



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Report from the Joint Meeting of the Groundfish Plan Teams

November 12, 2024

BSAI Groundfish Plan Team Members:

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|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Steve Barbeaux | AFSC REFM (co-chair) | Kirstin Holsman | AFSC REFM |
| Kalei Shotwell | AFSC REFM (co-chair) | Andy Kingham | AFSC FMA |
| Cindy Tribuzio | AFSC ABL (vice chair) | Beth Matta | AFSC REFM |
| Diana Stram | NPFMC (coordinator) | Andrew Seitz | UAF |
| Lukas DeFilippo | AFSC ABL/EMA | Jane Sullivan | AFSC ABL |
| Allan Hicks | IPHC | Steven Whitney | NMFS AKRO |
| Lisa Hillier | WDFW | | |

GOA Groundfish Plan Team Members:

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|-------------------|----------------------|---------------|-----------|
| Jim Ianelli | AFSC REFM (co-chair) | Pete Hulson | AFSC ABL |
| Chris Lunsford | AFSC ABL (co-chair) | Sandra Lowe | AFSC REFM |
| Sara Cleaver | NPFMC (coordinator) | Nat Nichols | ADF&G |
| Abby Jahn | NMFS AKRO | Jan Rumble | ADF&G |
| Craig Faunce | AFSC FMA | Paul Spencer | AFSC REFM |
| Lisa Hillier | WDFW | Ben Williams | AFSC ABL |
| Sophia Wassermann | AFSC RACE | James Thorson | AFSC REFM |

Introduction

The Joint meeting for the Groundfish Plan Teams (“Teams”) began on Tuesday, November 12, 2024 at 9:00am PST at the AFSC. Participation was both in person and offered remotely via Zoom. Roughly 40 people attended the meeting in person, with many more signed in remotely, but attendance varied throughout the meeting. All documents and presentations were posted to the Teams’ [electronic agenda](#). All presentations are also linked in the header for each agenda item in this report.

Future meetings: Week of September 16-19, 2025, November 10, & 12-14. Note there will be a stand down over the Veteran’s Day holiday on November 11th.

Economic SAFE Report

Rusty Dame presented the Economic Summary of the BSAI commercial groundfish fisheries in 2022-2023 (economic SAFE).

The Economic SAFE presentation detailed information about economic aspects of the groundfish fisheries, including figures and tables that report historical catch, finished production, and ex-vessel and wholesale value, for harvesting and processing sectors for a range of factors (gear, species, management area, product type), and a set of economic performance indices. The presentation included in-season catch and ex-vessel revenue estimates for groundfish and halibut, and wholesale market profiles for the most commercially valuable species.

The author reiterated that in general most stocks lost value in 2023, which was generally due to a decrease in prices. The author noted that Nowcasts have been brought back to the current SAFE, and responded to Teams questions that the Nowcasts use data through October 2024.

The Teams asked if industry labor costs will be incorporated in SAFEs and the author responded that this is a subject being explored internally. Members of the public noted that prices have continued to decrease in 2024 below what is included in the SAFE.

Sablefish Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profile (ESP)

Kalei Shotwell and Rusty Dame presented the report card for the sablefish ESP. Specific to the ecosystem indicators, the author was looking for feedback on the content of the information included. The Teams did not have any feedback for this meeting. Specific to the socioeconomic indicators, the Teams suggested including price data from the Chatham fishery in Southeast Alaska because it could be a good contrasting indicator from the IFQ fishery data for trends and size grades. The authors noted that they would look into this data for inclusion in a future sablefish ESP. The Teams asked if there was a difference between catcher processors and catcher vessels for prices by size grade. The authors noted that there is a downward trend regardless of size category. Additionally, there are incomplete data for the catcher processors because size grade is a voluntarily entered field.

A member of the public asked why there is a downward trend for prices for the 5-7 lb size category and the authors clarified that this decline could be due to export prices but will continue looking into why this trend exists and may have more information for the next cycle.

Sablefish Assessment

Dan Goethel presented the operational update assessment for Alaska sablefish. There were no model changes from 2023 SAFE and no surveys or indices were updated in 2024.

The Teams discussed the fits to the compositional data and potential improvements. Recent year classes are initially overestimated, then underestimated in the longline survey and fixed gear fishery age compositions, with discrepancies in fitting age compared to length data by fleet. Poor aggregate fits may be influenced by gear-type selectivity and/or time invariant growth. The Teams encouraged the author to explore incorporating dynamic input sample sizes for the composition data, or McAllister-Ianelli or Dirichlet-multinomial weighing, and estimating the sex ratio. **The Teams recommended the author explore the potential impact of time-varying selectivity, either by directly modeling it as a time-varying process or by mitigating its impact on other parameters, such as by exploring changes in the set of ages over which the age-length comps are fitted. The Teams recommended exploration of data-weighting methods that can be estimated jointly with changes in the variance of the time-varying selectivity parameters.**

Model fits to the abundance indices were also discussed at length. Generally, there were adequate fits to indices of abundance, but poor fits to the NOAA GOA bottom trawl survey especially in 2023, and the fishery CPUE indices. **The Teams recommended that the author perform a runs test of randomness to test autocorrelation in the fits to the indices.** The runs test is a residuals test that has been commonly used to diagnose fits to indices and other data components in assessment models as a strong non-random pattern in residuals may indicate model misspecification.

The Teams recognized that a lot of effort has been put into the development and use of the fishery CPUE indices (Cheng et al. 2023), which consists of logbook and observer data. The logbooks have a broader spatial and temporal extent than the observer data. However, funding this program through the IPHC is no longer a viable option and future plans are to expand this into an eLog program. The Teams were concerned about the loss of logbook data historically provided by IPHC. **If there are sufficient data, the Teams recommended exploring ways to update the standardized fishery CPUE index using only observer data.** The Teams noted that the loss of future fishery independent surveys may increase demand for this fishery dependent information.

The Teams supported the authors' future research priorities that include resolving trends in residual patterns, primarily through improved modeling of sex-specific sablefish dynamics.

The Teams agreed with the authors' recommended model, 23.5, and the resulting ABCs and OFLs with the whale depredation decrements included. The Teams also agreed with the apportionment strategy presented by the author based on the 5-year average survey biomass proportions by area.

BSAI and GOA Forage Fish

Johanna Vollenweider presented the Alaska Forage Fish Ecosystem Report for the BSAI and GOA. Johanna is the new author for forage fish, so the report this year was largely similar to past years, but with updated survey and catch data. The Teams commended the author on the report, and a member of the public applauded the usefulness of this report to the industry and how the report has evolved over time.

The Teams recommended the report begin with a statement that the purpose of this report is tracking trends in fishery bycatch for management purposes. This would provide clarity that the reports are intended to focus less on the specifics of potential modeling explorations. However, the Teams reiterated that the author has latitude to proceed with additional modeling explorations if they also serve other purposes.

The Teams had several points of discussion including:

- The pros and cons of computing an index of biomass to compare to fisheries bycatch. The Teams encouraged exploration of potential metrics, such as proxy exploitation rates (at the author's discretion), to help review bodies better understand the balance between population levels and catch removals.
- Whether forage fish data on the AI and BS should be aggregated together, due to how few data there are from the AI.
- Whether certain indicators belong in the forage fish report or the ESRs. Specifically, the Teams noted that this report is produced every other year, whereas the ESRs are produced annually and therefore the indicators that occur only in the forage fish report would not be available for use in risk tables annually. Additionally, the Teams noted that the same indicator could appear in both the ESR and Forage Fish SAFE report, with the expectation that there would be different context and interpretation provided when the index was reproduced. For example, the same forage fish biomass index might appear in both the ESR and Forage Fish SAFE, where it was used to interpret ecosystem patterns in the ESR and as context for interpreting bycatch in the Forage Fish SAFE. That any discussions about restructuring between forage reports and ESRs could happen internally at AFSC.

Grenadiers

Grenadiers are a non-target species in the Ecosystem Component of the GOA and BSAI FMPs. Kevin Siwicke presented an update to the assessment of grenadiers that was last presented in 2000. Kevin highlighted the new use of the Random Effects Model for Assessments (REMA) for the EBS and GOA subregions. Biomass and average size trajectories are declining in all areas and bycatch is very low. Almost all of the available data were from giant grenadiers.

One Team member suggested that the size trajectories be examined by depth area. Kevin reminded the Team that because the survey is only going down to 500m and giant grenadiers are mostly found in waters greater than 700 m, we don't have a firm grasp on what the population as a whole is doing over time.