



New England Fishery Management Council

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Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

DATE: April 11, 2022

TO: Tom Nies, Executive Director

FROM: Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)

SUBJECT: Terms of Reference – (1) SSC Planning for 2022 and Review of SSC roles and responsibilities; (2) Review of NEFSC 2022 State of the Ecosystem Report

The SSC met on April 1, 2022 via webinar to address the following terms of reference (TORs):

Terms of Reference

1. Review 2022 work priorities and timelines. Consider SSC assignments and a tentative meeting schedule for 2022. Review SSC roles and responsibilities including an opportunity to ask questions and discuss how the SSC fits in the overall Council process. Discuss potential ideas to further support SSC work related to ABC recommendations.
2. The SSC will receive a presentation on the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) State of the Ecosystem (SOE) Report and provide the Council with any recommendations it has about possible revisions to the report for the next year.

To address these TORs, the SSC considered the following information:

1. SSC Planning
 - a. 2022 SSC membership
 - b. 2022 SSC priorities and timelines
 - c. 2022 SSC reviewers and meeting leads (DRAFT)
 - d. NEFMC Staff presentation- Updated
2. SSC Roles and Responsibilities
 - a. MSA – SSC related sections only, <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/msa-amended-2007.pdf>
 - b. National Standard 1 Guidelines, <https://www.ecfr.gov/on/2022-03-10/title-50/chapter-VI/part-600/subpart-D/section-600.310>
 - c. National Standard 2 Guidelines, <https://www.ecfr.gov/on/2022-03-10/title-50/chapter-VI/part-600/subpart-D/section-600.315>
 - d. NOAA Fisheries Framework for Determining that Stock Status Determinations and Catch Specifications are based on the Best Scientific Information Available, NOAA Procedural Directive 01-101-10, <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/01-101-10.pdf>
 - e. Procedural Guidance for Changing Assessed Stock Status from Known to Unknown, NOAA Procedural Directive 01-101-11, <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-01/01-101-11.pdf?null>
 - f. NEFMC Operations Handbook - SSC and PDT sections only

- g. Description of the Stock Assessment Process for the New England and Mid-Atlantic Region,
https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/NRCC_Assessment_Process_Version-18Feb2022_508.pdf
3. NEFMC Risk Policy
4. NEFMC Risk Policy Matrix Template and Example (Atlantic herring)
5. NEFMC “ABC tracker” (DRAFT)
6. NEFMC SSC report template (DRAFT)
7. 2022 State of the Ecosystem (SOE) Report
 - a. 2022 SOE Report (DRAFT)
 - b. State of the Ecosystem Report 2021: New England. NOAA/NEFSC. Available at: <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/29279>
 - c. SSC Report to NEFMC on 2021 SOE Report
 - d. 2022 SOE Request Tracking Memo
 - e. NEFSC Staff Presentation

1. SSC Planning and Review of Roles and Responsibilities

The SSC received a presentation on SSC roles and responsibilities from Council Executive Director Tom Nies, a review of 2022 planning (i.e., work priorities for the year) from Council staff Deirdre Boelke, and a discussion of SSC operations from SSC Chair Lisa Kerr. The presentations reviewed guiding documents for SSC responsibilities and gave an overview of how the SSC fits into the overall Council process. The SSC was provided an opportunity to ask questions, and their discussion focused on recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of how the SSC operates. Below we have summarized the discussion:

- The SSC discussed expanding its approach of having appointed stock leads and considered how to better integrate the expertise of the socioeconomic scientists on the SSC. The SSC discussed potentially appointing socioeconomic leads for stocks; however, the imbalance in numbers of scientists with this expertise could result in this being burdensome for those with socioeconomic expertise. Furthermore, it was noted that much of this context is not stock-specific, but rather fishery- or community-specific, and thus the stock-level would not be an appropriate level of organization. The SSC discussed the possibility of a socioeconomic subgroup, such as the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP) under South Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s SSC, and resolved to continue outlining this approach through correspondence. The SSC also noted that ecosystem information needs to be brought into the process more formally over time.
- The SSC requested periodic presentations to the SSC on new assessment approaches and models developed in research track assessments (e.g., state space models, ecosystem-based approaches, climate-integrate modeling efforts) for general awareness and feedback.
- The SSC discussed the pathway for getting research recommendations back to NEFSC more formally. It was noted that the SSC makes recommendations to the Council, but a letter could be sent to the NRCC after Council meetings with SSC ideas to formalize research recommendations for future assessments.
- The SSC asked about opportunities for input to stock- and topic-specific research track assessment Terms of Reference (TORs) and was informed that there may be additional

opportunities in the future. However, the TORs are generally standardized for all stock specific Research Track assessments, as shown at the following:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/research-track-terms-reference>

- The SSC can, however, provide suggestions to the NRCC on scheduling of Research Track stock and topic-specific assessments through the NRCC's Assessment Working Group (AWG) with Dr. Richard Merrick representing the New England SSC. In this regard, the SSC asked that periodic updates about Research Track assessment scheduling be provided from/to the SSC by its AWG representative. Note while the Research Track schedule is in flux, a schedule for Management Track assessments is available at: <https://www.nefmc.org/library/2022-2026-stock-assessment-schedule>
- The SSC discussed the utility of the NEFMC's Risk Policy as a guidance document but also noted areas where additional clarity could be helpful. The SSC recommends revisiting the NEFMC Risk Policy to consider updating this document since its 2014 inception as a potential priority for 2023.
- There was a recommendation to produce further orientation documentation for new SSC members. Council staff will consider developing an orientation document for SSC members in the future.

2. 2022 State of the Ecosystem Report

The SSC received a presentation on the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) 2022 State of the Ecosystem (SOE) Report from Dr. Sean Lucey. The SSC stated its appreciation for the tremendous work that goes into producing this report and thanked the NEFSC for such a useful and quality product. The SSC noted the utility of the online resources (<https://noaa-edab.github.io/tech-doc/>) and associated R packages (<https://github.com/NOAA-EDAB/ecodata>) that accompany this report.

The SSC offered the following suggestions for consideration as modifications to the report during the discussion held at the meeting:

- The SSC appreciated the utility of the SOE tracking memo which allows for tracking how past suggestions have been addressed and what new work is ongoing. The SSC suggested that more detail might be provided in the future on the status of various items in progress. The SSC offered to help with prioritizing items to work on more immediately.
- There were several questions raised about the environmental justice vulnerability indicators and why some communities were ranked as they were. There was a desire to know more about methods that resulted in this list of vulnerable communities and any work that was done to ground truth or validate the findings. In future presentations, it would be helpful to have a social scientist from the NEFSC that is involved in the generation of this information to participate in the SSC's review to field these questions.
- A question was raised as to when and how it is decided that a particular "risk" will make it into the report. A suggestion was made to consider offshore aquaculture as a risk that is relevant for inclusion in the report in the future.
- A suggestion was made to consider reference to the impact of climate change on some of the key data streams (i.e., monitoring and assessment) that inform NEFMC decision

making (e.g., climate change impacts on survey catchability and misspecification of stock assessments).

- A suggestion was made to incorporate information from the SOE report in stock assessments, and it was noted that this is occurring for the cod research track assessment and could be formalized as an SSC research recommendation for future assessments.
- The topic of stock-specific work being carried out by the Ecosystem Assessment Division in the form of Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profiles (ESPs) was discussed, and the SSC was interested in receiving a presentation on the products in the future.
- A suggestion was made to consider coordination between the SOE report and other annual reporting by NOAA such that there is consistency and climate is identified as a risk that is impacting the performance and economics of certain fisheries. For example, there may be opportunities for more integration across SOEs and NOAA's annual *Status of Stocks*, *Fisheries of the United States*, and *Fisheries Economics of the United States* report.

In addition, minor editorial comments were made on the report and were provided directly to the lead author of the report.