GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON RESEARCH AND DATA NEEDS

The GMT supports the list of research and data needs provided in Agenda Item C.2, SSC Report 1 and recommends the Council preliminarily adopt it with the addition of fishery impact projection modeling methodologies under challenge #4 Evaluating Fishery Impacts as described below, if it is not already captured.

It is the GMT's understanding that most topics listed in SSC Report 1 are general enough to capture the needs of the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (Groundfish FMP), even if they do not specify applicability to groundfish. However, the team identified a need for improvements to groundfish impact projection modeling methodologies that does not appear to be captured in any topics on the proposed list. The team requests that the SSC indicate whether they considered this specific need in the Challenge #4 "Evaluating Fishery Impacts" under any of the currently proposed topics. If not, the GMT requests that the Council explicitly add it to the list, recognizing that it may be applicable across all FMPs and not just groundfish.

For example, in September 2024, the GMT notified the Council of the need for a "Non-Nearshore Shelf Catch Projection Tool" to better monitor and project impacts from an emerging portion of the non-trawl fishery targeting healthy shelf rockfish stocks (Agenda Item 1.2.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, September 2024). In the following Council meeting (November 2024), the GMT requested that the Council seek external support for the development of such a model due to its expected complexity and the constraints of the GMT's workload and expertise (Agenda Item I.3.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, November 2024). In November, the GMT also highlighted data limitations that the team hopes can be addressed in the future by targeted observer coverage of the emerging fishery. Beyond this example, research on overall improvements to fishery impact projection methodologies is a high priority for meeting the Groundfish FMP goals and objectives. Any improvements would support the Council's effort to create more flexible and adaptive management measures, as the Council would have greater confidence in inseason projections and be better suited to develop management measures that are conditional on projected attainment levels (e.g., if/then management measures as described in Agenda Item C.4, Supplemental Attachment 1).

With regard to Challenge #1 Data Collection, the GMT agrees with the SSC statement in SSC Report 1, "It is necessary to continue and expand existing data collection efforts, develop new data streams (e.g., to support indices of abundance or life history parameter estimation) and improve access to relevant databases." In addition to fishery-independent data streams (i.e., surveys), the GMT views supporting and enhancing our ongoing fishery-dependent data streams as a high priority for meeting the Groundfish FMP goals and objectives, as fisheries provide a critical source of information to our management process. These include recreational and commercial fishery-dependent sampling programs. Budget cuts, reductions in force, and flat/declining funding of field sampling programs have reduced existing program capacity to maintain the baseline data streams that are the bedrock of fisheries management. The Council should support the continuation of, and building of additional capacity into, existing commercial and recreational fishery-dependent sampling programs that also align with the research and data needs outlined by the SSC.

For example, the GMT discussed that when increasing the collection of biological data (e.g., age structures), doing so in conjunction with existing sampling programs to the extent practicable provides a greater benefit than establishing multiple disconnected collection programs. When biological structures are included within fisheries sampling programs that are designed to be representative of the fleets, they are then able to be used in stock assessments both as part of composition data as well as to inform biological relationships. In contrast, biological structures collected outside of these sampling programs are generally used within stock assessments only to inform biological relationships. That being said, additional data is beneficial and should be considered even if it cannot be incorporated within existing sampling programs.

PFMC
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