

# North Pacific Fishery Management Council

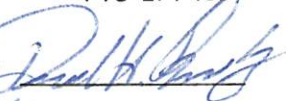
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North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
Scientific and Statistical Committee  
September 23-24, 1985

The Scientific and Statistical Committee of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council met in Anchorage on September 23-24, 1985. Members present were:

Donald H. Rosenberg, Chairman  
Richard Marasco, Vice Chairman  
William Aron  
Bud Burgner  
Larry Hreha

Don Bevan  
Scott Marshall  
Tom Northup  
Doug Eggers  
Steve Langdon

## B-6 & B-7 Bering Sea Crab Survey and Crab Interceptions

The SSC received a presentation on the status of the Bering Sea crab resource. The report indicated that the crab resources continue to be depressed. The SSC also received a presentation by Council staff on the bycatch of crab in the joint venture fishery. At the current time, data was not available to determine if this bycatch represents a conservation problem.

## D-1 Gulf of Alaska Groundfish

### Status of Stocks

The SSC reviewed the Team's September 13, 1985 report, had a Team's oral presentation and discussed various issues with the Team. The SSC has the following comments and recommendations:

Pollock. The Team, in the process of developing an ABC for this species, decided that as a first step an attempt should be made to define the threshold biomass level. The threshold biomass is defined by the Team as that level below which if the exploitable biomass were to drop, its ability to produce strong recruitment would be adversely affected. This biomass level for the GOA was defined to be from 600 to 700 mt.

The biomass estimate obtained from the 1985 Shelikof Strait acoustic midwater trawl surveys was from 500 to 900 kmt, with a mean of 700 kmt. The team, using an assumed 1985 harvest of 300 kmt, projected the exploitable biomass of from 325 to 565 kmt for early 1986. Since this range is below the 600 to 700 kmt threshold, the Team recommended a zero ABC for 1986.

The SSC supports the Team's attempt to define a threshold level for the population. However, the threshold that the SSC considers meaningful is the level below which if the exploitable biomass dropped, the reproductive success of the population would be endangered. This definition differs from the one used by the Team. The biomass level that corresponds with the SSC's definition would fall below the Team's.

It is recognized by the SSC that any attempt to determine the threshold biomass is very difficult. Little is known about the nature of the spawner/recruit relationship. This information is critical to the specification of the threshold. While not being prepared to offer an estimate of what the SSC considers the size of the threshold biomass to be, the SSC recommends that the Team be encouraged to continue to work on the issue.

After examining estimates of exploitable biomass projected for early 1986, 1987 and 1988 given various possible harvest levels reported in Table 5 in the report and in light of:

1. the projected recruitment of the strong 1984 year class to the fishery beginning in 1987, and
2. the fluctuating nature of pollock stocks that requires examination of abundance trends for several years to determine where the stock is on its abundance cycle and forecasts of where it's likely to be in the future,

the SSC concludes that some level of harvest could be allowed in 1986 without the risk of adversely affecting the reproductive potential of the stock being significant. Because of the succession of weak year classes that have or will enter the fishery and the size of the projected 1986 exploitable biomass (325-565 kmt), a conservative management approach is warranted. After examination of Table 5 in the Team report, the SSC recommends that the ABC should not exceed 100 kmt. Harvests in excess of this amount would result in exploitation rates that are higher than those experienced in the recent past, if the projected 1986 exploitable biomass number proves to be reliable.

The SSC has chosen to base its recommendation for a 1986 ABC on the expected dynamics of the Shelikof pollock stock over the next three years. This differs from the Team's approach to consider an ABC for 1986 in isolation. The SSC might have concurred with the Team's ABC of zero had we looked only at the projected stock size in 1986. We feel that even from an ABC standpoint it is overly conservative to propose a stock size that has produced large recruitment every year in a multi-aged stock such as pollock.

The SSC wishes to caution the Council that our recommendation is based on the assumption that the 1984 year class is strong. Should this not be the case, allowance of a fishery could further reduce the exploitable biomass.

As a result of the Team's recommendation that ". . . if a directed pollock fishery is allowed in 1986, it should be delayed until after the March spawning period to protect the productive potential of the 1986 spawning stock," the SSC discussed the pros and cons of not allowing a fishery in the Shelikof Straits during the spawning period. The following pros were identified:

1. Protection of the stock during the spawning period would be provided, and
2. An incentive would exist to go look for fish in other areas of the Gulf of Alaska.

A minority view which did not receive consensus suggested the Council consider that catches made during the spawning period outside of Shelikof Straits should not be constrained.

Two cons were identified:

1. Harvesting costs would be increased, and
2. The ability to monitor the structure of the stock while it is in Shelikof Strait would be precluded.

In general the SSC feels that future recruitment will not be adversely affected with a Shelikof Strait fishery, given the suggested level and nature of the projected fishery in 1986.

The last item associated with the pollock fishery taken up by the SSC was the issue of what should be done to manage the fishery for the rest of 1985. It was pointed out above that the Team, in the development of exploitable biomass projects for 1986, assumed that 300 kmt of fish would be harvested in 1985. If the Council were to close the fishery for the rest of 1985, new biomass estimates would have to be developed for 1986. These new estimates could require a revision of the ABC recommended by the SSC. In summary, the SSC does not feel that there is a conservation problem requiring immediate action.

Pacific Cod. The SSC agrees with the Team's recommendation that the Gulf ABC be set at 136 kmt for 1986.

Flounder. The SSC agrees with the Team's recommendation that ABCs for the Western, Central and Eastern Gulf be set at 22,832 mt, 101,449 mt, and 16,800 mt, respectively.

Pacific Ocean Perch. The SSC supports the Team's recommendation that the 1986 ABCs be set equal to those adopted for 1985: Western (1,736 mt), Central (5,208 mt) and Eastern (4,530 mt) and recommends that the Council continue to have an OY which will encourage rebuilding sablefish.

Sablefish. The SSC was informed by the Team that the Gulf of Alaska sablefish stocks appear to be recovering from their depressed conditions of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The strong 1977 year class that has contributed substantially to the fishable biomass in recent years appears to be declining in importance. The Team also indicated that the 1980 and 81 year class appears to be good. After examining various biomass estimates and studies available to it, the Team indicated ABC to be between 12,630 mt (EY for 1983-85) and the maximum upper limit of 25,000 mt. The SSC is unable to provide the Council with a point estimate at this meeting. The Team indicated that analyses are currently being conducted that would shed additional light on the issue. The SSC recommends that the Council adopt the Team's recommendation as a working ABC range with finalization pending completion and

review of the studies. The SSC does not feel that new stocks can sustain a catch of 25,000 mt over an extended period of time.

The SSC is concerned with management problems encountered in the past season with this fishery. A data collection system must be implemented that allows orderly and timely management of this and, for that matter, all groundfish fisheries.

Atka Mackerel. SSC recommends continuation of status quo for 1986.

Other Rockfish. The Team recommends that ABC for 1986 be reduced to 1,700 mt. The poor showing of other rockfish in the triennial survey in the Central and Western Gulf served as the basis of this recommendation. Because of the lack of data and staff to undertake an analysis, the SSC recommends that the ABC for this category be left at 1985 level.

Squid, Thornyhead Rockfish and Other Species. SSC recommends ABC not be changed from 1985 levels.

#### Halibut Bycatch Measures

The SSC received a presentation from the Council staff on the Team report entitled "Halibut Bycatch Measures for the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Fishery" dated September 20, 1985. Some confusion existed regarding bycatch tables presented in the report. This was clarified by the staff. The SSC feels that the Council should use the most realistic rates in determining the PSC limits. We did not receive an analysis of those rates and therefore are unable to comment on specific rates.

#### D-2 Bering Sea/Aleutian Island Groundfish

##### Resource Assessment

The SSC reviewed the "Resource Assessment Document for the Bering Sea/Aleutians Groundfish for 1985" and reviewed an updated report from the team. It is noted that the estimated equilibrium yield for the groundfish complex for 1986 is estimated to decrease to approximately 2 million mt from a 1985 level of 2.2 million mt. The team presentation indicated that some of the species EYs were currently being reviewed and that some adjustment to their values may be presented by the December meeting. Those species are Pacific cod, yellowfin sole, turbot and sablefish. This review may result in a further reduction in the equilibrium yield for the groundfish complex (1.9 million mt).

The SSC notes that the Team's recommendation on 1986 EYs and catch levels divides each species out into two management areas. In the past only pollock, sablefish, POP and other rockfish were so managed. The SSC was unable to evaluate this proposed split at this time. Concern was expressed to the SSC that this was a major departure from the current management regime.

Based upon our review, the SSC recommends that the OY of 2 million mt, the estimated equilibrium yields and TACs presented in the July RAD (i.e. Table 6) be sent out for public review. We recommend that to prevent confusion and to ensure that the public is aware of the Team recommendation on management

areas, the documents should clearly state the proposed change. We also recommend that the table presenting the proposed catch levels include an additional column indicating the TACs in the same manner as 1985.

#### R.I. Fletcher Report

The SSC examined the "Fletcher" report on Bering Sea pollock together with the review by Balsiger et.al. and the letter from Dr. Deriso. We concur with Dr. Deriso and the Balsiger review that Dr. Fletcher's conclusions are incorrect.

#### D-3 Salmon FMP

The SSC received the brief proposal regarding the rewrite of the Salmon FMP. The SSC agrees that the principal investigator is well qualified to undertake the rewrite should the Council wish to proceed with a plan rewrite in this manner. This rewrite should be closely coordinated with the Salmon team.

#### E-1 Contracts and Proposal

The SSC received the proposal entitled "Discard Catch in U.S. Commercial Marine Fisheries, Analysis and Recommendations" dated June 1, 1985. We did not have time to review this proposal, and will place it on our agenda for the next meeting.