

## SAFE Report

by

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## SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES IN THE PELAGIC SHELF ROCKFISH ASSESSMENT

Relative to the November 1999 SAFE report, no substantive changes have been made. Minor changes include updating commercial and research catch data in Table 7.1, adding commercial length frequencies for 1999 to Figure 7.1, presenting age results for light dusky rockfish from the 1996 triennial survey, and recalculating F and yield for Scenario 3 in section 7.7 (harvest scenarios).

## 7.1

## INTRODUCTION

The pelagic shelf rockfish assemblage in the Gulf of Alaska is comprised of three species: dusky rockfish (*Sebastes ciliatus*), yellowtail rockfish (*S. flavidus*), and widow rockfish (*S. entomelas*). This assemblage is one of three management groups for *Sebastes* in the Gulf which were implemented in 1988 by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). Pelagic shelf rockfish can be defined as those species of *Sebastes* that inhabit waters of the continental shelf of the Gulf of Alaska, and that typically exhibit a midwater, schooling behavior. Gulfwide, dusky rockfish is the most important species in the assemblage, whereas yellowtail and widow rockfish are generally considered minor species in Alaska waters.

Dusky rockfish has one of the most northerly distributions of all rockfish species in the Pacific. It ranges from southern British Columbia north to the Bering Sea and west to Hokkaido Is., Japan, but appears to be abundant only in the Gulf of Alaska. No studies have been done to determine if the Gulf of Alaska population is one stock, or if subpopulations occur.

The taxonomy of dusky rockfish is unclear, and biochemical studies (Seeb 1986 and footnote<sup>1</sup>) and morphometric studies<sup>2</sup> indicate that two distinct species of dusky rockfish likely occur in the Gulf of Alaska: an inshore, shallow water, dark-colored variety; and a lighter-colored variety found in deeper water offshore. No actual reclassification of dusky rockfish has yet been made, but a publication is currently in preparation that will propose the formal separation of the two varieties into distinct species<sup>3</sup>. In this report, nearly all the discussion on dusky rockfish will concern the offshore, light-colored variety, since most information is available from offshore trawl surveys and the offshore commercial fishery.

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<sup>1</sup>Seeb, L.W. 2000. Molecular markers distinguish light and dark forms of the dusky rockfish (*S. ciliatus*) in the Gulf of Alaska. Presentation at the 11<sup>th</sup> Western Groundfish Conference, Sitka, Alaska, April 25-28, 2000.

<sup>2</sup>Orr, J.W., and J. Blackburn. 2000. Morphology and systematics of dusky rockfish: the *Sebastes ciliatus* problem. Presentation at the 11<sup>th</sup> Western Groundfish Conference, Sitka, Alaska, April 25-28, 2000.

<sup>3</sup>J. Orr, National Marine Fisheries Service, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, RACE Division, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, BIN C15700, Seattle, WA 98115-0070. Pers. commun. October 2000.

Until 1998, black rockfish (*S. melanops*) and blue rockfish (*S. mystinus*) were also included in the assemblage. However, in April 1998, a NPFMC Gulf of Alaska Fishery Management Plan amendment went into effect that removed these two species from the federal management plan and transferred their jurisdiction to the state of Alaska. Because of their removal from the assemblage, black and blue rockfish are no longer covered in this report.

## 7.2

## FISHERY

### 7.2.1 Catch History

Fishery catch statistics for pelagic shelf rockfish in the Gulf of Alaska are only available for the years 1988-2000 (Table 7-1a). Previous to 1988, these fish were classified into another, larger management group ("other rockfish"), and it is generally not possible to separate out catches of the pelagic shelf species. Generally, annual catches increased from 1988 to 1992, and have fluctuated in the years following. This pattern is largely explained by management actions that have affected rockfish during this period. In the years before 1991, TAC's were relatively large for more desirable slope rockfish species such as Pacific ocean perch, and there was less reason for fishermen to target a lower valued fish such as dusky rockfish. However, as TAC's for slope rockfish became more restrictive in the early 1990's, there was a greater economic incentive for taking dusky rockfish. As a result, catches of the pelagic shelf assemblage increased, reaching 3,605 mt Gulfwide in 1992. In following years, in-season management regulations have usually prevented any further increase in the dusky rockfish fishery, and have sometimes caused a decrease in catch. For example, in 1997, 1998, and 2000, the pelagic shelf rockfish trawl fisheries in both the Central and Eastern areas were closed with a substantial amount of unharvested TAC remaining to ensure that catches did not exceed the TAC, and also to prevent bycatch of Pacific ocean perch.

It should be mentioned that the catches in Table 7-1a include black and blue rockfish for the years 1988-97, when these species were members of the pelagic shelf assemblage. A significant black rockfish jig fishery existed in the Gulf of Alaska starting in 1991, but precise catches of black rockfish for these years are not available. Clausen and Heifetz (1997) provided approximations of the Gulfwide annual catches of black rockfish for the years 1991-97. The approximation for 1997 was later revised in the 1998 SAFE report (Clausen and Heifetz 1998). These approximations can be subtracted from the Gulfwide totals in Table 7-1a to yield the following estimates of pelagic shelf rockfish catch for the three species that now comprise the assemblage:

Year	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>
Catch (mt)	1,773	3,163	3,041	2,610	2,342	1,834	2,280

Catches of pelagic shelf rockfish from research cruises since 1977 are listed in Table 7-1b.

### 7.2.2 Description of the Fishery

Pelagic shelf rockfish (excluding its former members black and blue rockfish) have been caught almost exclusively with bottom trawls. Species composition data for the present species in the assemblage are shown below for the trawl fishery in the years 1991-99, based on data from the domestic observer program:

Year	<u>Percent of assemblage catch</u>			
	Light dusky	Dark dusky	Yellowtail	Widow
1991	93.5	0.2	5.1	1.2
1992	98.9	0.3	trace	0.8
1993	98.1	trace	0.5	1.4
1994	98.3	1.2	0.1	0.4
1995	99.2	trace	trace	0.8
1996	99.7	trace	trace	0.3
1997	99.9	trace	trace	0.1
1998	99.9	trace	trace	trace
1999	97.4	2.6	trace	trace

A small portion of these data may also come from longline vessels that carried observers, which could account for some of the yellowtail and dark dusky rockfish listed. Clearly, with the possible exception of 1991, nearly all the trawl catch consists of "light" dusky rockfish.

The trawl fishery for light dusky rockfish in the Gulf of Alaska in recent years has occurred mostly in July, because management regulations do not allow rockfish trawling in the Gulf until the first week in July. The same trawlers that target Pacific ocean perch and northern rockfish also target light dusky rockfish. Typically, these vessels fill the quota first for Pacific ocean perch, and after this fishery is closed, move on to catch dusky and northern rockfish. Catches of light dusky rockfish are concentrated at a number of relatively shallow, offshore banks of the outer continental shelf, especially the "W" grounds west of Yakutat, Portlock Bank northeast of Kodiak Is, and around Albatross Bank south of Kodiak Is. Highest catch-per-unit-effort in the commercial fishery is generally at depths of 100-149 m (Reuter 1998). During the period 1988-95, almost all the catch of light dusky rockfish (>95%) was taken by large factory trawlers that processed the fish at sea. This changed starting in 1996, when smaller shore-based trawlers also began taking a sizeable portion of the catch in the Central area for delivery to processing plants in Kodiak. These shore-based trawlers accounted for 27% of the trawl catch in the Central area in 1996, 18% in 1997, 28% in 1998, 45% in 1999, and 76% in 2000.

### 7.2.3 Bycatch

The only analysis of bycatch in rockfish fisheries of the Gulf of Alaska is that of Heifetz and Ackley (1997). They examined data from the observer program for the years 1993-95. For hauls targeting pelagic shelf rockfish, the major bycatch species were fish in the "other slope rockfish" management category and northern rockfish, followed by Pacific ocean perch. Similarly, dusky rockfish was the major bycatch species for hauls targeting northern rockfish. These conclusions are supported by another study (Reuter 1998), in which catch data from the observer program showed dusky rockfish were most commonly associated with northern rockfish, Pacific ocean perch, and harlequin rockfish (the latter is one of the "other slope rockfish" species). There is no information on the bycatch of pelagic shelf rockfish in non-rockfish fisheries, but it is presumed to be small.

#### 7.2.4 Discards

Discard rates for pelagic shelf rockfish in the trawl fishery have been relatively low, as shown in the following table<sup>4</sup>:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Discard rate (%)</u>
1991	10.2
1992	5.9
1993	10.8
1994	9.4
1995	6.3
1996	10.9
1997	6.4
1998	4.8
1999	9.3
2000	3.3

In contrast, discard rates in the fisheries for slope rockfish in the Gulf of Alaska have generally been much higher (see section 6.2.4 of the slope rockfish report in this document).

### 7.3

### DATA

#### 7.3.1 Fishery Data

In addition to the catch data listed in Table 7-1, length frequency data for dusky rockfish in the commercial fishery are also available for the years 1991-99 (Figure 7-1). The reader is cautioned that for each year, these data are the raw length frequencies for all dusky rockfish measured by observers; because there was no attempt to collect or analyze these data systematically, some biases may be expected, especially for 1995 and 1996 when sample sizes were relatively small. Generally, however, these lengths were taken from hauls in which dusky rockfish was either the target or a dominant species, and they provide an indication of the trends in size composition for the fishery. Size of fish taken by the fishery generally appears to have increased after 1992; in particular, the mode increased from 42 cm in 1991-92 to 44-47 cm in 1993-97. The mode then decreased to 42 cm in 1998, and rose back to 45 cm in 1999. Fish smaller than 40 cm are seen in moderate numbers in certain years (1991-92 and 1996-98), but it is unknown if this is an artifact of observer sampling patterns, or if it shows true influxes of younger fish.

Age data for light dusky rockfish in the commercial fishery were collected for the first time in 1999, but aging has not been completed on this sample.

#### 7.3.2 Survey Data

##### 7.3.2.1 Survey Biomass Estimates

Comprehensive triennial trawl surveys were conducted in the Gulf of Alaska in 1984, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1996, and 1999. These surveys provide estimates of biomass for pelagic shelf rockfish (Table 7-2). The estimates for the 1984 through 1996 surveys showed that dusky rockfish comprised virtually all the biomass of the assemblage. In 1999, dusky rockfish again predominated, but a relatively large biomass of yellowtail

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<sup>4</sup>National Marine Fisheries Service, Alaska Region, P.O. 21668, Juneau, AK 99802. Data are from weekly production and observer reports through September 30, 2000.

rockfish was also seen in the Southeastern area. This yellowtail rockfish biomass can be mostly attributed to one relatively large catch in Dixon Entrance near the U.S./Canada boundary. Dusky rockfish were separated into “light” or “dark” varieties only in the 1996 and 1999 surveys, which showed that dark dusky rockfish were caught in only small quantities. Presumably, the dusky rockfish biomass in previous surveys also consisted of nearly all light dusky rockfish. On a geographic basis, the Kodiak statistical area has shown the highest biomass of dusky rockfish in all years of the survey except 1984. Biomass estimates for the assemblage have been consistently lowest in the Southeastern area, with the exception of 1999.

Comparative biomass estimates for the six triennial surveys show wide fluctuations in the abundance of dusky rockfish (Table 7-2; Figure 7-2). Total biomass increased substantially between 1984 and 1987, dropped by over 50% in 1990, rebounded in 1993 and 1996, and decreased again in 1999. Large confidence intervals are associated with all these biomass estimates, and are an indication of the generally patchy and highly aggregated distribution of this species. None of the changes in biomass appear to be statistically significant. Whether these fluctuations indicate true changes in abundance, temporal changes in the availability of dusky rockfish to the survey gear, or are an artifact of the imprecision of the survey for this species, is unknown. However, because of the apparently light fishing pressure on dusky rockfish during most of these years (catches have usually been much less than the ABC), and their relatively low rate of natural mortality (see section 7.4.1, “Assessment Parameters”), large and abrupt changes in abundance such as those shown by the trawl surveys seem unlikely.

#### 7.3.2.2 Survey Size Compositions

Survey population size compositions suggest that recruitment of dusky rockfish is a relatively infrequent event, as only one survey, 1993, showed evidence of substantial recruitment (see Clausen and Heifetz 1989 for 1987 results and Figure 7-3 for 1990, 1993, 1996, and 1999 results). Size compositions of dusky rockfish from both the 1987 and 1990 surveys showed virtually no fish <35 cm. Mean population length increased from 39.8 cm in 1987 to 43.1 cm in 1990, apparently the result of growth. In 1993, however, a large number of small fish (~27-35 cm long) appeared which formed a sizeable percentage of the population, and this recruitment decreased the mean length to 38.3 cm. It is interesting to note, however, that no corresponding numbers of small fish are seen in the fishery length frequency data for this year (see Figure 7-1). In the 1996 and 1999 surveys, the length frequency distribution was similar to that of 1990, with very few small fish, and both years had a mean population length of 43.9 cm. An estimated 88% of the population in 1999 was greater than or equal to 40 cm in length.

#### 7.3.2.3 Survey Age Compositions

Gulfwide age composition data for dusky rockfish are available for the 1987, 1990, 1993, and 1996 surveys (Figure 7-4), and, similar to the length data, these age data also indicate that recruitment is highly variable. The 1996 data are presented here for the first time. For each survey, ages were determined using the “break-and-burn” method of aging otoliths, and a Gulfwide age-length key was developed. The key was then used to estimate age composition of the dusky rockfish population in the Gulf of Alaska. In 1987, just 4 year classes (1975, 1976, 1977, and 1980) comprised over 75% of the estimated population, and mean age was 10.3 years. In the 1990 age composition, the 1976 and 1979 year classes were especially prominent, with 1975 and 1980 also being important (Figure 7-3). The 1990 results showed no significant recruitment and appeared to merely reflect growth of the population that existed in 1987; mean age was 13.9 years. The 1993 age composition showed a very prominent 1986 year class. This year class is clearly associated with the large influx of small fish that was noted previously in the 1993 size compositions, and its presence likely explains much of the increase in dusky rockfish biomass that year. The existence of a strong 1986 year class was further confirmed by the 1996 age composition, in which this year class was again the most important. The 1996 results showed little evidence of recruitment of young fish <10 years old; accordingly, mean age of the population increased from 12.0 years in 1993 to 14.7 years in 1996.

The oldest fish aged in the 1996 sample was 51 years. This is the second oldest dusky rockfish that has been aged; the only older fish was one aged 59 years from the 1993 survey.

#### 7.3.3.1 Length at Age

In last year's assessment (Clausen and Heifetz 1999), we presented revised estimates of the von Bertalanffy growth parameters for combined sexes of dusky rockfish. These were based on age samples from 1,245 fish in the 1984, 1987, 1990, and 1993 triennial surveys. The revised parameters are:  $L_{inf} = 45.9$  cm;  $K = 0.24$ ; and  $t_0 = 1.18$ . A recent manuscript has also been prepared that presents these results in more detail (Malecha and Heifetz 2000).

#### 7.3.3.2 Weight at Length

The most accurate length-weight information for light dusky rockfish comes from the 1996 triennial survey, in which motion-compensated electronic scales were used to weigh the fish. For combined sexes, using the formula  $W = aL^b$ , where  $W$  is weight in grams and  $L$  is fork length in mm,  $a = 3.28 \times 10^{-5}$  and  $b = 2.90$  (Martin 1997).

### 7.4

### ANALYTIC APPROACH

Due to the lack of biological information for dusky rockfish, population dynamics modeling has not been done for the pelagic shelf rockfish assemblage. Instead, past assessments have used a biomass-based approach based on trawl survey data to calculate ABC. We continue to use this approach for the present assessment. In future years, we plan to move towards using an age-structured model for dusky rockfish.

#### 7.4.1 Assessment Parameters: Natural Mortality, Maximum Age, Age of Recruitment, and Age and Size at Maturity

Information on mortality rates and maximum age for the three species of pelagic shelf rockfish is shown in Table 7-3. These data are based on the currently accepted "break-and-burn" method of aging otoliths. The method used to determine the natural mortality rate for dusky rockfish was described in Clausen and Heifetz (1991). The dusky rockfish natural mortality rate of 0.09 is an indication that dusky rockfish is a faster growing and shorter lived species than most other rockfish. For example, mortality rates for slope rockfish species are all  $<0.09$ , with the exception of redstripe rockfish (see Table 6-13 of the slope rockfish report in this document). The maximum age of 59 years for dusky rockfish in Table 7-3 represents the age of just a single specimen and is 8 years older than the next oldest fish that has been aged. Therefore, it may be an outlier whose validity should be viewed with some caution.

There is no published information on age or size of recruitment for any of the pelagic shelf species in Alaska. In SAFE reports before 1999, we used a very rough estimate of 7 years as the age of recruitment for dusky rockfish. However, in last year's report (Clausen and Heifetz 1999) we revised this estimate to 10 years. This was based on a visual examination of the length frequency distributions for the commercial fishery, which indicated that length of 50% recruitment probably corresponds to about 40 cm. This length translates to an age of approximately 10 years, which we believe is a more reasonable estimate of age at 50% recruitment than the 7 years that we had used previously. A more precise estimate of the age at 50% recruitment will be computed in the future when an age-structured model is applied to dusky rockfish.

Size at 50% maturity for a relatively small sample (n=64) of female light dusky rockfish in the Kodiak area has been estimated to be 42.8 cm fork length (Clausen and Heifetz 1997). Age data for these fish were analyzed using a logistic function, which provided an estimated age at 50% maturity of 11.3 years<sup>5</sup>.

#### 7.4.2 Current Exploitable Biomass

In the last six SAFE reports (Clausen and Heifetz 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999), current exploitable biomass for pelagic shelf rockfish was computed by averaging the Gulfwide assemblage biomass in the most recent three trawl surveys (i.e., averaging the 1987, 1990, and 1993 surveys for the 1994 and 1995 reports, averaging the 1990, 1993, and 1996 surveys for the 1996, 1997, and 1998 reports, and averaging the 1993, 1996, and 1999 surveys for the 1999 report). This averaging technique was used because of the uncertainty of the biomass estimates (discussed previously in section 7.3.2.1, "Survey Biomass Estimates") and the resultant desire to avoid placing too much emphasis on the results of an individual survey. We recommend continuing this procedure in this report. The Gulfwide assemblage biomass estimates for 1993, 1996, and 1999 are 58,761 mt, 75,879 mt, and 64,688 mt, respectively (Table 7-2). Averaging these values yields a current exploitable biomass of 66,443 mt for pelagic shelf rockfish.

#### 7.4.3 Reference Fishing Mortality Rates and Yields

A spawning biomass-per-recruit analysis was applied to dusky rockfish to determine several reference values of fishing mortality (F) and corresponding yields. The computed values of F include  $F_{30\%}$ ,  $F_{35\%}$ , and  $F_{40\%}$ . Required parameters for this analysis include an estimate of natural mortality (M), von Bertalanffy growth parameters K,  $t_0$ , and  $W_{inf}$ , and ages of maturity and recruitment. The estimates of M, K, and  $t_0$  used were those listed in section 7.4.1, "Assessment Parameters".  $W_{inf}$  was calculated using a length-weight regression to convert  $L_{inf}$  in the "Assessment Parameters" section to a weight value. Age at 50% maturity for females was estimated at 11.3 years as listed in section 7.4.1. Recruitment was assumed to be "knife-edge", and age of recruitment was estimated at 10 years as discussed in the "Assessment Parameters" section. Yields were calculated using an exploitable biomass of 66,443 mt from section 7.4.2, "Current Exploitable Biomass". The computed reference values of F and another reference value,  $F=M$ , are listed in the following table, along with their corresponding yields:

	$F_{30\%}$	$F_{35\%}$	$F_{40\%}$	$F=M$
Reference value	0.169	0.136	0.110	0.090
Yield (mt)	11,229	9,036	7,309	5,980

### 7.5

#### ACCEPTABLE BIOLOGICAL CATCH

In previous stock assessments, acceptable biological catch (ABC) of pelagic shelf rockfish was estimated using the most conservative of the reference values listed above,  $F=M$  (Clausen and Heifetz 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, and 1995). In this strategy, which was originally based on the NPFMC's old (pre-1996) definitions for overfishing and ABC, the annual exploitation rate for the assemblage was set equal to the rate of natural mortality for dusky rockfish, 0.09. New definitions for overfishing and ABC were established in 1996, and these were revised in 1999. As described below in section 7.6, "Overfishing Definition", dusky rockfish falls into tier 4 of the current definitions, in which the fishing rate that determines ABC is required to be less than or equal to  $F_{40\%}$ . This new definition theoretically allows a somewhat higher ABC than the old (pre-1996) definition, as shown by the yields in the preceding section (compare the yield for  $F_{40\%}$ , 7,309

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<sup>5</sup>C. Lunsford, National Marine Fisheries Service, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Auke Bay Laboratory, 11305 Glacier., Juneau, AK 99801. Pers. commun. August 1999.

mt, with that for  $F=M$ , 5,980 mt). However, because of the uncertainty of the biomass estimates for dusky rockfish that was previously discussed in section 7.3.2.1, and the resultant lack of knowledge about the real trend in stock abundance for these fish, we opted to stay with the more conservative  $F=M$  approach in the last four assessments (Clausen and Heifetz 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999). We recommend again using  $F=M$  for computing the 2001 ABC. Thus, multiplying the current estimate of exploitable biomass (66,443 mt; see section 7.4.2, "Current Exploitable Biomass") by an  $M$  of 0.09 yields an overall ABC of 5,980 mt in 2001 for pelagic shelf rockfish in the Gulf of Alaska.

In all previous years, annual allocation of the Gulfwide ABC for pelagic shelf rockfish amongst the three regulatory areas in the Gulf has been based on the geographic distribution of pelagic shelf rockfish biomass in the triennial trawl surveys. Since the 1996 SAFE report, this distribution has been computed as a weighted average of the percent biomass distribution for each area in the three most recent trawl surveys. In the computations, each successive survey is given a progressively heavier weighting using factors of 4, 6, and 9, respectively. This 4:6:9 weighting scheme was originally recommended by the Gulf of Alaska Plan Team, and had already been used for Pacific ocean perch in the 1996 fishery (for a rationale, see section 6.7.1 of the slope rockfish report in this document). The Plan Team believed that for consistency among the rockfish assessments, the same weighting should be applied to pelagic shelf rockfish. The Plan Team's scheme was adopted for the 1997 fishery, and we have continued to follow it. Therefore, based on a 4:6:9 weighting of the 1993, 1996, and 1999 trawl surveys, the percent distribution of pelagic shelf rockfish biomass in the Gulf of Alaska is: Western area, 9.18%; Central area, 68.24%, and Eastern area, 22.59%. Applying these percentages to the overall recommended ABC of 5,980 mt yields the following apportionments for the Gulf in 2001: Western area, 549 mt; Central area, 4,081 mt; and Eastern area, 1,351 mt.

## 7.6

### OVERFISHING DEFINITION

In 1990, the NPFMC adopted a policy to prevent overfishing by requiring that fishing mortality for any stock should not exceed a prescribed maximum rate. For any given stock, a specific rate of overfishing ( $F_{OFL}$ ) was defined based on the amount of population dynamics information available for the stock. In June 1996, the NPFMC approved a revised series of overfishing definitions, and these definitions were further revised in January 1999. The 1999 definitions specify that for a species such as dusky rockfish, where estimates of biomass,  $F_{35\%}$ , and  $F_{40\%}$  are the only parameters known (i.e., tier 4 in the definitions),  $F_{OFL}$  is defined to be the  $F_{35\%}$  level. The definitions also state that the fishing rate that determines ABC ( $F_{ABC}$ ) should be less than or equal to  $F_{40\%}$ . As shown previously in the "Reference Fishing Mortality Rates and Yields" section,  $F_{35\%}$  is computed to be 0.136, and  $F_{40\%}$  is 0.110. These rates correspond to Gulfwide yields of 9,036 mt for overfishing and 7,309 mt for ABC, respectively. Thus, the ABC recommendation of 5,980 mt in this report for pelagic shelf rockfish in the Gulf of Alaska is consistent with the NPFMC definition because it is less than the maximum allowable ABC of 7,309 mt.

## 7.7

### HARVEST SCENARIOS TO SATISFY REQUIREMENTS OF NPFMC'S AMENDMENT 56, NEPA, AND MSFCMA

To satisfy requirements of the NPFMC's Amendment 56, the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA), all stock assessments have been asked to provide a set of seven harvest scenarios for future years. For species that are assessed using an age/length-structured model (tiers 1, 2, or 3 in the overfishing definitions), these scenarios can take the form of multi-year projections. For species such as pelagic shelf rockfish that are not modeled (tier 4 or higher), such projections are not possible, but yields for just the year 2001 can be computed for scenarios 1-5 as follows:

(Note: all the computed yields are based on an exploitable biomass of 66,443 mt in 2001.)



*Scenario 1: F equals the maximum permissible  $F_{ABC}$  as specified in the ABC/OFL definitions.* For tier 4 species such as dusky rockfish, the maximum permissible  $F_{ABC}$  is  $F_{40\%}$ .  $F_{40\%}$  equals 0.110, and the corresponding yield is 7,309 mt.

*Scenario 2: F equals the stock assessment author's recommended  $F_{ABC}$ .* In this assessment, the recommended  $F_{ABC}$  is  $F=M=0.09$ , and the corresponding yield is 5,980 mt.

*Scenario 3: F equals the 5-year average F from 1995 to 1999.* Using the catch data for these years in Table 7-1 (excluding estimated catches of black and blue rockfish in 1995-97) and annual exploitable biomass estimates for the assemblage, the average F for 1995 to 1999 is 0.051955, and the corresponding yield is 3,452 mt.

*Scenario 4: F equals 50% of the maximum permissible  $F_{ABC}$  as specified in the ABC/OFL definitions.* 50% of  $F_{40\%}$  (the maximum permissible  $F_{ABC}$ ) is 0.055, and the corresponding yield is 3,654 mt.

*Scenario 5: F equals 0.* Corresponding yield is 0.

## 7.8

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

### 7.8.1 Management Problems Involving Dark Dusky Rockfish

Although black and blue rockfish have been removed from the pelagic shelf assemblage, one management problem that remains is the taxonomic uncertainty of dusky rockfish. The inshore habitat of dark dusky rockfish is one that this variety shares with black and blue rockfish. This suggests that from a biological perspective, it may be more logical for dark dusky rockfish to be grouped with the latter two species, rather than in the pelagic shelf assemblage. Moreover, information from ADF&G indicates that in past years a sizeable portion (perhaps 25%) of the fish reported as "black rockfish" in the Kenai Peninsula jig fishery may have actually been dark dusky rockfish.<sup>6</sup> Dark dusky rockfish and black rockfish often co-occur in nearshore kelp beds of the Gulf of Alaska, and they are superficially similar in appearance, especially in body color, which leads to misidentification. As already mentioned, however, no definitive taxonomic studies have been completed that would separate the light and dark varieties of dusky rockfish into distinct species. Until results of such studies are available, we recommend for the interim that both forms of dusky rockfish remain in the pelagic shelf assemblage. In the future, if dark dusky rockfish is found to be a valid species, it may be appropriate to consider its removal from the assemblage and transfer to state jurisdiction, similar to what has been done for black and blue rockfish.

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<sup>6</sup>W. Bechtol, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 3298 Douglas St., Homer, AK 99603. Pers. commun. August 1995.

## SUMMARY

A summary table of the natural mortality rate ( $M$ ), biomass, exploitation rates, OFL, and recommended ABC for pelagic shelf rockfish is presented below:

$M$	current exploitable biomass (mt)	$F_{OFL}$	maximum allowable $F_{ABC}$	recom- mended $F_{ABC}$	OFL (mt)	recom- mended ABC (mt)
0.090	66,443	0.136	0.110	0.090	9,036	5,980

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Table 7-1a.—Commercial catch<sup>a</sup> (mt) of fish in the pelagic shelf rockfish assemblage in the Gulf of Alaska, with Gulfwide values of acceptable biological catch (ABC) and total allowable catch (TAC), 1988-2000. Updated as of September 30, 2000.

Year	Category	Regulatory Area <sup>b</sup>					Gulfwide Total	Gulfwide ABC	Gulfwide TAC
		Western	Central	Eastern	West Yakutat <sup>c</sup>	Southeast Outside <sup>d</sup>			
1988	Foreign	0	0	0	-	-	0		
	U.S.	400	517	168	-	-	1,085		
	JV	Tr	1	0	-	-	1		
	Total	400	518	168	-	-	1,086	3,300	3,300
1989	U.S.	113	888	737	-	-	1,738	6,600	3,300
1990	U.S.	165	955	527	-	-	1,647	8,200	8,200
1991	U.S.	215	1,191	936	-	-	2,342	4,800	4,800
1992	U.S.	105	2,622	887	-	-	3,605	6,886	6,886
1993	U.S.	238	2,061	894	-	-	3,193	6,740	6,740
1994	U.S.	290	1,702	997	-	-	2,989	6,890	6,890
1995	U.S.	108	2,247	536	471	64	2,891	5,190	5,190
1996	U.S.	182	1,849	265	190	75	2,296	5,190	5,190
1997	U.S.	96	1,959	574	536	38	2,629	5,140	5,140
1998	U.S.	60	2,477	576	553	22	3,113	4,880	4,880
1999	U.S.	130	3,835	694	672	22	4,659	4,880	4,880
2000	U.S.	188	3,144	464	445	19	3,796	5,980	5,980

<sup>a</sup>Catches for 1988-97 include black rockfish and blue rockfish, which were members of the assemblage during those years.

<sup>b</sup>Catches for West Yakutat and Southeast Outside areas are not available for years before 1996. Eastern area is comprised of the West Yakutat and Southeast Outside areas combined.

<sup>c</sup>West Yakutat area is comprised of statistical areas 640 and 649.

<sup>d</sup>Southeast Outside area is comprised of statistical areas 650 and 659.

Notes: There were no foreign or joint venture catches after 1988. Catches in 1988 are landed catches only. Catches in 1989-91 also include fish reported in weekly production reports as discarded by fishermen or processors. Catches in 1992-2000 also include discarded fish, as determined through a "blend" of weekly production reports and information from the domestic observer program.

Definition of terms: JV = joint venture production; U.S. = domestic annual production; Tr = trace catches.

Sources: Catch: 1988, Pacific Fishery Information Network (PacFIN), Pacific Marine Fisheries Commission, 305 State Office Building, 1400 SW 5th. Avenue, Portland, OR 97201; 1989-2000, National Marine Fisheries Service, Alaska Region, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668. ABC and TAC: 1988-99, Clausen and Heifetz (1999); 2000, North Pacific Fishery Management Council Newsletter, December 1999. 605 W. 4th. Avenue, Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501-2252.

Table 7-1b.--Catch (mt) of pelagic shelf rockfish taken during research cruises in the Gulf of Alaska, 1977-99. (Does not include catches in longline surveys; tr=trace)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Catch</u>
1977	0.4
1978	0.5
1979	0.9
1980	0.2
1981	7.4
1982	1.0
1983	0.5
1984	6.5
1985	6.8
1986	0.3
1987	34.4
1988	0.0
1989	0.1
1990	4.8
1991	0.0
1992	tr
1993	6.8
1994	0.0
1995	0.0
1996	7.4
1997	0.0
1998	2.5
<u>1999</u>	<u>6.7</u>

Table 7-2.--Biomass estimates (mt) for species in the pelagic shelf rockfish assemblage in the Gulf of Alaska, based on results of the 1984, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1996, and 1999 triennial trawl surveys.

Species	Statistical Area					Total
	Shumagin	Chirikof	Kodiak	Yakutat	South-eastern	
<u>1984</u>						
Dusky rockfish	3,843	7,462	4,329	15,126	307	31,068
Yellowtail rockfish	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>454</u>	<u>471</u>
Total, all species	3,843	7,462	4,329	15,143	761	31,539
<u>1987</u>						
Dusky rockfish	12,011	4,036	46,005	18,346	1,097	81,494
Widow rockfish	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>51</u>	<u>96</u>	<u>147</u>
Total, all species	12,011	4,036	46,005	18,397	1,193	81,641
<u>1990</u>						
Dusky rockfish	2,963	1,233	16,779	5,808	953	27,735
Widow rockfish	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>285</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>285</u>
Total, all species	2,963	1,233	16,779	6,093	953	28,020
<u>1993</u>						
Dusky rockfish	13,176	13,073	23,869	7,027	1,607	58,752
Yellowtail rockfish	<u>0</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>9</u>
Total, all species	13,176	13,082	23,869	7,027	1,607	58,761
<u>1996</u>						
Light dusky rockfish	3,551	19,235	36,040	14,193	1,479	74,498
Dark dusky rockfish	169	140	58	0	0	367
Widow rockfish	0	10	0	0	919	929
Yellowtail rockfish	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>65</u>	<u>85</u>
Total, all species	3,720	19,385	36,118	14,193	2,463	75,879
<u>1999</u>						
Light dusky rockfish	2,511	9,161	33,727	2,097	2,108	49,604
Dark dusky rockfish	2,128	31	49	0	0	2,208
Dusky rockfish, unspecified	0	20	0	0	0	20
Widow rockfish	0	0	69	0	115	184
Yellowtail rockfish	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>162</u>	<u>12,510</u>	<u>12,672</u>
Total, all species	4,639	9,212	33,846	2,259	14,733	64,688

Table 7-3.--Instantaneous rate of mortality and maximum age for pelagic shelf rockfish, based on the break-and-burn method of aging otoliths. Area indicates location of study: Gulf of Alaska (GOA) or British Columbia (BC).

Species	Mortality rate	Maximum age	Area	Reference
Dusky rockfish	0.09 <sup>a</sup>	59	GOA	1
		51	GOA	2
Yellowtail rockfish	0.06-0.14 <sup>b</sup>	64	BC	3, 4
Widow rockfish	0.05 <sup>b</sup>	59	BC	4

<sup>a</sup>Instantaneous rate of natural mortality (M).

<sup>b</sup>Instantaneous rate of total mortality (Z).

References: 1) Clausen and Heifetz (1996); 2) this report; 3) Archibald et al. (1981); 4) Chilton and Beamish (1982).

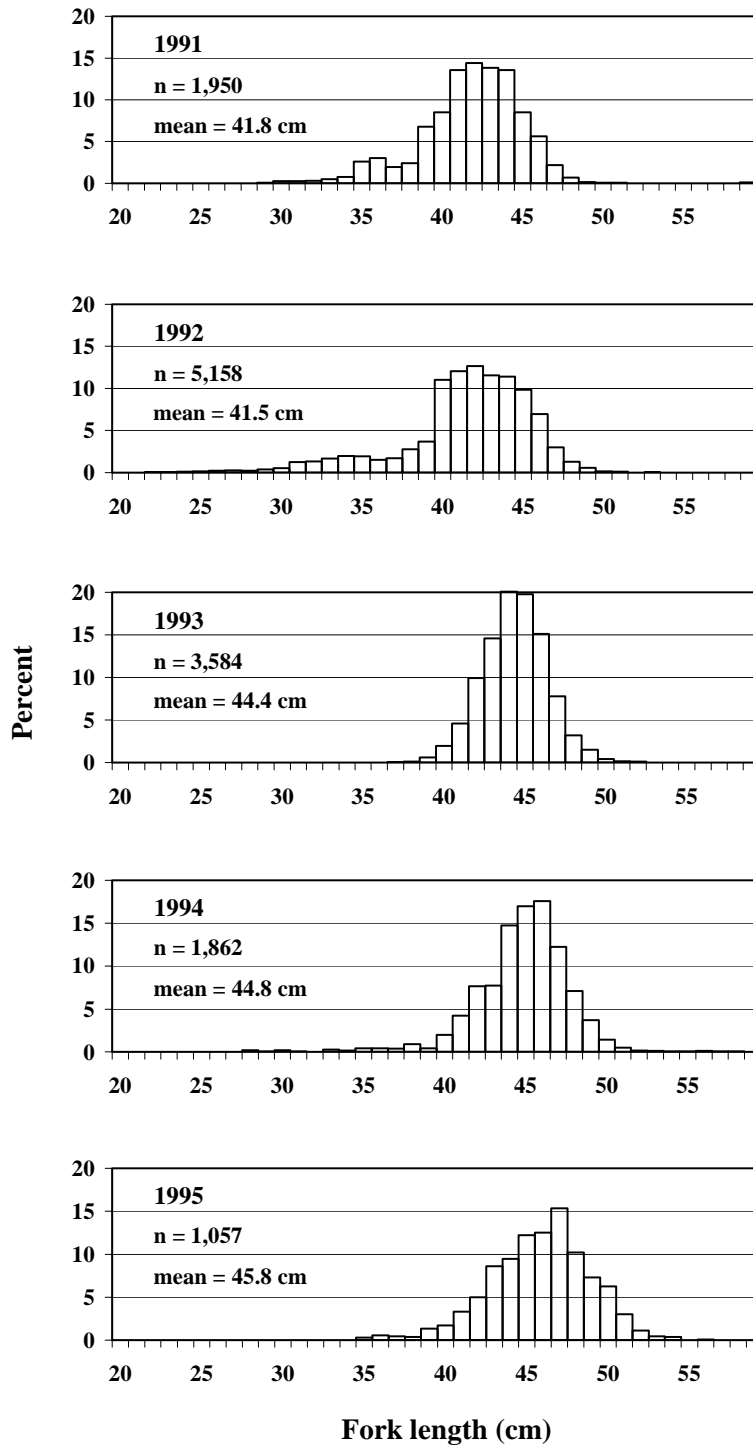


Figure 7-1.--Raw length frequency distribution of dusky rockfish measured by observers in the Gulf of Alaska commercial fishery, 1991-99 (continued on next page).



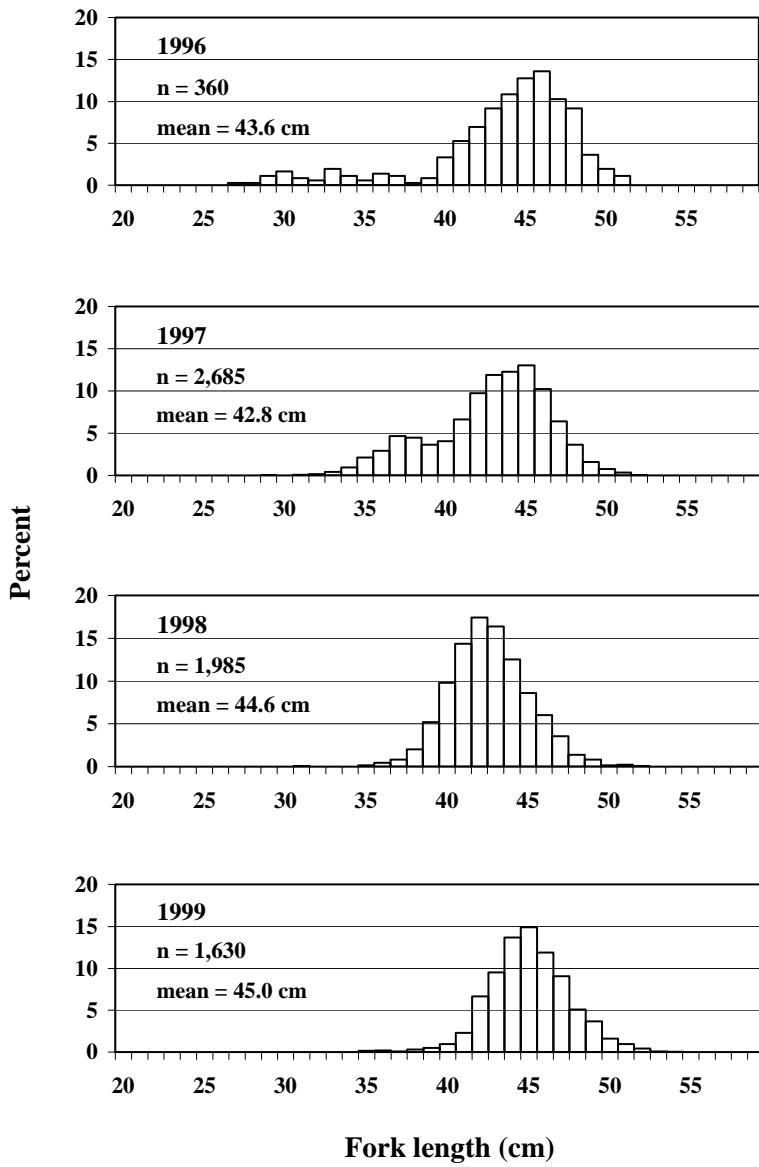


Figure 7-1.--(continued).

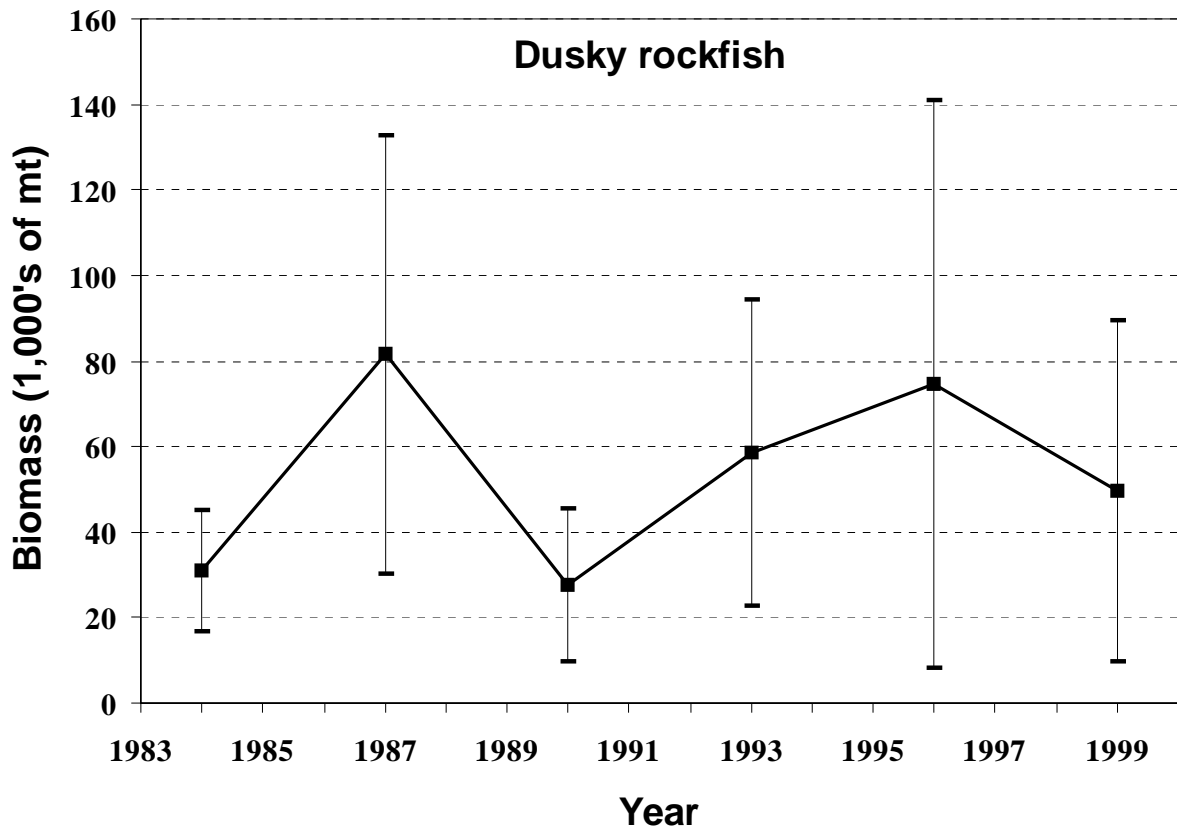


Figure 7-2.--Estimated biomass of dusky rockfish in the Gulf of Alaska, based on results of the 1984, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1996, and 1999 triennial surveys. The vertical bars show the 95% confidence limits associated with each estimate.

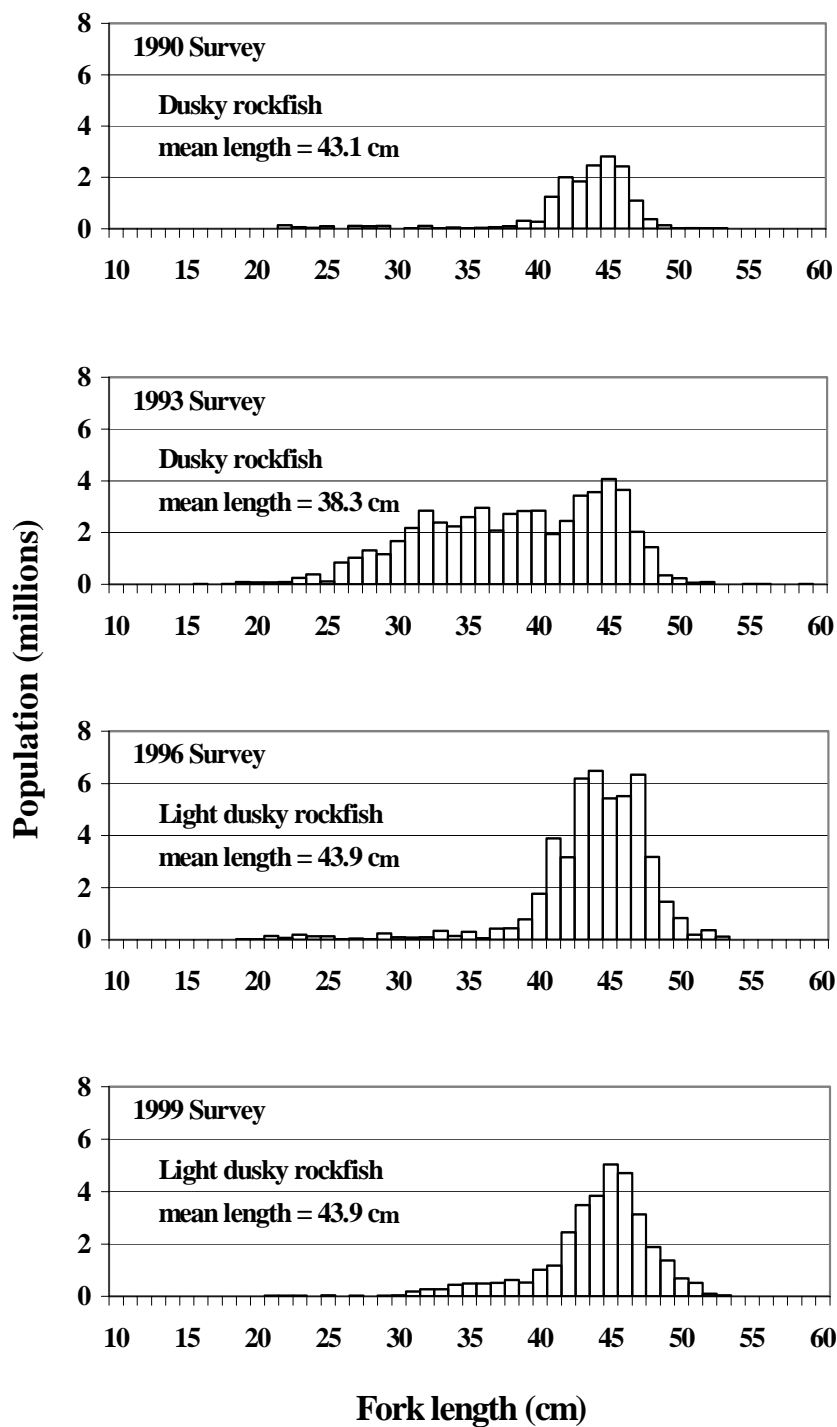


Figure 7-3.--Length frequency distribution of the estimated population of dusky rockfish in the Gulf of Alaska, based on the 1990, 1993, 1996, and 1999 triennial trawl surveys. The 1996 and 1999 distribution only includes data for the light-colored variety of dusky rockfish; in the 1990 and 1993 distribution, variety of dusky rockfish is unknown, but nearly all (>99%) are thought to be the light variety.

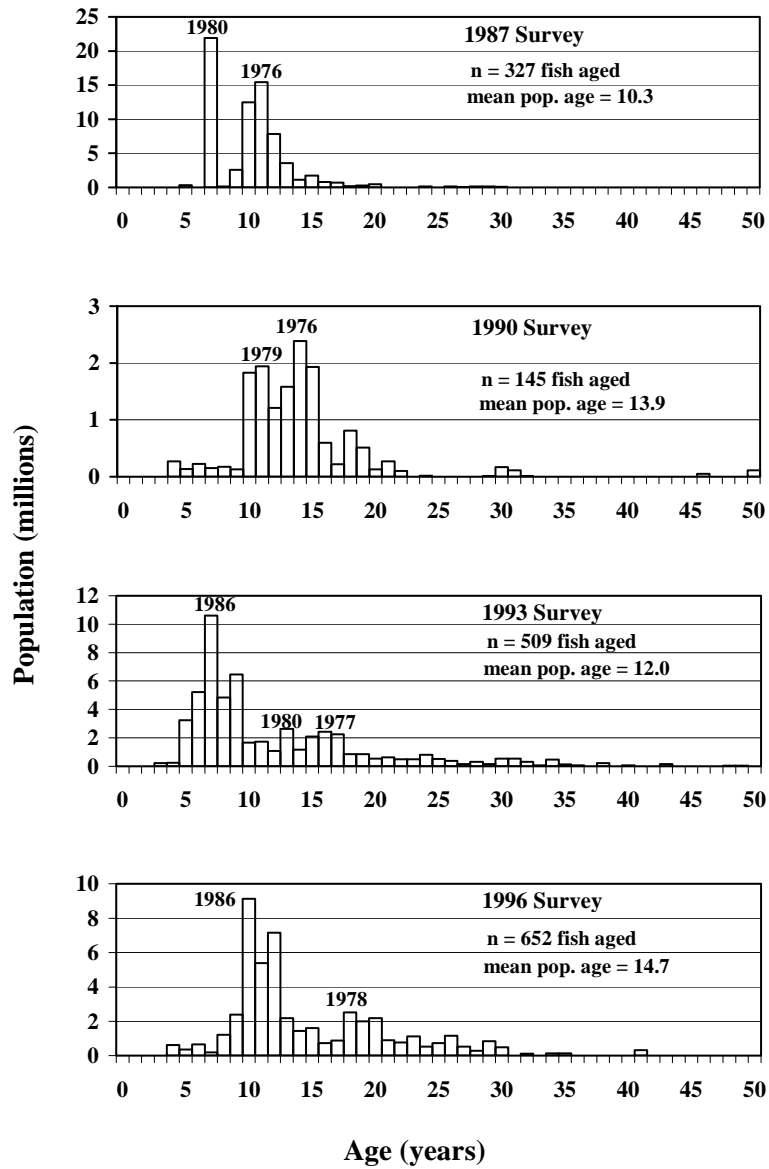


Figure 7-4.--Age composition of the estimated population of dusky rockfish in the Gulf of Alaska, based on the 1987, 1990, 1993, and 1996 triennial trawl surveys. The numbers next to prominent bars identify apparently strong year classes.