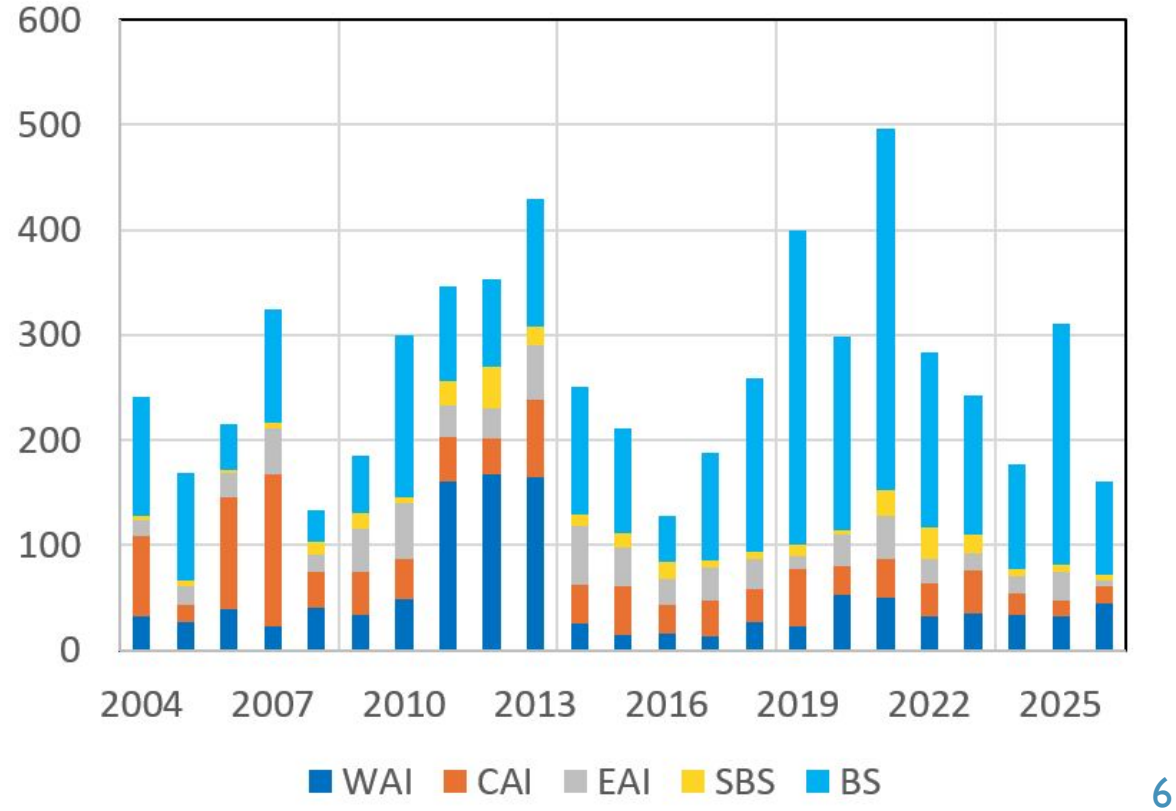
Data Summary

Source	Data	Years
AFSC Bering Sea slope survey	Survey biomass	2002, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2016
AFSC Aleutian Islands survey	Survey biomass	1991, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2022, 2024, **2026**
AFSC Longline Survey	Relative Population Weights	1997-2021, 2023, **2026**
Fishery	Catch Biomass	2003-2023, **2024-2026**

Note: Length data available for all surveys and fishery but not used in model

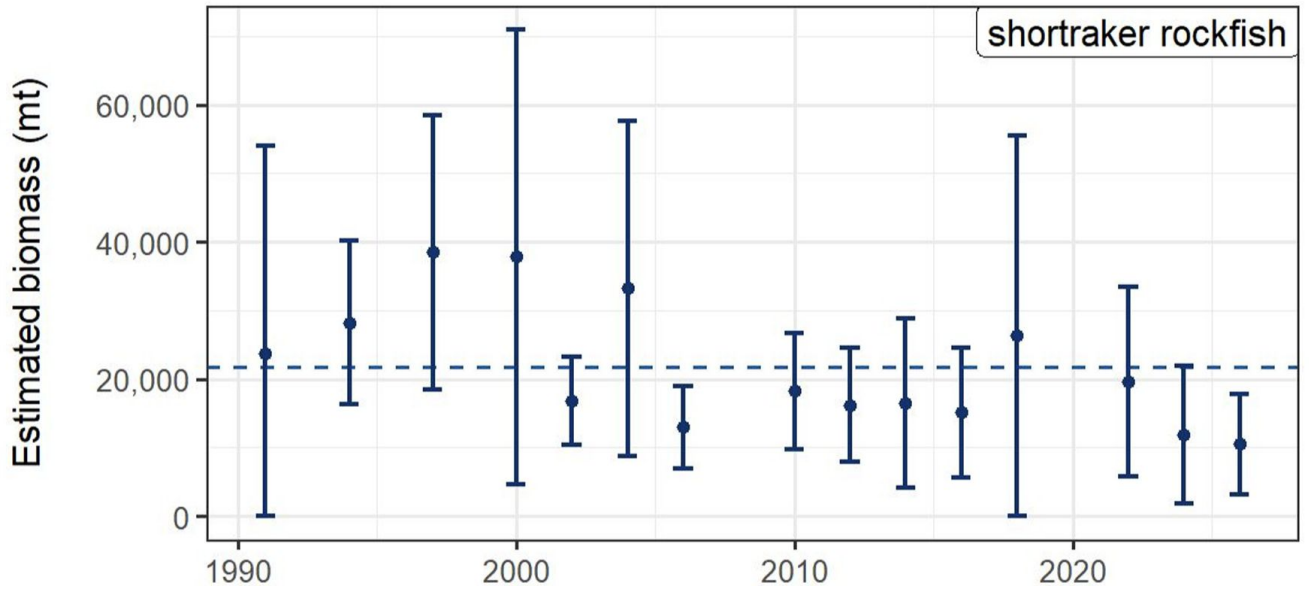
Catch

- Data
  - 1991-2001 recorded in other red rockfish
  - 2001-2003 shortraker/rougheye
  - 2004 species specific catch accounting
  - Catch average 57% of ABC
- Trends
  - On avg catch is 47:53 in AI:BS, more in BS in last decade
  - Shortraker caught during directed fishing for POP since 2010, more recently caught in Atka and sablefish
  - 2025 increased catch in BS but still below 65% of ABC, 2026 catch lower (34% ABC)

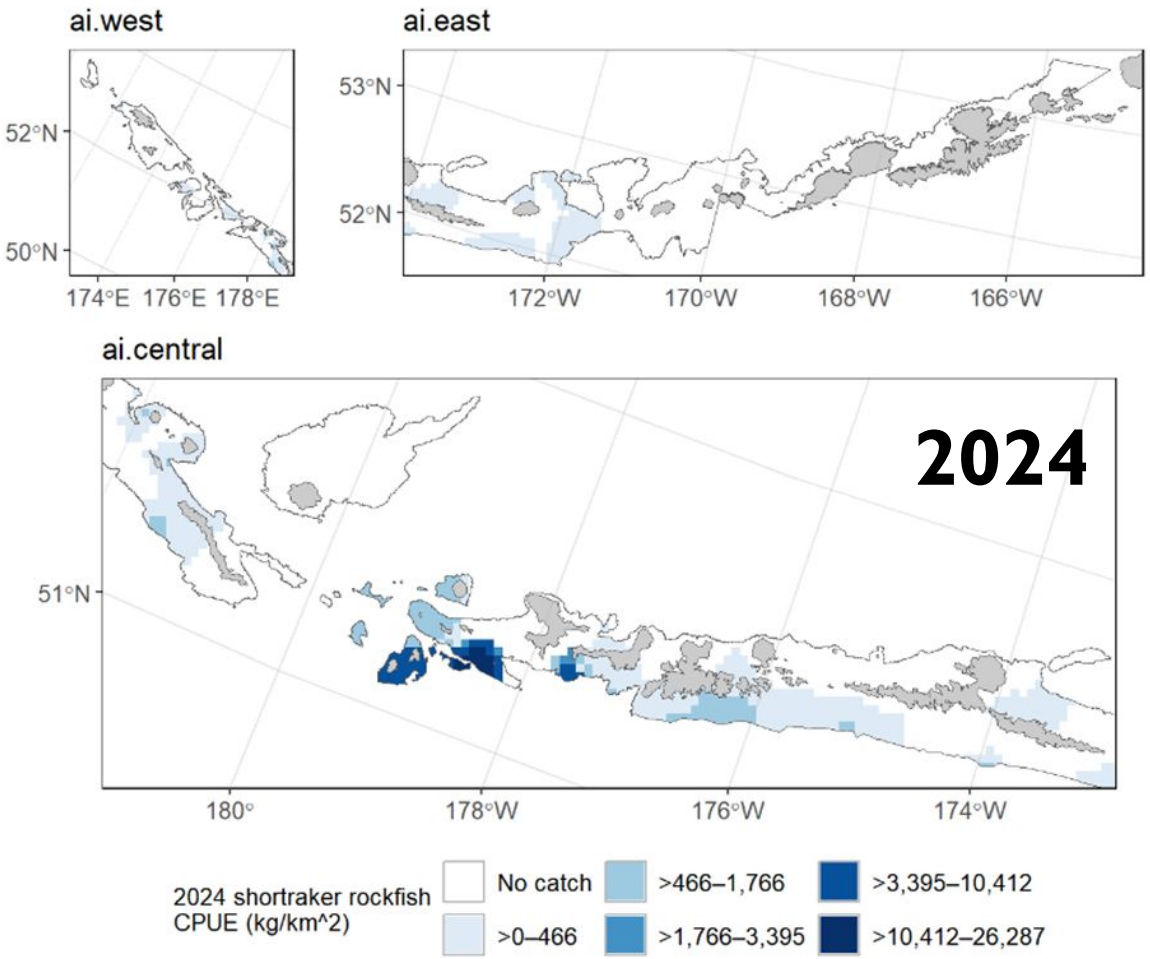


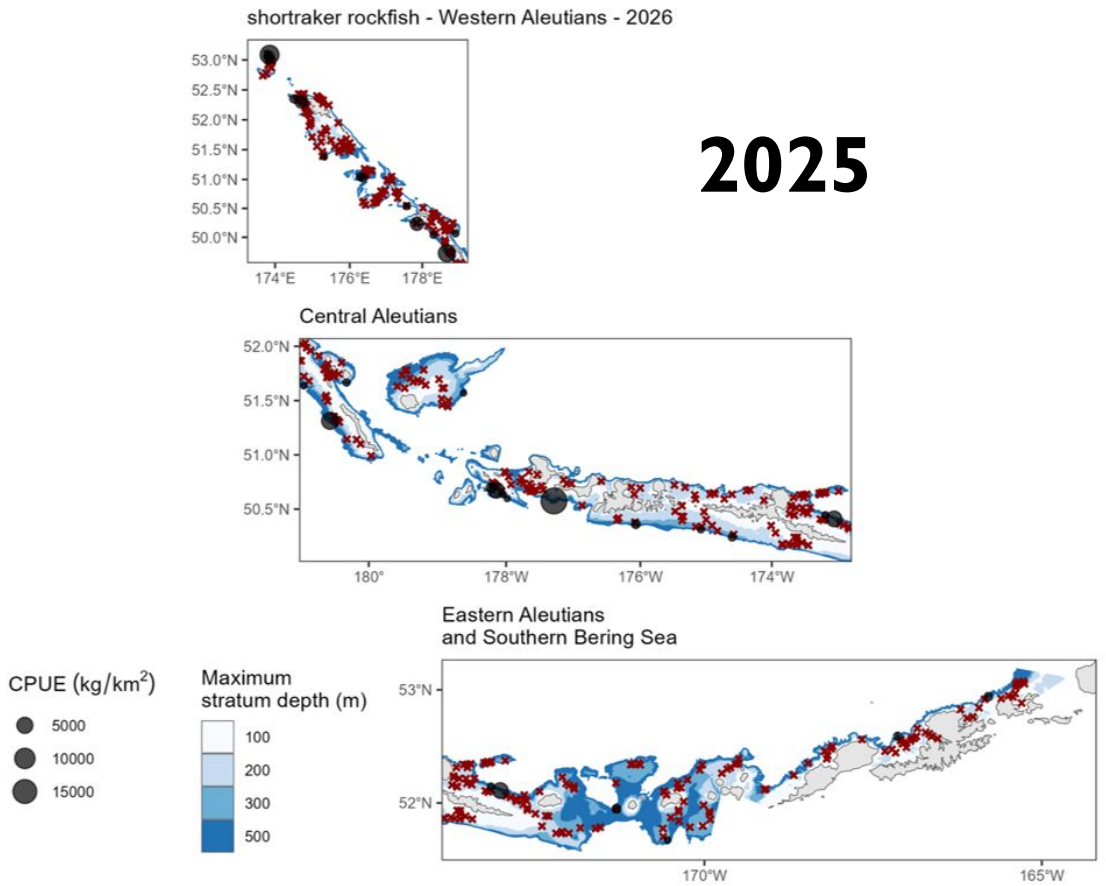
Survey - Aleutian Islands Bottom Trawl

- Data
  - Shortraker reliably identified to species (1980 on)
  - Use standardized survey time series (1991 to present), new 2026
- Trends
  - Variable with occasional large CVs
  - 2026 estimate decreased 12% from 2024, 52% decrease from mean
  - 2026 estimate lowest in the time series (but moderate CV)



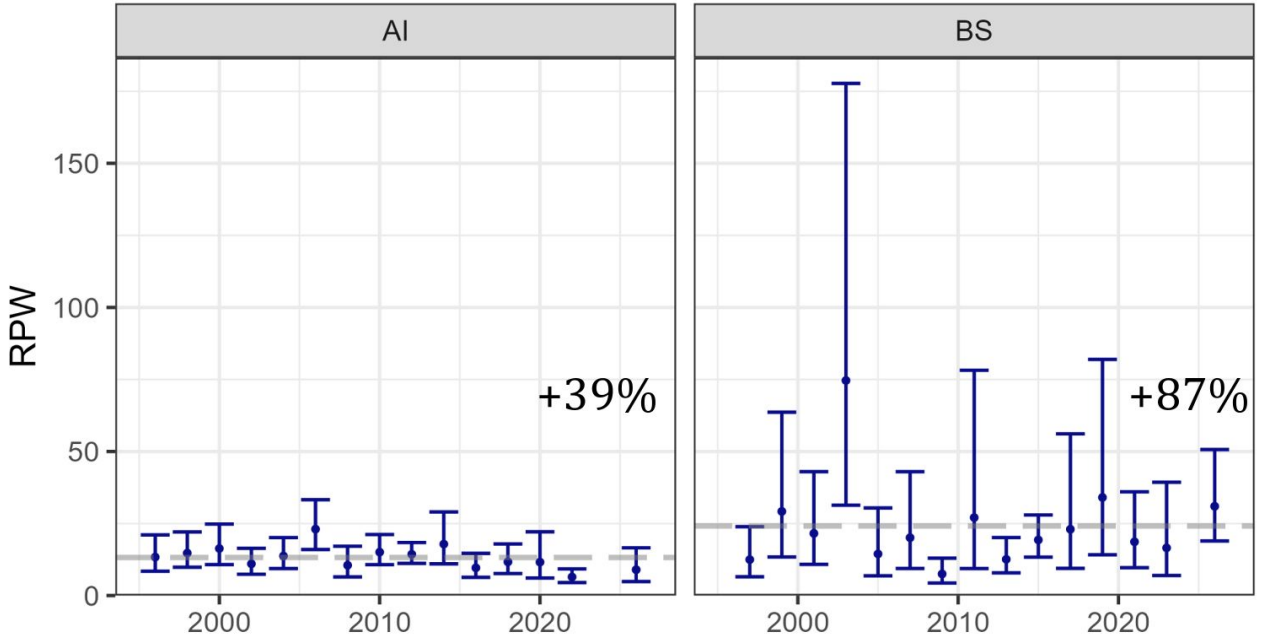
Survey Distribution – AI Bottom Trawl





Survey – EBS Longline Survey

- Data
  - Use EBS slope portion of the standard survey (1997 to present)
  - Only used data sampled in years when survey in the EBS
- Trends
  - Fairly steady pattern over time with a few peaks
  - 2026 estimate increased 87% from 2023 in Bering Sea
  - 2026 estimate now above average



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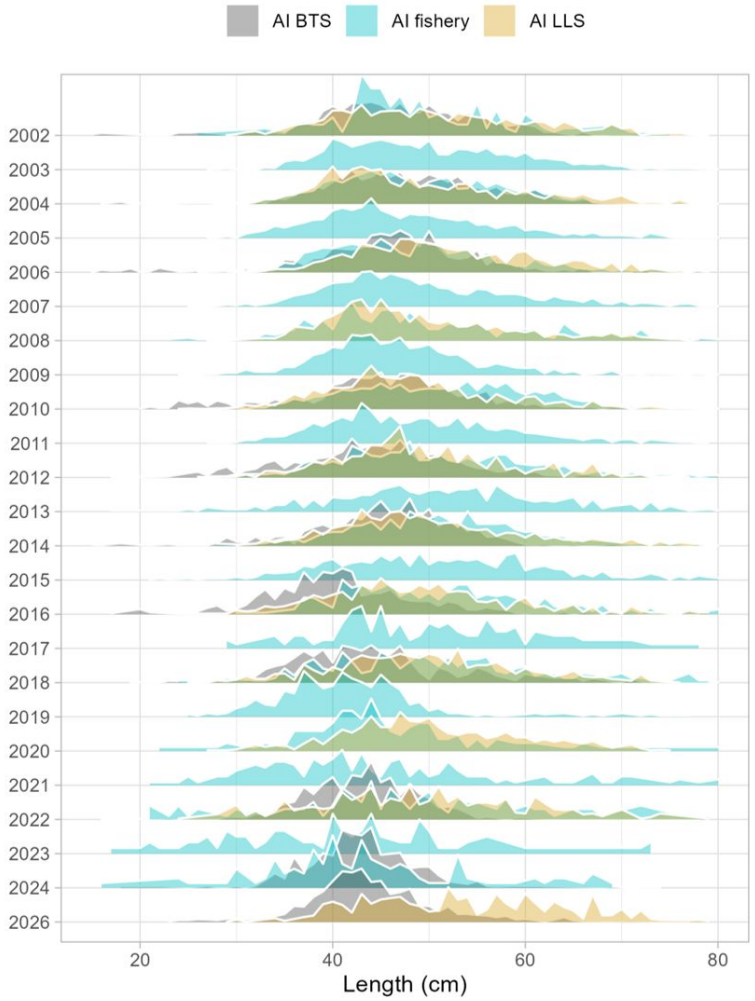
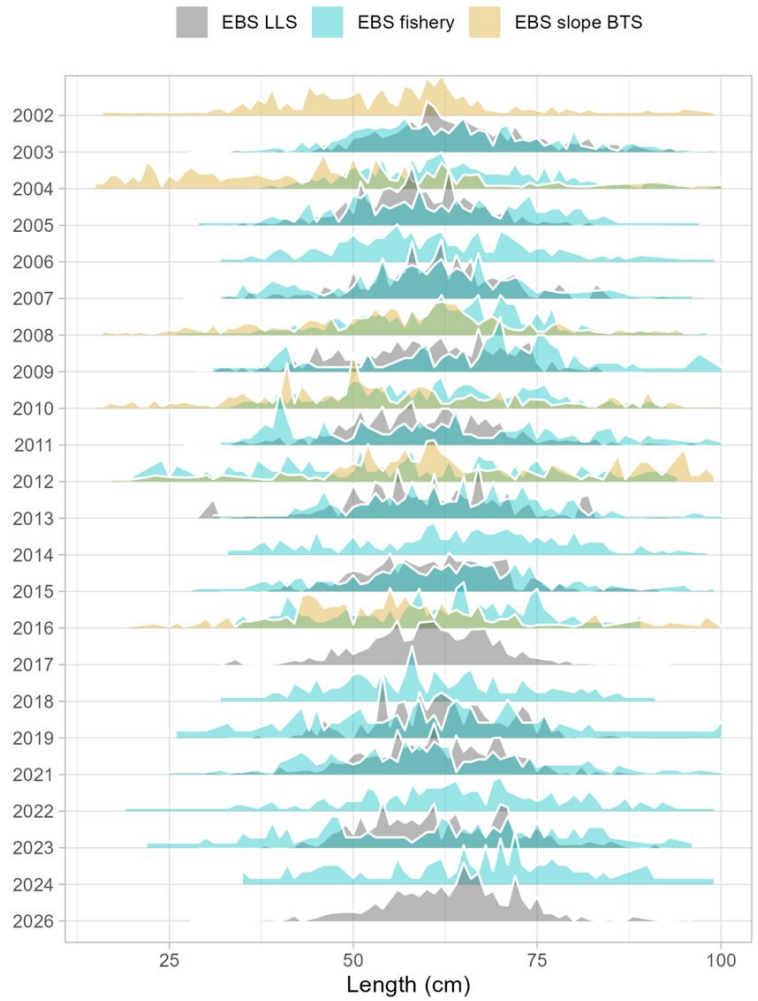
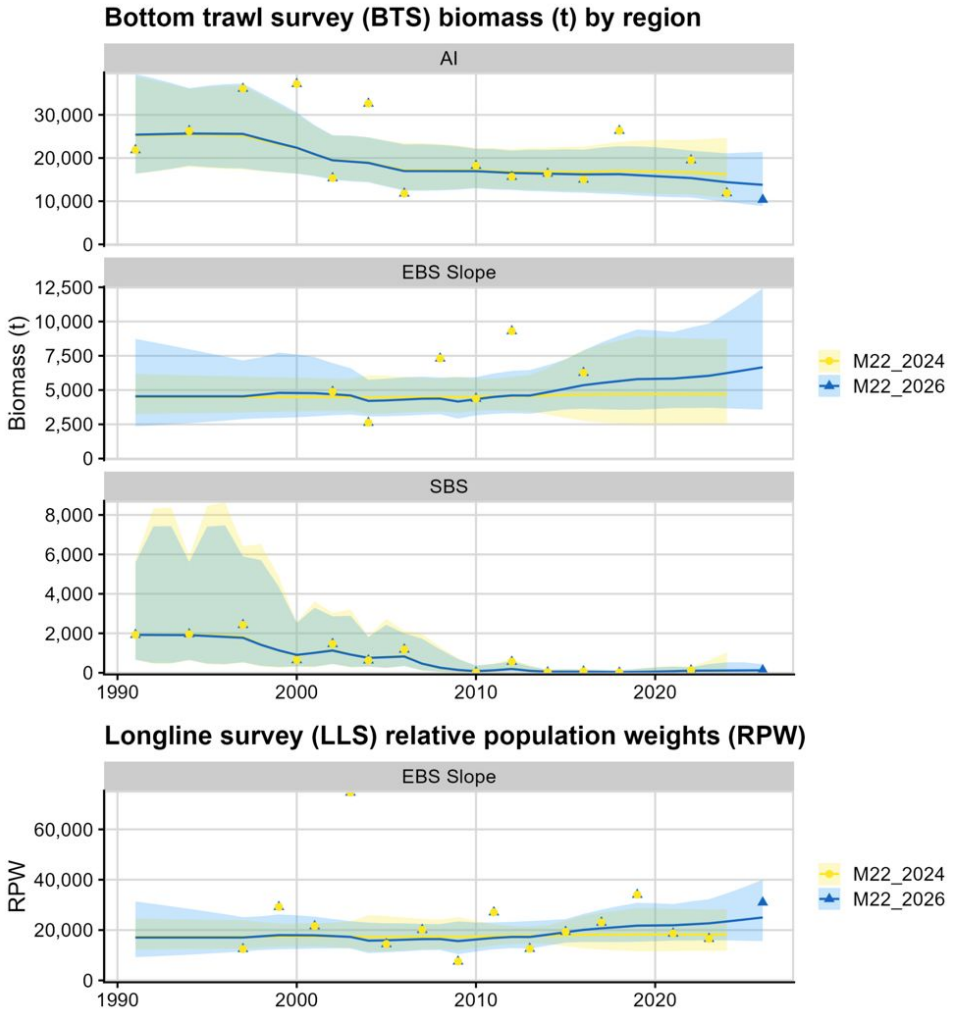


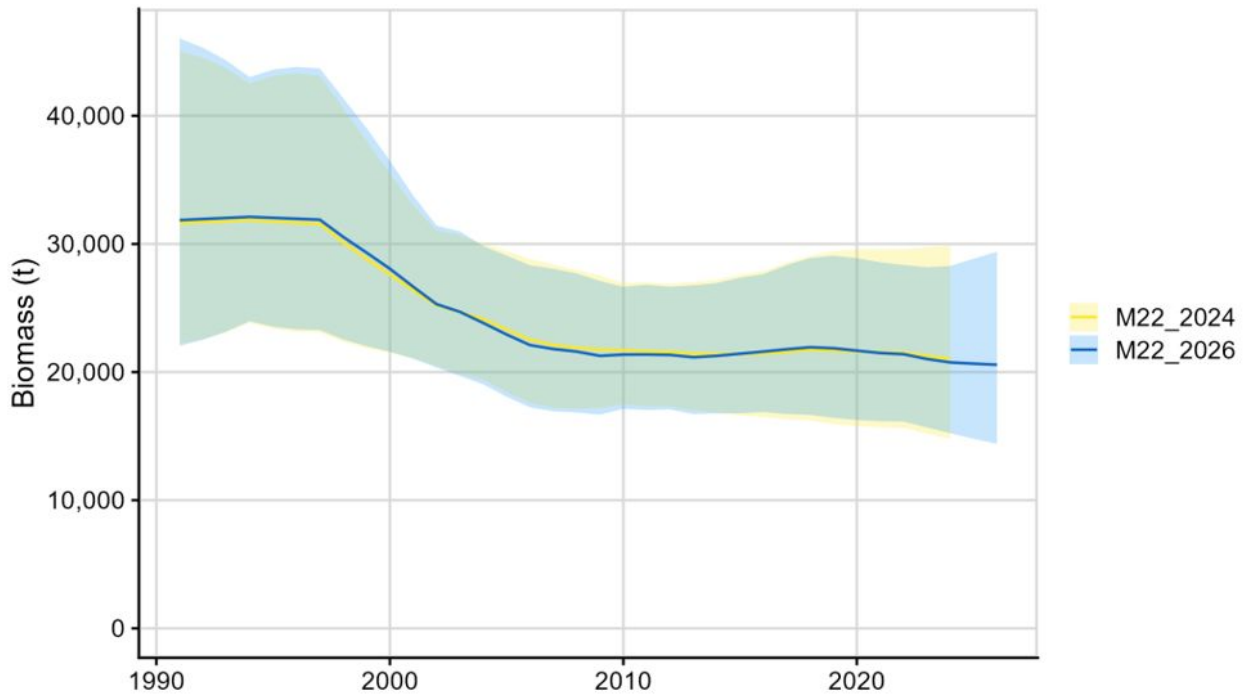


Model Summary and Results

- Model 22 with updated data = Model 22_2026
  - Bottom trawl surveys in the Aleutians (AI), Southern Bering Sea (SBS), eastern Bering Sea (EBS) slope (ended in 2016)
  - AFSC longline survey (LLS) relative population weights (RPW) on the EBS slope
- Review model fit to survey biomass and RPWs
- Review risk table and harvest recommendations

Model Fit - Survey Biomass





Risk Table: Assessment Level 1

- Assessment –
  - Three surveys for this assessment affords some stability of biomass over time.
  - Little contrast in data and standard error estimates for the process error on the EBS slope sometimes approach zero, but better this year
  - In 2024, ran a sensitivity using pooled process error, which resulted in better model fit and estimated fixed effects with similar terminal year
  - Decreased concern from last assessment because process error for EBS slope survey no longer approaches zero
  - However, maintain recommendation to revisit in next full assessment

Risk Table: Other Categories Level 1

- Pop Dy – biomass slowly trending downward, but little information on early life history of shortraker, length comps show slight increase in <35cm fish in fishery and LLS in the AI, suggests potential increase in recruitment in AI
- Environment (Ortiz) – no clear concerns for shortraker outside of increased temps in AI, prey generalists, no concerning trends in predators
- Fisheries performance – retained as incidental catch, catch half of ABC, related to the POP fishery
- Do not recommended reduction from max ABC

Harvest Recommendation

Quantity	As estimated or *specified in* ***2024*** for: 2025	2026	As estimated or *recommended this* year for: 2027	2028
M (natural mortality rate)	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
Tier	5	5	5	5
Biomass (t)	21,018	21,018	20,573	20,573
F_{OFL}	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
$maxF_{ABC}$	0.0225	0.0225	0.0225	0.0225
F_{ABC}	0.0225	0.0225	0.0225	0.0225
OFL (t)	631	631	617	617
maxABC (t)	473	473	463	463
ABC (t)	473	473	463	463
Status	As determined *in 2024* for: 2023	2024	As determined *this* year for: 2025	2026
Overfishing	No	n/a	No	n/a

Conclusions

- Summary
  - Recommend Model 22_2026 that uses the longline survey and so is robust to loss of slope bottom trawl survey
  - No reduction from max ABC, but plan to revisit the stratification and process error in the next cycle
  - ABC = 463 t, OFL = 617 t
- Data Gaps and Future Research Priorities
  - Work with other rockfish authors for guidance on M tech memo
  - Incorporate any future research on effects of hook competition

Thank You!



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