



D1 Unobserved Fishing Mortality Working Group Report

June 2024

Action Memo

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Action Required: 1. Review the UFMWG report.
2. Recommend further action, if any, for the working group

BACKGROUND

The Unobserved Fishing Mortality Working Group (UFMWG) was formed in October 2023 in response to a SSC request and further Council endorsement following the presentation of a Crab Conservation Workplan in [December 2022](#). In [June 2023](#), the Council developed objectives and end products for the UFMWG as detailed below:

The Council-approved objectives of the working group are as follows:

- *Identify data sources, major data gaps, and assumptions to estimate unobserved mortality for stock assessments and to better understand temporal/spatial extent across fisheries and gear types.*
- *Provide research priority recommendations and/or needed research projects.*

The anticipated products include:

- *Framework for estimating unobserved fishing mortality and explicitly incorporating estimates into stock assessments.*
- *Report on specific research priorities and data needs.*
- *Recommendations for approaches to investigate spatial/temporal extent of unobserved mortality over fisheries and gear types to the extent practicable.*

The UFMWG report provides a detailed summary of the working group discussion surrounding proposed end products and is structured into four main sections: (1) a summary of the existing data that may be utilized to estimate unobserved fishing mortality (UFM), and relevant data gaps; (2) a framework for incorporating UFM into stock assessments; (3) UFM research priorities; and (4) the WG recommendations. Several of the data and information needs highlighted by the UFMWG are currently in progress or require additional research, and the WG emphasized that there are substantial data deficiencies that preclude a meaningful estimation of UFM. The WG discussion provided substantial improvement in identifying and prioritizing research needs to best quantify UFM estimates.

Integration with Council 5-year research priorities process

The report and recommendations from the UFMWG were filtered through the research priorities process and combined with related research priorities highlighted by the Crab Plan Team, Groundfish Plan Teams, to address the need for additional research on unobserved mortality in the Bering Sea. (Research ID: SSCSub006, [April 2024 Plan Team Summary Report](#)). Through the research priorities process, the

SSC had the opportunity to review and incorporate research suggestions made by the UFMWG into their decision-making process for elevating the top 10 research priorities.

Next steps for UFMWG

At this time, there is no immediate action required by the Council; however, the Council may wish to identify specific action items following the review of the UFMWG report, including but not limited to:

- (1) Provide input as to whether or not the UFMWG's highlighted research needs and prioritization is comprehensive, and
- (2) suggest next steps related to existing or newly identified objectives for the UFMWG and provide a timeline for the requested outcomes. It may be helpful to consider that several areas of prioritized research are underway or may be funded in the near future.

In considering next steps for the WG, the Council could consider whether a public-facing workshop would be beneficial in informing UFM estimates prior to or following the acquisition of additional data needs to inform UFM.