

Plan Team Report

September 15 - 17, 2004

Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Seattle

Joint Team minutes

The Joint Plan Teams convened on September 15-17th, 2004 at the AFSC, Seattle. There were approximately 30 members of the public and agency staff present. The agenda (attached) was agreed upon for the meeting.

Team members present:

Loh-Lee Low	AFSC REF M(BSAI chair)	Jim Ianelli	AFSC REF M (GOA co-chair)
Mike Sigler	AFSC ABL (BSAI vice chair)	Diana Stram	NPFMC (GOA co-chair)
Kerim Aydin	AFSC REF M	Sandra Lowe	AFSC REF M
David Carlile	ADF&G	Jeff Fujioka	AFSC ABL
Bill Clark	IPHC	Jon Heifetz	AFSC ABL
Jane DiCosimo	NPFMC	Robert Foy	UAF
Lowell Fritz	AFSC MML	Bill Bechtol	ADF&G
Brenda Norcross	UAF	Tory O'Connell	ADF&G
Andy Smoker	NMFS AKRO	Tom Pearson	NMFS AKRO
Grant Thompson	AFSC REF M	Beth Sinclair	AFSC MML
Ivan Vining	ADF&G	Sarah Gaichas	AFSC REF M
		Bill Clark	IPHC

The Teams noted the attrition of Team membership and requested that the Council consider appointing representatives from the states of Oregon and Washington and an economist to each Team.

The Teams noted that since the record of decision has been filed for the Groundfish PSEIS, the Teams should track whether the Council policy resulting from the PSEIS mirrors current stock assessment guidelines for authors. The Teams also noted that draft changes to the National Standard Guidelines could affect the development of SAFE chapter requirements, and ultimately ABC recommendations.

Council update and activities

The Teams were updated by Council staff on the results of the HAPC proposal review (from March 2004) and the concurrent process changes in conjunction with the EFH EIS analysis. All 4 Council Plan Teams put considerable time and effort in March 2004 into both reviewing HAPC proposals and making suggestions for revising the proposal process in the future. Understanding that the HAPC Process (appendix J of the EFH EIS) is currently undergoing review and revision, the Plan Teams specifically reiterate the comments put forward in the Report by the Joint Teams in March 2004. A section of that document, the "Comments by the Plan Teams on the HAPC Process", is attached to the minutes. The Plan Teams recognize that the HAPC proposal review process is dynamic and that Plan Team participation may be requested again in the future to review such proposals for the Council, thus the Teams request that these comments be incorporated into any revisions made to the HAPC Process in order to improve upon the process in the future.

The Teams reviewed the process for TAC-setting now underway under Amendments 48/48. It is expected that the amendments will be implemented for the 2005 fishing year. Therefore, the Teams should recommend overfishing levels and allowable biological catches for 2005 and 2006. The Teams recommended that the new procedure for assessment authors for projecting specifications for the subsequent two fishing years should be included in the guidelines for authors. The Teams recommended

that a uniform methodology be applied. Since a groundfish trawl survey was not conducted in the Gulf of Alaska in 2005, assessments for some GOA species will not be conducted in 2004 for 2005; instead projected OFLs and ABCs for selected GOA species will be recommended in November 2004. Assessments for all species (based on the 2005 GOA trawl survey) will be prepared in 2005 for the 2006 and 2007 fishing years. The Teams discussed the method for estimating late May through December catches for proposed and interim specifications, but concluded that the current method achieved results within 2 percent of actual catches.

Report on REFM's Fisheries Interaction Team (FIT) studies

The Teams requested to have presentations on recent fishery marine-mammal interaction studies. Four separate presentations were given.

First, Chris Wilson presented the AFSC acoustic study to examine whether the abundance and spatial patterns of walleye pollock are impacted by commercial fishing activities over short spatio-temporal scales in 2001, 2002, and 2004. This study focused on a fish avoidance response, which might be characterized by disruption of the fish distribution patterns over a longer time scale (days) and space scale (area of commercial fishing operations). Results for 2001 did not detect any fish avoidance responses that could be attributed to the commercial fishing activities. Results from 2002 were disappointing because very little fishing occurred in the area during the study. The commercial fishing effort was good during the 2004 survey and analyses of the data are currently underway. Results from 2004 indicated that the 2004 year-class of pollock was relatively strong compared to numbers of young-of-the-year pollock that were detected during the earlier surveys.

The Teams suggested that the Council consider whether to recommend the preparation of a regulatory amendment to extend the closure of Chiniak Bay past 2005 to allow additional research on potential fishery interactions, depending on whether the 2004 results indicated the need for additional research. The Teams were informed that the RV *Miller Freeman* is not available in 2005, and that another research platform (commercial or ADF&G vessels) may be necessary to continue the study.

Liz Conners presented work on Pacific cod distribution within and outside of closed areas near Unimak Pass in the Bering Sea. The study is part of an overall effort to address concerns over localized depletion of Steller sea lion prey as a result of spatially and/or temporally intensive commercial fishing. Results from the pot study did not show a significant difference in the distribution of cod between trawled and untrawled areas in either 2003 or 2004 (the study was repeated in the Winter of 2004). Comments from Plan Team members requested to what extent the study could be repeated in a different area, and questioned to what extent the region chosen for the study as well as the short temporal nature of the study might complicate results. The author noted the difficulty in identifying regions where trawl exclusion zones are located in close proximity to heavily fished areas.

Susanne McDermott presented work on the tagging program for Atka mackerel. This study operated at three different sites in the Aleutian Islands with very successful release and recapture cruises. The study was designed to assess the movement of Atka mackerel between areas that are open and closed to fishing and adjacent to Steller sea lion critical habitat. The experiments also allow estimation of tag shedding rates and tag reporting rates. Models of the tagging data have been successful at estimating movement rates but have been affected by apparent strong-recruitment of small fish within the study area. Future plans are to use the Atka mackerel tagging data to provide independent estimates of mortality and supplemental information on the spatial distribution for application in the stock assessment model and in setting ABCs.

Bing Shi presented analyses of the pilot tag program for Pacific cod. This study was done on an opportunistic basis with the Pacific cod study near Unimak Pass. The goal is to test the feasibility of such a study and to better understand the movement of cod. Preliminary estimates of short-term and seasonal movement from this tagging study are affected by fishery effort concentrations. Trials to estimate fishing effort by area have been pursued using VMS data. The presentation suggested that recovery rates for

Pacific cod tags were quite high (>30% for some release groups). The Teams were concerned that this is higher than expected given current stock status and exploitation rates. Dr. Shi noted that 733 out of the total 1328 fish recaptured were recaptured in the same area and season as released, suggesting that the Pacific cod released with tags (which totaled 3,691 from February 2003) had not mixed with the entire population. The Teams encouraged further analyses of these data. In particular, it was noted that the NMFS bottom trawl survey had failed to recapture any tagged Pacific cod. The recapture rates and spatial coverage appears to hold promise in improving our understanding of the spawning dynamics of Pacific cod.

Joint Stock Assessment Presentation

Tom Wilderbuer and Paul Spencer presented some issues concerning BSAI flatfish assessments, and a comparison of arrowtooth flounder assessments in the BSAI and GOA. Paul presented estimates of stock productivity and F_{MSY} of BSAI flathead sole and Alaska plaice should these species be managed using Am. 56 Tier 1 ABC calculations. Estimates of stock productivity and F_{MSY} are strongly influenced by the temporal trend in decreasing recruitment in recent years, and vary considerably depending upon the choice of spawner-recruit curve and the years included in the analysis. In light of these uncertainties, management advice based upon estimates of F_{MSY} was not recommended. Paul also presented information on spatial locations of flatfish distributions that indicate that several flatfish distributions on the EBS shelf moved southeast in 1999, one of the coldest years in the EBS. Tom presented similarities and differences in assessing arrowtooth flounder in the BSAI and GOA. The Plan Team discussed the differences in populations of arrowtooth between regions, noting that while biomass in the BSAI has peaked and is in a declining trend, it is still increasing in the GOA. It was further noted that female spawning biomass in the GOA is approximately 3-4 times that in the BSAI.

The Teams suggested that authors utilize data from the longline survey and halibut surveys for further indexes of abundance in flatfish.

The Teams suggested future joint assessments and research presentations might include:

- Rockfish assessment comparisons
- Rockfish genetic stock structure research and implications for stock assessments
- Update on on-going habitat research
- Current status of knowledge on cold water corals and links to productivity of ecosystems
- Inclusion of the broader North Pacific trends in species based on the PICES Ecosystem Status and Trends Report into the Ecosystem Considerations Section
- Survey presentations: update on current survey methodology and survey plans for upcoming year

Pacific cod area apportionments

Grant Thompson presented a report on alternative methods for determining Pacific cod biomass distributions for the BS, AI, and GOA. The Teams recommended applying the Kalman filter, at least for the BSAI assessment. Based on survey data through 2003, the Kalman filter would result in only a 1-3% change in the biomass proportions currently used in the BSAI assessment. The Teams noted that since a spatially explicit model is expected soon and the results of the differently tested approaches are not meaningfully different than the status quo, it may not be necessary to apply a new method now.

Grant Thompson gave a brief overview of a new spatially explicit “ALASKA” model. The acronym is from: **A**ge- **L**ength- and **A**rea-**S**tructured **K**alman **A**ssessment.

Additional research presentations

Franz Mueter gave a presentation to the Teams on his work with evaluating the total annual surplus production and overall exploitation rate of groundfish in the BSAI and GOA. He showed some

probability distributions of an aggregate species MSY that could be used for evaluating overall OY rules (such as those used for the BSAI and GOA). For evaluating OY limits, his results suggest that for the BSAI, the current OY cap is on the left side of the aggregated species MSY distribution while for the GOA, the upper limit of the OY range (800 mt) is to the right. This suggests inconsistencies between the use of OY ranges between the regions based on an aggregate groundfish production estimate. However, the GOA catch has never come close to approaching the upper limit of the OY due to in part to the groundfish species mix and bycatch considerations (e.g., for prohibited species). The Plan Teams decided that a reevaluation of the appropriateness of the current OY range in both the BSAI and GOA would be an important topic for Plan Team discussion. This topic was previously discussed in conjunction with work on the PSEIS and currently is part of the priorities for implementing the recommendations of the PSEIS. It is also timely given the on-going National Standard Guidelines revision as well as the Goodman report in 2003. The Teams suggested that OY range considerations be revisited in the future (but specific dates were left unspecified).

Economic SAFE Report

The Teams received a report by Ron Felthoven and commended staff for improvements in the Economic SAFE Report and recommended adding more descriptive fishery and cost information in the text section. The Teams requested an update on community profiles at the November 2004 joint meeting, and requested AFSC economists to be named to both Plan Teams.

NPCREP

Pat Livingston gave an overview of a new NOAA initiative to incorporate climate research and ecosystem productivity, Northeast Pacific Climate Regime and Ecosystem Productivity (NPCREP). They had just completed a workshop earlier in the week to provide guidance on the scope and direction of work under the initiative. One conclusion from the NPCREP workshop was to have Council interactions as an integrated part of the work. The program is intended to be responsive to the needs and concerns of fisheries managers. They would like to begin a regular dialog with the Plan Teams and the Council to ensure that the goals of the initiative satisfy pertinent management questions from the Council. For example, what are the Council's key ecosystem concerns? What type of ecosystem investigations would be most useful for answering pressing management issues? The Plan Teams reiterated the utility of having climate forecasting variability information available for single-species assessments. Also, the pattern of projected climate change is of general interest to the Council. The Plan Teams recommend that NPCREP explore means to consolidate information on GOA climate and ecosystem indices, similar to the Bering Climate website (www.beringclimate.noaa.gov). While the Teams understand that this particular website was separately funded, it appears to be an excellent model for consolidation of relevant information and the Teams encourage the development of a similar website for the Gulf of Alaska.

Ecosystem Assessment and Ecosystem Considerations

Jennifer Boldt gave an overview of the chapter on Ecosystems Considerations for 2005. She noted that in the future the timing of production of this chapter will be revised such that it will be updated and produced for the spring Council meeting. This will provide better timing for use of the information contained within the chapter for stock assessment scientists in their assessments.

The Plan Teams recognize and appreciate the amount of effort involved in compiling this information and commends the group on their continued effort on this behalf.

Some recommendations by the Team for inclusion in the future:

- Description of effort by gear type
- More information on global warming trends particularly with respect to the arctic, location of sea ice, and how these impacts are manifested
- Hot links to updated information within the ecosystem chapter

- Compile list of questions to be addressed/data needs (i.e., what would be useful information to answer questions) which could help forging linkage to management

The Plan Teams discussed the recommendation that the Council be more involved in posing management-related questions for the ecosystem chapter to address. It was suggested that this could be the focus of summary section to answer questions pertinent to Council requests, and that a review of the ecosystem considerations chapter be presented to the Council in a similar fashion to their review of annual stock assessments.

Suggestions were made to have a PICES presentation to the Joint Teams regarding what regions and associated indicators are being compiled. The Teams struggled with the intent to decrease the volume of the ecosystem considerations chapter while still providing a comprehensive synthesized overview of all information. Suggestions were made to have a larger document as an appendix with a separate summary section which is updated annually and reviewed. The larger document would always be available (e.g., on the web) but only periodically produced and updated.

Ecosystem Assessment

Kerim Aydin presented an overview of the Ecosystem Assessment and on-going ecosystem modeling activities. He showed the Teams a website under development which will allow for the ecosystem assessment modeling outputs to be utilized in a filtered format. The Teams commended the work by the authors but cautioned that some of the results could be very controversial. Thus, while very useful, the website and results should appropriately recognize assumptions to keep from being misinterpreted. The authors reiterated that it is very important for stock assessment authors to understand that these models are only being conceived of as a tool for use as a preliminary investigation of inter-relationships amongst stocks. If stock assessment authors are interested in specific scenarios being run they can request this of the ecosystem assessment authors.

Marine Mammal Update

Lowell Fritz updated the Teams on results of the 2004 aerial SSL survey and the 2004 fur seal survey.

SSL Survey

Lowell noted that results from the 2004 aerial SSL survey found more animals than in previous years given the use of a new methodology. In general this improved format finds an increase of 3-5% more than the old method.

This year's medium format survey showed approximately an 11% increase overall in the western stock, thus given format issues this likely represents an approximate 6% increase. This shows a very similar pattern to results from 2 years ago. The only area showing a decrease was in the Central GOA. Results are still preliminary.

Fur Seals

Results from the July male seal counts showed a decline on St Paul from recent years. 2002 was the lowest on record since 1921. St. George showed similar low count results. While actual estimates are still being finalized, preliminary indications are of a continued decline in pup production.

Wrap-up

The Teams discussed the changes to the catch accounting system. It was noted that the system represents an improvement over the previous system, but that problems with the new system are related to non-managed species. These issues are due to be resolved in the next year but are unlikely to be resolved in time for the current year's assessments. Important issues were raised with respect to what results would be if the new system were applied to old data and would this result in any changes to those data? Would a retrospective analysis of this nature be possible? The Teams expressed an interest in having a presentation on the new catch accounting system for the November meeting by Dave Ackley.

The meeting adjourned at 12:45pm on Friday September 17th.

Gulf of Alaska Plan Team minutes

The meeting of the Gulf of Alaska groundfish Plan Team convened at 2pm on Thursday September 16, 2004.

Team members present were:

Jim Ianelli	AFSC REFM (GOA co-chair)
Diana Stram	NPFMC (GOA co-chair)
Sandra Lowe	AFSC REFM
Bill Clark	IPHC
Jeff Fujioka	AFSC ABL
Jon Heifetz	AFSC ABL
Robert Foy	UAF
Bill Bechtol	ADF&G
Tory O'Connell	ADF&G
Tom Pearson	NMFS AKRO
Beth Sinclair	AFSC MML
Sarah Gaichas	AFSC REFM

Absent: Kathy Kuletz, USF&W

Approximately 10 members of the public and agency staff were also in attendance.

Sharks

Dean Courtney gave an overview of a new proposed chapter for this year's SAFE Report on sharks in the GOA and BSAI. This chapter will provide a compilation of available information and data from multiple sources as well as summarize the available bycatch data and fishery-independent biomass data. The chapter is intended to provide advice regarding the sustainable incidental catch of some shark species.

Catch of shark species will be tabulated for individual fisheries and areas for monitoring potential incidental catch problems. Relative abundance trends for Pacific sleeper sharks will be included in the stock assessment. The report will be a stand-alone chapter similar to the 2003 "skates" section in the GOA SAFE. It may also appear in the BSAI SAFE in conjunction with the other species chapter since it covers sharks Alaska-wide.

The Plan Team members suggested including the IPHC bycatch data to look at distribution of Pacific sleeper sharks as the halibut survey may provide valuable information on sharks. It was noted that the chapter would benefit greatly by including actual numbers of sharks as well as the percentage estimates of bycatch relative to population estimates. Currently the Regional Office is working on species-specific catch estimation methods from the "other species" category. Changes in how the Regional Office estimate catches have hampered progress on non-targets for this year's assessment. Estimates of non-targets are likely to be unavailable for the November Plan Team.

This chapter was recommended to be included as an appendix to the GOA SAFE. This will also serve as a placeholder for future "Other Species" chapters (which may include a regular evaluation of species within this group).

Rex sole

Teresa A'Mar presented a draft stock assessment for rex sole. This is the first year that data on rex sole have been analyzed separately from "other" flatfish. The model, parameters, and results were presented. In keeping with Plan Team convention, new models undergo a year of review prior to being used for ABC specification purposes (pending approval). This analysis will represent an appendix to the flatfish chapter in November and may then be presented separately in 2005.

The model formulation is based upon the Dover sole model. The Team (and authors) noted a number of problems and issues with the analysis as presented. The overall modeling and data consistency seemed

quite good. However, there is a large difference between the age at 50% maturity and the age at 50% selectivity with the former occurring (apparently) at much younger ages than the latter. The effect of this is that harvest levels recommended tend to be very high since many fish have had numerous opportunities to spawn. Under a standard Tier 3 approach to estimating ABC and OFL, the harvest levels end up being very high. Since the authors and Plan Team members were concerned that the actual selectivity might change to younger fish should rex sole become a more focused target fishery, an alternative harvest rate was considered more appropriate. Some alternatives to consider in the future include:

1. Estimating F_{ABC} and F_{OFL} based on the minimum of the average yield minus $\frac{1}{2}$ times the variance of yield or use of another risk-averse loss function
2. Use of Tier 5 calculation since this is likely to be more precautionary in this case
3. Making adjustments to the fishery selectivity curve in order to set it closer to the maturity curve

The Team discussed these difficulties with the assessment and alternatives. While the maturity data is new, its reliability seems sound. A more careful evaluation of selectivity patterns, possibly by depth and area, is required. Adopting a Tier 3 policy for this species in the future should also weigh trade-offs in catch stability and other bycatch concerns. Presumably, these would be accounted for during the TAC specifications.

Questions were posed regarding the discard rates in the fishery and it was noted by a member of the public that rates are low as compared with other flatfish fisheries given that this species has the highest value of the flatfish fisheries. The majority of catch is from the directed fishery. Age data for the fishery was noted to be difficult from the catcher processor sector given that the fish are frozen whole. It was noted that seasonal depth distribution could be contributing to a possible problem with estimating fishery selectivity-at-age. More investigation should be given to potential seasonal effects and what portion of the catch is taken in which seasons. Highest catches were noted to be in April and October and only the July fishery is in conjunction with the survey. The Team suggested further evaluation be given to the differential mortality rates listed for males and females and questioned the ability to further analyze this as it is pertinent to all flatfish assessments.

The degree to which the commercial fleet target larger fish relative to the survey was questioned.

The Team would like to see additional information presented on the difference between fishery selectivity and survey selectivity as well as more details from the referenced study on maturity versus selectivity. The Team commends the work put forth by the assessment authors and decided to revisit the model and results next September prior adopting the model for use in making ABC recommendations.

Dover Sole

No additional information was presented at this time on Dover Sole.

GOA pollock

Martin Dorn and Chris Wilson presented an overview of preliminary results from the Spring 2004 Shelikof survey.

The survey results were similar to the last 3 years with no indication of a strong 2003 year class based on preliminary results. Relatively greater quantities of adult pollock were detected on the west side of Shelikof Strait which is different from the last 3 years' of surveying.

Preliminary results were presented from the summer 2003 survey. This was meant to be a feasibility study thus no Gulfwide estimates were intended. The top 5 species encountered, based on catch weights from the midwater and bottom trawls were: pollock, POP, herring, eulachon, and northern rockfish. These species were also the most common based on numbers caught, except that capelin should be substituted for herring. It is important to note that these catch estimates do not necessarily represent the

actual relative abundance of these species because of the manner in which the hauls are conducted. The survey was able to sample in areas 630 and 620 but not into 610. Plans are for a follow up survey in 2005.

Adult pollock were generally found along the shelf break. 4 yr olds were widely distributed throughout the study area and 1 year olds were often located in the bays on the Kenai.

Martin Dorn summarized the current information on the status of GOA pollock. The results from the Shelikof region appear stable but flat. There is no indication of strong recruitment. Results from the east side of Kodiak found young of year pollock but results are very preliminary. The winter survey did not cover as much area as in other years therefore there was no sense of how much spawning is occurring outside of Shelikof.

The Team discussed the preliminary results and status of the population with respect to recommendations for proposed specifications. It was noted that the model projection for the specification assumes an average 99 year class. Given the concerns with the survey results, the size of the 99 year class and the trend in the population, the Team recommended a rollover from the ABC for the proposed specifications (i.e., a rollover of 2004 ABC and OFLs to 2005 and 2006). The projection model indicated an increase and given the preliminary survey indications, this seemed less prudent.

Biennial Assessments for GOA Species

The Team discussed clarifications to the SAFE Report, Plan Team process and expectations of stock assessment authors given the new specifications process and the biennial specifications instituted for most GOA species.

It was determined that for species where biennial assessments are approved, no new assessments will be presented this year given that there will be no additional survey data until 2005. The Team thought it would be important to have an executive summary of all species whether or not a full analysis was completed. A list of some suggested inclusions for summary assessments were:

1. Citation for the assessment from previous year (perhaps with web address)
2. ABC and OFL for 2005-2006 with documentation for those estimates as well as justification for any adjustment to that estimate
3. Catch estimates for 04-05 if possible. Any new developments of concern: update on new available data
4. Response to any SSC comments.

The Team also discussed what criteria would be utilized to justify the need for an assessment in an “off” year regardless of the lack of summer survey data.

Using some sort of “potential threshold ABC change” as a determinant for whether a new assessment would be required was discussed and ultimately rejected. This also included evaluating patterns in any specific new information (e.g., a dramatic perceived change in abundance trend or fishery development). The Team agreed that the decision could be left at the discretion of the stock assessment author with guidance from the Council. The analysts should be able to evaluate how additional information (age-composition data, new fishery developing, etc.) would affect an assessment. Time at future September meetings should be devoted to help decide if assessments need to be done in an “off” year based on information and/or concerns about particular species or species groups.

GOA assessments that will continue to be produced annually include:

- Pollock
- Pacific cod
- Sablefish

Additional assessments likely to be included this year regardless of the lack of survey data include:

Preliminary assessment of Roughey rockfish
Dusky rockfish assessment (pending new information)
POP assessment

The Plan Team requested that stock assessment authors attend the November Plan Team meeting and be prepared to answer questions about their species. In particular, the Team seeks an evaluation of the suggested OFL and ABC and numbers from projections.

Light/dark dusky rockfish

Dave Clausen discussed a recent paper by Orr which officially separates light and dark dusky rockfish by species. They are now designated as “dusky rockfish”, (*Sebastes variabilis*: formerly called light dusky rockfish) and “dark rockfish” (*Sebastes ciliatus*: formerly called dark dusky rockfish). Given that dark rockfish share habitat with black rockfish, it seems reasonable at this time to pursue amending the FMP in order to remove dark rockfish to state management, similar to the decision to remove black and blue rockfish back in 1998. It was reiterated that annual stock assessments have encouraged removing dark rockfish to state management as soon as the identification of two species was official. Conversations with state management personnel indicated that that would be possible to fold into on-going state management initiatives

The Plan Team recommends moving dark rockfish to state management in the GOA. The Plan Team also suggests looking into moving dark rockfish in the BSAI as well as black and blue rockfish in BSAI to state management at the same time.

Shortraker/Roughey

The Team recapped some issues that were raised at the December Council meeting by the SSC regarding comments on the relative proportions of weighted gears by area for ABC apportionment between SR/RE. It was noted that the Team would like more clarification of this at the November meeting and requests a detailed explanation of the rationale for the assumptions and proportion of catch by gear type.

It was reported that Dana Hanselman is working on an age-structured model for estimating ABC for roughey rockfish. This analysis will be presented in an appendix to the November Plan Team meeting Slope Rockfish SAFE Report.

Proposed Specifications

The Plan Team approved the proposed ABCs and OFLs with the exception of pollock as noted previously. The Plan Team noted that any proposed TAC for skates which come from the proposed specifications in the CGOA should continue to account for the conservation of big and longnose skates in this region. The proposed specifications as presented do not account for this, but the previous year’s stock assessment as well as minutes from the Plan Team and SSC give the justification for establishing a conservative TAC in the CGOA (equal to the OFL for longnose skates) and the Team continues to recommend that the TAC for skates in the CGOA be conservatively set to account for noted conservation concerns.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30pm.

Draft BSAI Plan Team Minutes

The Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Plan Team convened on September 15-17, 2004. Members in attendance were Loh-Lee Low (AFSC, BSAI chair), Mike Sigler (ABL, vice chair), Jane DiCosimo (Council Plan Coordinator), Kerim Aydin (AFSC), Dave Carlile (ADF&G), Brenda Norcross (UAF), Andy Smoker (NMFS Region), Grant Thompson (AFSC), Ivan Vining (ADF&G). Kathy Kuletz (USFWS), Lowell Fritz (AFSC), and Bill Clark (IPHC), (attended GOA Team meeting) were not present.

Pacific cod split

The team reviewed a report by Grant Thompson on appropriate methods for separating BSAI Pacific cod ABC into subarea apportionments. The current method is a fixed split between the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. The team selected the Kalman filter over the current method because the filter adjusts the split for abundance changes in the two areas and considers the amounts of error in the abundance estimates. The team noted that if the AI population were to be set at tier 5, then there would not be an issue of “splitting” the BSAI specifications.

AI pollock

Steve Barbeaux presented a new model for assessing AI pollock. It was presented in November 2004, but was not applied because it was out of cycle for accepting new models. The team recommended that the authors continue their efforts at developing an age-structured model for AI pollock. Assessment of AI pollock is difficult because trawl survey biomass estimates are similar to maximum fishery catch, yet the large fishery catch did not affect the trawl survey abundance trend. The team recommended Tier 5 because the ABC recommendation likely is conservative, but noted the potential to apply Tier 3 to the stock. Catch could be used as a minimum biomass estimate but the upper bound is not known.

Rockfish

The team discussed whether the initiative in the GOA to consider removing dark rockfish (AKA “dark dusky rockfish”) from the GOA FMP should be extended to the BSAI. The teams and author discussed the potential management implications from a developing groundfish fishery out of Adak. The analysis (or a discussion paper) could identify whether a deferral to the State of Alaska is necessary or wanted. The team supported the non-target species initiative and noted the following discussion on whether to split shortspine thornyhead rockfish out of the other rockfish complex could be addressed there. The team thought it was reasonable to continue development of the model for shortspine thornyhead. It recommended the following: (1) relax the assumption that the stock starts at K; (2) drop $M = 0.013$ from consideration; and (3) add a discussion of natural mortality values estimated by Kline and Miller.

TACs

The teams recommended the BSAI OFL and ABC projections for 2005 and 2006 as presented by Jim Ianelli. The teams noted that it has recommended a different method for setting the “other species” ABC and likely will recommend the same methodology in November 2005. It may recommend separating shortspine thornyheads from the other rockfish complex, and may recommend that black and dark dusky rockfish be removed from the BSAI FMP to be consistent with action to remove those species from the GOA FMP under GOA Plan Amendment 46 in 1998.

Draft Agenda
September 2004 Plan Team Meeting
AFSC, Seattle

Wednesday September 15: 1pm-5pm

Joint Plan Teams:

- Update on Council-related items: HAPC Process, EFH EIS, PSEIS timeline and issues pertinent to Plan Teams, GOA Rationalization/Central GOA Rockfish Pilot Rationalization Program, Proposed revisions to National Standard 1 Guidelines, Non-Target Species committee work, possible alternative management strategies for rockfish, IRIU (BSAI amendment 80 update)
- Overview of BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMP revisions: questions, clarification (per SSC on definitions) etc as necessary
- Presentation of on-going research by Fishery Interaction Team

Thursday September 16:

Joint Plan Teams:

9am-12pm

- Proposed specification changes: TAC-Setting Process changes and TAC-Setting EA
- Economic SAFE Report
- Joint Stock Assessment presentation on BSAI and GOA flatfish species
- Rockfish Management
- Pacific cod BS and AI , GOA subarea apportionments

1pm-5pm: Individual Teams:

GOA Plan Team:

- GOA pollock
- Rex Sole
- Dover Sole
- Sharks
- Shortraker/rougheye
- Light/dark dusky rockfish

- AI pollock
- BS pollock
- AI survey results
- AI special management area discussion
- BSAI thornyhead

Friday September 17:

Joint Plan Teams:

- Update on 2004 aerial SSL survey
- Ecosystem Considerations Chapter
- Ecosystem Assessment
- Joint Teams wrap up

BSAI Plan Team:

Plan Team comments and suggestions on the current HAPC process

(from: “Report of the NPFMC Joint Plan Teams’ review of proposals for Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) March 8-9, 2004”)

The Teams generally expressed appreciation to be included in the process of establishing useful HAPC designations. This issue is important and can have far-reaching consequences for developing innovative management strategies. The Council requested comments from the Teams about the effectiveness of this style of review process.

The Teams’ felt that more input on writing the “directions for reviewers” and on criteria might have helped alleviate some ambiguity.

The Teams’ discussed the pros and cons of establishing a smaller subset of plan team members assigned specifically to a HAPC review workgroup (along with a number of experts). Many plan team members felt that could be more efficient than requesting that all members of all Plan Teams participate in the full review process. Such a workgroup could then report back to the full Plan Team their findings similar to other working groups (e.g., “Other species” working group, Crab overfishing working group). However, other plan team members discussed that the inclusion of all Team members brought together diverse experiences and expertise and provided for a more comprehensive review. This was felt to be constructive initially and served to raise the level of general understanding about habitat issues to those involved in FMP implementations (where these types of concerns have not traditionally played a large role). The Teams’ acknowledged that time and opportunity to involve additional expertise from outside of the plan teams would have been beneficial in the process.

An evaluation of the level of data utilized in the proposal as well as the level of scientific uncertainty inherent in that data would be useful in this review.

Citations should be submitted in full for these proposals such that reviewers could pursue these citations if necessary to evaluate their relevance. Grey literature should be accessible and would assist reviewers.

A general habitat inventory should be made available. If this is unavailable, it should be a priority for agency work. This would serve a number of purposes, one of which would be to provide a uniform basis for evaluating HAPC sites.

As noted above under “Plan Team concerns,” it was difficult to evaluate proposals in a consistent manner according to established criteria. Also, there was a lack of time available to debate and discuss a number of critical concepts and measures.

The Teams struggled with the notion in many proposals that HAPC sites that lack information should be designated HAPC *first*, and then evaluated for refinements and further research to determine if the designation was appropriate. Since HAPC are discretionary tools for Council use, a HAPC designation should be based on information that is currently available rather than on speculation. That said, perhaps HAPC proposals that fit this description should fall into a separate research priority category. This would provide the Council with a subset of sites that may not fit the HAPC criteria, but may reflect a higher priority research area.

Several sites proposed were areas already closed to trawling, hence the question of how to treat the Council’s priority on “stress” was raised. Since Council guidance did not specify the type of fishing activity, the Teams interpreted any fishing activity (e.g., fixed gear such as longline and pots) in considering the degree of stress.

Additional data concerns centered on the determination of extent of relative fishing pressure by proposal area. This was notably difficult for reviewers to assess given only the information provided in the proposal though it was noted that some additional information was provided by staff. While it was noted that confidentiality issues may be problematic, it was suggested that in the future catch data be provided in some aggregated form such as within statistical areas.

The number of proposals and limited time to review them did not leave sufficient time to discuss important concepts like the size of buffers around areas, maintaining habitat types as well as connected groups of habitat types, and the overall management objectives for HAPCs.

The Teams noted that the same sites were identified in a number of proposals, but varying levels of scientific information were utilized for each site. There should be consistent availability of data for proposed sites such that it would then raise the levels of information available for use by all proposers and therefore increase the quality and consistency of all proposals. Mixing of sites within proposals made them difficult to evaluate (i.e. pinnacles and seamounts). Proposers could likely have done a much better job in their respective proposals had they been advised to separate out these conflicting and sometimes confusing mixtures of areas and habitat types.

Finally evaluating individual HAPC sites (regardless of who proposed them) rather than evaluating duplicative sites by individual proposal would have been more beneficial and increased the utility of proposal review. The Plan Teams understand that during this review this was not necessarily feasible under the time constraints and thus the Teams evaluated each proposal individually. However it is the Teams understanding that it is the individual sites and relative merits thereof that will eventually be evaluated in any forthcoming analysis.