

Draft SSC Report February 2026



**D2 Planning for 2026 Groundfish
Stock Assessment Cycle**

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- An internal agency workgroup, consisting of AFSC leadership, SSC members, and Council staff coordinators, met in January to prioritize stocks for the 2026 groundfish assessment cycle
- The SSC recommended this workgroup at the December 2025 meeting because OFL and maxABC projections are necessary in December 2026 for 2027/2028 specifications, but not all previously planned operational (full or update) stock assessments scheduled for 2025 and 2026 can be completed during 2026.
- For stock assessments not updated during the 2026 assessment cycle, the SSC signaled its intent to re-evaluate the potential for additional reductions from outdated maximum ABCs due to an additional year of uncertainty in these specifications.

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- The subgroup recommended the groundfish stock assessment schedule for 2026 and noted what final operational assessments, normally reviewed in December, could potentially be moved to October to relieve the review burden on the Council advisory bodies. These include stocks that will not have additional 2026 survey data and models that had preliminary review in October 2025 (see Table 1 of 2026 Groundfish Stock Assessment Priorities report on the SSC agenda).
- The SSC **thanks** the AFSC for their flexibility and work in advance of the 2026 groundfish assessment cycle and their planned efforts to take on such a heavy load of assessments.
- The SSC **supports** the workgroup's recommendations and provided additional guidance

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- The SSC **recognizes** the importance of completing as many assessments as possible during the 2026 cycle
- Therefore, the SSC explored the possibility of reviewing some of the final assessments and having necessary process discussions in June and October, to relieve the review burden in December, recognizing that this would require an additional GPT meeting
- The SSC **recommends** moving as many assessments as possible to the June and October meetings
- The SSC **recommends** assessment authors bring forward only essential models and revisions for review.

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- The SSC **recommends** its June agenda include, if possible:
 - a presentation and discussion of the potential impacts of the GOA survey design changes, including comparisons across similar species;
 - a discussion of methods to determine flexibility for BRDs for Council-identified stocks;
 - and the GOA rex sole and GOA arrowtooth flounder final stock assessments.

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- To the extent practicable, the SSC also ***recommends***:
 - Scheduling reviews for GOA rockfish assessments with large decreases in survey estimates at a single meeting,
 - scheduling reviews of stocks for which the Council recommended exploring potential flexibility in BRDs at the same meeting, and
 - AFSC staff consider bringing forward an update rather than a full assessment of GOA shortraker to allow possible review in October