

yelloweye ABC of 52 mt is based on the new assessment, with an Fmsy proxy of F50%.

A revised rebuilding analysis was prepared following completion of the 2002 assessment. Due to the less depleted stock status and higher productivity estimated by the updated assessment, the rebuilding period is shorter than had been estimated following the initial rebuilding analysis. The SSC indicated that the revised rebuilding analysis represented the best available science and advised using it to set 2003 harvest levels.

At the Council's September meeting, four OY options were considered for yelloweye rockfish: 2.1 mt — the low range from the June 2002 draft rebuilding analysis; 13.5 mt - the 2002 OY; 22 mt - based on a 50-percent probability of rebuilding the yelloweye rockfish to Bmsy by the year 2050 (T_{mid}) from the revised rebuilding analysis; and 27 mt, the value corresponding to a 50-percent probability of rebuilding the yelloweye rockfish to Bmsy by the year 2069 (T_{max}) from the revised rebuilding analysis. The SSC advised that the OY not exceed 22 mts, the OY recommended by the Council's ad hoc allocation committee. The Council followed the SSC's advice and recommended adopting an OY of 22 mt.

Sablefish

In 2001, sablefish were assessed in the region between Point Conception (34° 27' N. lat.) and the U.S.-Canada border. The assessment indicated a decline in biomass since the late 1970s and a decline in recruitment during the early 1990s. This result was supported by a parallel assessment conducted by an industry-supported research team. For 2002, newly available fishery and survey data were used to update the assessment. No changes were made to the model structure or assumptions. However, the update produced a larger than expected increase in the perceived stock abundance throughout the time series. Such a change is an indication of the overall uncertainty in the stock assessment due to the relatively short time series of survey data. The relative 2001 spawning stock biomass had been estimated to be between 27 and 38 percent of the unfished biomass following the 2001 assessment, and the estimate increased to between 31 and 39 percent of the unfished biomass in the 2002 update. There was a notable increase in the estimated abundance of young fish born in 1999 and 2000 and evidence that these young fish have begun to recruit to the fishery.

As in 2001, two alternative states of nature, environmentally driven and

density-dependent, were considered in calculation of target abundance levels and current productivity. The declines in recruitment during the early 1990s may have resulted from changes in environmental conditions or the low recruitment may have been caused by low spawning biomass. It is not possible to determine with high confidence the primary cause of the low recruitments during the 1990s, but the higher recruitment in 1999 and 2000 lends support for the environmental scenario.

The ABC estimate for the assessment area north of Point Conception (34° 27' N. lat) is 8,459 mt. The ABC for the management area north of 36° N lat. is 8,209 mt (97.04 percent of the ABC from the surveyed area). The ABC estimate was based on the environmental scenario for trends in recruitment and on application of an Fmsy proxy of F45%. Although there is evidence that juvenile sablefish have begun to recruit to the fishery, the growth of the sablefish biomass will be slow and will depend on future average recruitment being larger than observed during most of the 1990s.

Four OY options were presented to the Council for the area North of 36° N. lat.: 8,187 mt based on the ABC from the environmentally driven projection with an Fmsy proxy of F45% and a 40/10 adjustment; 7,455 mt based on the ABC from the density-dependent projection with an Fmsy proxy of F45% and a 40/10 adjustment; 4,477 mt based on the ABC from the density-dependent projection with an Fmsy proxy of F60% and a 40/10 adjustment; and 5,000 mt, an intermediate point between 4,477 mt and 7,455 mt. The SSC indicated that the medium and high OYs were relatively risk-prone and advised the Council that caution should be used when setting the 2003 harvest levels. The SSC noted that an OY of 5,000 mt, as recommended by the Council's ad hoc Allocation Committee, was consistent with the SSC recommendation and addresses uncertainty in assessment relating to the different states of nature.

Following discussions and public comment, the Council recommended adopting an ABC of 8,459 mt for the surveyed area, resulting in an ABC of 8,209 mt with an OY of 6,500 mt for the area north of 36° N' lat. The Council recommended OY of 6,500 mt is the 7,455 mt OY, based on a 40/10 adjustment to the ABC, with an additional 1,000 mt precautionary reduction. The Council based its recommendation on the SSC's advice to be precautionary because of assessment uncertainties, and because the sablefish biomass is within the precautionary

range. The Council indicated that it was prudent to adopt an OY that was risk averse rather than risk neutral.

Pacific Whiting

Pacific whiting was declared overfished on April 15, 2002 (67 FR 18117). The Pacific whiting stock is estimated to be just below the FMP's overfished species rebuilding threshold of B25%. In June, a draft rebuilding analysis for whiting that followed the analysis guidelines established by the SSC was presented to the Council. Because of the high variability in recruitment patterns and short life span of whiting, the rebuilding analysis estimated a short rebuilding period even with high harvest levels. However, given the recruitment variability, there is also a high probability that the whiting biomass would drop below the overfishing threshold again following recovery. The rebuilding analysis examined alternative Fmsy proxies in terms of whether the population would become overfished following recovery. The SSC was unable to investigate the merits of moving from the current F40% Fmsy proxy to another; however, the SSC did advise continuing the use of the 40–10 harvest policy for whiting and noted that the 40–10 harvest policy appeared adequate to achieve rebuilding.

Three OY options, all of which are based on a medium level of recruitment for the 1999 year class, were considered by the Council: 129,600 mt based on the 2002 biomass estimate with an F40% Fmsy proxy and the application of the 40–10 harvest policy; 148,200 mt based on the 2003 projected biomass with an F45% Fmsy proxy and the application of the 40–10 harvest policy; and 173,600 mt based on the 2003 projected biomass with an F40% Fmsy proxy and the application of the 40–10 harvest policy. The SSC advised the Council to be precautionary and not increase the whiting OY over the 2002 harvest level until a new assessment was conducted. However, the Council indicated that the medium harvest level, 148,200 mt, based on the 2003 projected biomass with an F45% Fmsy, was sufficiently precautionary. Although it allows a short-term increase in the OY based on expected population growth, it moves to a more precautionary harvest rate that is expected to increase the rebuilding rate and reduce the risk of declining back into an overfished state (below B25%) given the high productivity of whiting.

Minor Nearshore Rockfish

To protect depleted stocks and minimize the chance of overfishing, changes were made in 2000 that