



June 14, 1999

Dr. William W. Fox, Jr.
Director, Office of Science and Technology
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Fox:

The Center of Independent Experts has completed another review. In it, Dr. Robert Mohn (Canada) participated in a STAR Panel meeting in La Jolla. The primary product of his review will be reflected in the STAR documents that are being finalized by the NWFSC. Dr. Mohn also provided us with a brief summary of his activities and findings, which I enclose. It is my understanding that your Office will forward the document to the appropriate places in NMFS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Robert K. Cowen".

Robert K. Cowen
Professor and Maytag Chair of Ichthyology

c: Steering Committee Members
V. Restrepo

encl.: Review

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Report to the UM Independent System for Peer Reviews.

Submitted by R. Mohn for STAR Panel of May 24-28, 1999

Overview:

The STAR Panel reviewed two stocks: 1) cowcod which was analytically assessed for the first time and 2) black rockfish which has not been assessed since 1994. The STAR panel consisted of the Chair, Rick Methot, Ray Conser and myself. The assessment teams were well prepared, highly motivated and accepted criticism and suggestions in a professional manner. Because only two stocks were under review, and because of they were relatively 'new', the Chair allowed a lot of time for discussion and development of models and ideas. This probably led to a better review and more meaningful direction to the authors. On the other hand, it meant that the documentation was less fully prepared by the end of the meeting than might otherwise have been the case. See point 4) below.

Activities:

Upon receipt of the relevant documents, they were read and summarized and questions compiled. Neither assessment was complete to the projection /decision table phase, and considerable analysis was performed during the meeting. At the STAR Panel I assumed the lead for writing the black rockfish portion of the proceedings. Also, because of the time made available for analysis, I prepared some simple data analyses to complement the fairly technical level of analysis presented in the assessment. These analyses included catch composition, survivorship and simple VPAs. As well, during breaks in the meeting, I would try to talk the various individual researchers aside and give specific technical recommendations for analysis or ideas for to clarify the presentation of results.

Review related observations:

1) For both stocks relatively sophisticated analyses were used (Stock synthesis or A/D Model synthesis). A lot of effort was done before the meeting to review and compile relevant data. Of particular note was the cowcod where many data sources were presented including a spatial analysis of CPUE. The reliance on synthesis was at the cost of simpler analyses e.g., age-aggregated models, growth, survivorship or other biological time series. The inclusion of simpler models, which I observed at SARC last year, gives an enhanced insight into the underlying uncertainty which cannot be inferred from uncertainties related to the goodness of fit from a particular model alone. It is also often easier to communicate results to industry from simpler models and analysis.

2) The STAR system limits the Panel to reviewing no more than 2 stocks. This means there is enough time to thoroughly review the fishery and data, which in turn makes it much easier for an external reviewer to understand the issues involved. I encourage this limitation, but understand that it either adds to the cost of resource review or means that stocks are assessed less frequently.

3) Neither assessment was completed to the projection/decision table phase before the meeting. I understand the reluctance of the authors to carry through a complete analysis in the knowledge that the Panel may well recommend new models and all the projections will become, to some degree, obsolete. However, I believe it is valuable to come to the meeting with a 'base' model which has been completely analyzed. This assures that the relevant data, software, formats, etc. are available and checked before the meeting. Even if the base model is changed during the meeting, having all the bits in place will save time. Furthermore, it is valuable to have the full run to act as a standard to check against for any coding errors that may be accidentally introduced by last minute changes.

4) The Chair allowed a great deal of discussion and analysis to be carried out during the meeting, to the benefit of both the authors and reviewers. Time for writing up and summarizing was thus reduced. Clearly stating what was expected at the start of the meeting and measuring progress against these objectives would have structured our time and discussion more effectively. I realize that this criticism is somewhat subjective, and could almost be a style of chairing item, but feel that on balance there was insufficient time given to the synthesis and documentation.

Project administration related observations: (both repeats from last report)

1) More specificity in what is expected of us would help. These should not be restrictive but would help focus one's efforts and avoid overlooking something. I realize that it will probably take a couple of iterations to get the roles refined.

2) It would be useful to have a standardized format (perhaps including a checklist) for constructing this or similar reports.