



120th Meeting of the Scientific and Statistical Committee
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SSC REPORT

Report on the Tier 3 Panel Review of the Bottomfish Stock Assessment Updates for American Samoa, Guam, and Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands

Dr. Erik Franklin, Chair of the Tier 3 WPSAR Panel, presented on the summary and highlights of the WPSAR review of the Territorial Bottomfish Stock Assessment Updates held at the Council Office Conference Room on August 11-12, 2015. The Tier 3 review panel consisted of Dr. Franklin, Dr. Milani Chaloupka, and Dr. Donald Kobayashi. Overall, the panel had consensus and found that the results and conclusions were reliable and sound including the estimated population benchmarks and management parameters for the updated draft stock assessment (Yau et al, May 29, 2015) for the bottomfish fisheries of American Samoa, CNMI and Guam given the limitations in available datasets. The Panel further found that this updated assessment is considered adequate for management-decision making at this time. The panel provided several recommendations in the next benchmark to improve the assessment

Report on the final Bottomfish Stock Assessment Updates for American Samoa, Guam, and Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands

Dr. Christofer Boggs presented on the Science Center's response to the Tier 3 WPSAR Panel review comments. Overall, the WPSAR Tier 3 review provided helpful directions for the future benchmark assessment. The reviewers did not have any immediate revision or changes to the current form of the stock assessment. The majority of the recommendations will be considered on the next benchmark assessment. The final version of the assessment will be published as part of the public record.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

SSC Discussion and Recommendations

The SSC heard the report of the WPSAR Tier 3 Panel Review of Stock Assessment Updates of the Bottomfish Management Unit Species of American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam in 2015 Using Data through 2013.

The SSC concurs with the WPSAR Tier 3 review panel's joint findings on the seven terms of reference examined within the review. It was noted that the findings of each of the three reviewers

were in close concurrence and no dissenting or conflicting views were stated while each review provided greater detail and additional useful information.

Specifically, the SSC concurs that the assessment updates are adequate for management-decision making at this time. Therefore, the SSC determined that the 2015 Bottomfish Stock Assessment Updates are currently the best scientific information available for the bottomfish management unit species in American Samoa, Guam, and CNMI.

SSC members voiced the opinion that recommendations 3, 4, 5, 10, and 12 were particularly important. Dr. Boggs (presenter, PIFSC) indicated that the final report would include some of the minor recommendations to the extent possible, including the inclusion of analysis scripts and input data files in an appendix (a recommendation in Terms of Reference #2.)

Regarding the 2nd panel recommendation, it was noted that the depth contours used in the publication which the Our Living Oceans reports were based upon were very smooth because of the limited resolution of the available depth data. Since incrementally better data were available subsequently, contours developed later should not be processed with the same multiplier, since that multiplier is specific for the smoother contours from older depth data. This is particularly significant for areas where one region's habitat area may have better resolution depth data and where MSY was not presented in the original publication.

Regarding the 6th panel recommendation, it was pointed out that the CPUE standardization followed typical practice, basically selecting for the major players in harvesting the fish. It was suggested that the best fishers might be most capable of adjusting to reduced fish abundance resulting in smoothing out changes in actual abundance. Since it might be reasonable to expect that the poorer fishers might not have the ability to make these adjustments, it was suggested that it might be productive to select for the poorer fishers and include them in the assessment.

Regarding the 8th panel recommendation, the discussion clarified that the emphasis was on how fishers altered their operations in response to environmental changes themselves as well as how they dealt with changes in fish behavior and the catchability of the fish.

It was suggested that recommendations 1-4 were very important to improve future assessments while the rest were desirable but less urgent. Dr. Boggs noted that if the current stock assessment update is to be deemed adequate for management purposes, an attempt would be made to address some recommendations. Recommendations, such as #12 calling for greater spatial resolution that would require specific funding would be more difficult to address. However, it was noted that most of the work required for future stock assessments could be covered by existing Science Center staff.

The SSC commended the quality and detail contained in the review report and thanked the review panel for their efforts.