amounts. These proposed specifications indicate apportionments of TAC amounts among DAP, JVP, TALFF, and reserves for each target species and the "other species" category. The sum of the TAC amounts for all species must fall within the combined optimum yield (OY) range, of 116,000–800,000 metric tons (mt), established for these species.

Species TAC amounts are apportioned initially among DAP, JVP, TALFF, and reserves under §§ 611.92(c)(1) and 672.20(a)(2). DAP amounts are intended for harvest by U.S. fishermen for delivery and sale to U.S. processors. JVP amounts are intended for joint ventures in which U.S. fishermen deliver their catches to foreign processors at sea. TALFF amounts are intended for harvest by foreign fishermen. Existing harvesting and processing capacity of the U.S. industry is capable of utilizing the entire 1996 TAC specification for GOA groundfish. Therefore, the Council recommended that DAP equal TAC for each species category, resulting in no proposed amounts of TALFF or JVP for the 1996 fishing year.

The reserves for the GOA are 20 percent of the TAC amounts for pollock, Pacific cod, flatfish target species categories, and "other species." If necessary, these reserve amounts may be set aside for possible apportionment to DAP and/or to JVP if the initial apportionments prove inadequate. Reserves that are not apportioned to DAP or JVP may be reapportioned to TALFF. The GOA groundfish TAC amounts have been utilized fully by DAP since 1987, and NMFS expects the same to occur in 1996. Therefore, NMFS proposes apportionment of all the

reserves to DAP.

The Council met from September 27 through October 2, 1995, to review scientific information concerning groundfish stocks. The preliminary SAFE Report, dated September 1995, prepared and presented to the Council by the GOA Plan Team (Plan Team), summarizes the best available scientific information.

The September 1995 SAFE Report contains updated stock assessments for pollock, Pacific cod, Pacific ocean perch (POP), thornyhead, and Atka mackerel. New assessments were not available for the flatfish groups (deep-water flatfish, shallow-water flatfish, rex sole, flathead sole, and arrowtooth flounder), shortraker/rougheye rockfish, other slope rockfish, northern rockfish, and pelagic shelf rockfish. Survey information will be available for incorporation into assessments of sablefish and demersal shelf rockfish (DSR) for the final SAFE Report issued in November. Details of the assessments

can be found in the September 1995 SAFE Report.

The Council's proposed 1996 acceptable biological catch (ABC) amounts for pollock, Pacific cod, and thornyhead are reduced from the 1995 ABC levels specified for these species; whereas the 1996 ABC for POP increased from 1995. The proposed 1996 ABC amounts, as recommended by the Council, for all other species or species groups remained unchanged from 1995.

The Plan Team recommended a range of ABC amounts for pollock, 35,800-52,700 mt. These ABC amounts are lower than the 1995 ABC amounts. The lower end of the range was an ABC based on the fishing mortality rate that produced a minimal (5 percent) probability of falling below the threshold spawner biomass level in the long-term (34,000 mt for the Western and Central Regulatory Areas). The upper end of the range reflects an optimal fishing mortality rate that maximizes yield and minimizes risk of falling below the threshold spawner biomass level. The stock biomass for pollock has been in a declining trend for a number of years; however, biomass is expected to increase following recruitment of the strong 1994 year class. Considering the projected improvements in stock biomass, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) chose the upper end of the Plan Team's recommended range for ABC. The Council accepted the SSC's recommendation.

The Plan Team also presented a range of ABC values for Pacific cod, from 65,000 to 110,000 mt. The SSC chose the lower end of the range, because the stock has been declining since 1987, and because recent recruitment levels appear to be below normal. The Council concurred with the SSC's recommendation.

An updated model for POP produced a 1996 ABC of 10,165 mt, an increase of 2,935 mt over the analysts' estimated ABC for 1995. As in previous years, the ABC equals the overfishing level. The Plan Team reduced this number further (to 8,060 mt) to create a buffer between the overfishing level and the ABC. The SSC does not agree with this adjustment and recommended that ABC equal overfishing. The Council accepted the Plan Team recommendation and set the 1996 ABC at 8,060 mt. The TAC amount for POP is set by the POP rebuilding plan algorithm (Amendment 32 to the FMP). The SSC also recommended that the analysts explore the feasibility of running the stock assessment model separately for the Western/Central and

the Eastern Regulatory Area, providing two ABC amounts for POP in the Gulf.

An updated analysis was presented for thornyhead rockfish, which resulted in a 1996 ABC recommendation of 1,560 mt, somewhat lower than the 1995 ABC amount of 1,900 mt. The differences from 1995 are attributable to the inclusion of new data for 1982 and 1983, and correcting 1978 and 1979 hook-and-line data that were previously attributed to trawl gear.

The Plan Team recommended an ABC for sablefish of 18,700 mt, which is reduced from the 1995 ABC to reflect model projections of reduced 1996 biomass. However, the SSC recommended that the 1995 ABC (21,500 mt) be used for the preliminary 1996 ABC, until the 1996 longline survey data can be incorporated into the stock assessment analysis in November.

The stock assessment for Atka mackerel was also updated for 1996 to include 1994 catch data and maturity at length/age data. From the new analysis the Plan Team recommended a 1996 ABC of 6,480 mt. The SSC, however, recommended reducing the Plan Team's ABC by one-half, to 3,240 mt, which is equal to the 1995 ABC. This conservative approach is recommended because of the uncertainty in the abundance of Atka mackerel and because of concerns for marine mammals. Atka mackerel is an important prey species for sea lions and occurs in abundance near sea lion

The Plan Team recommended that dusky rockfish (*Sebastes ciliatus*) be separated from the other species in the pelagic shelf rockfish assemblage. The SSC requested that the Plan Team provide a more extensive report on the management and stock assessment alternatives and recommends that the Council proceed with the development of a plan amendment analyzing management alternatives for pelagic shelf rockfish. However, the Council did not make a recommendation at this time.

The total ABC amount recommended by the SSC and accepted by the Council was 477,110 mt.

The total TAC amount recommended by the Advisory Panel (AP) was 267,917 mt. The AP recommended 1996 TAC amounts equal to the 1996 ABC amounts, as recommended by the SSC, for all species except the flatfish groups (deep-water flatfish, shallow-water flatfish, rex sole, flathead sole, and arrowtooth flounder) and POP. For the flatfish groups the AP recommended a 1996 TAC that was equal to the 1995 TAC amount. The TAC for POP is established by an algorithm in the POP