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New England Fishery Management Council

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 John F. Quinn, J.D., Ph.D., *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 27, 2019
TO: Executive Committee
FROM: Tom Nies, Executive Director
SUBJECT: **Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program Review – Next steps**

In June 2019 the Council reviewed the RSA Program Review final report. A motion passed to support moving all the recommendations forward for further consideration. The Council requested the Executive Committee further discuss a potential implementation plan for these recommendations. Council staff developed a strawman list of recommendations and potential implementation plan for initial work on this subject.

The Executive Committee should discuss this recommendation for Council consideration of 2020 priorities at the September Council meeting. Subject to its approval, this approach would be presented to the Council during the September priorities discussion and added to the list of possible tasks. A final decision would be made at the December Council meeting.

Over 50 specific recommendations were included in the RSA final report. Staff have identified a sub-set of those recommendations the Council could focus on first, as well as a potential implementation plan. A matrix is attached to this memo that identifies the “high” priority items based on staff input as well as input from various PDT, AP and Committee discussion to date. In general, the initial priority topics could focus on:

- Recommendation #2 – Address several of the ten concerns identified about existing RSA programs;
- Recommendation #3 - Clarity the role of RSA;
- Recommendation #4- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of scallop resource surveys; and
- Recommendation #5 – Evaluate the administrative capacity of the RSA program and identify where shortfalls exist.

In order to complete these tasks, staff recommends three separate approaches:

1. Form a group that will focus on the ten concerns identified in the final report (Recommendation #2). Several items would be addressed first (inadequacies in priority setting process, unique challenges created by awarding RSA fishing opportunities instead of monetary awards, lack of clarity about financial oversight of grants, ability to get results back into the management process, and data availability). The deliverable would

be a discussion paper that the Council could consider for future work priorities, particularly if Council action is needed to modify existing RSA programs.

2. Establish a Scallop Survey Advisory Panel (or some other title). This group would design an overall strategic approach for sea scallop surveys and then explore mechanisms for implementing that design. This group would also consider alternatives to the use of competitive grants for this program.
3. Request that NMFS, in consultation with the Council, evaluate and document RSA program administrative capacity. This would include an evaluation of resources available and/or needed to ensure RSA programs are functioning well.