

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON RESEARCH AND DATA NEEDS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) recommends that the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) adopt the preliminary research and data needs list recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC; [Agenda Item C.2, SSC Report 1, April 2024](#)), and we offer the following comments.

The GAP was pleased to see many of [our highest priorities](#) incorporated into the SSC's recommendations to address Council-identified challenges, specifically these items:

- Develop coastwide fishery-independent surveys of nearshore and/or hard substrate (untrawlable) habitats to inform groundfish stock assessments as well as to improve life history parameters (e.g., growth, natural mortality) and research to locate older female rockfish;
- Improve estimates of discards and discard mortality from commercial and recreational fisheries, including the effects of barotrauma, descending devices, mark-selective fisheries, and catch-and-release practices;
- Develop new approaches for using citizen science and improve fishery-dependent data usage to inform stock assessments;
- Investigate new data [ecosystem monitoring] sources such as historical ecosystem variability and fishery-dependent data;
- Continue research on methods of inclusion and accounting for long-term closed areas in assessment models;
- Evaluate impacts of non-fishing activities (e.g., offshore development, freshwater operations) on habitat use by federally-managed species; and
- Review and improve the adaptiveness of our management process to external change.

With funding challenges likely ahead, the GAP recommends adding the following items to the “Data Collection” challenge that may allow for some efficiencies in data collection:

- Geographic habitat characterization and mapping in the exclusive economic zone (e.g., backscatter, high resolution multi-beam bathymetry) with the goal of developing a methodology/rubric (e.g., flat, low relief, medium relief, high relief) for use in extrapolating biomass estimates from transect data (ROV, manned submersible, SCUBA). This effort would first look for existing spatial data;
- Collection of environmental DNA (eDNA); and
- More explicitly looking for opportunities for commercial and recreational fishing vessels to collect data-of-opportunity in a cost-effective manner.

The GAP discussed our support for robust science, uncertainty and concern about future funding for that science, and the impacts that budget cuts could have on groundfish fisheries. We are hopeful that the Council's streamlining of research and data needs will be helpful for partner agencies and academic institutions to begin research on these priority items and appreciate the SSC's work to aggregate and present such a comprehensive cross-fishery management plan list.