



New England Fishery Management Council

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

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 27, 2018
TO: Research Steering Committee
FROM: Dr. Matt McKenzie, Committee Chairman
SUBJECT: Charge to Committee for its August 8, 2018 meeting

Our next Research Steering Committee (RSC) meeting will be at the Hilton Garden Inn in Portsmouth, New Hampshire on **Wednesday August 8 starting at 9:30 AM**. This meeting provides an opportunity to discuss: the future of the RSC, Council research priorities, updates from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) Fishery Monitoring and Research Division, the Research-Set-Aside (RSA) program review, and recently completed research. Any RSC recommendations will be considered by the Council at its September 2018 meeting. Dr. Rachel Feeney is the staff coordinator of the RSC (rfeeney@nefmc.org; 978-465-0492 ext. 110); please contact her at any time. We look forward to meeting with you in August.

MEETING MATERIALS

As they become available, the documents listed below are being posted to the Council's website (www.nefmc.org). Paper copies will be provided at the meeting.

1. Meeting cover memo (this document)
2. Meeting agenda
3. RSC meeting summary, January 17, 2018
4. RSC staff presentation slides
5. **Future of the RSC**
 - a. RSC-related excerpts of the Council's *Operations Handbook*
 - b. *NEFMC Program Review Final Report*, May 3, 2018
 - c. Staff memo re RSC, July 2018
 - d. RSC worksheet
6. **NEFMC Research Priorities and Data Needs for 2017-2021**
 - a. "Word version"
 - b. DRAFT "spreadsheet version"
 - c. NEFMC letter to NMFS re research priorities, January 3, 2018
 - d. CCC letter to NMFS re research priorities, June 5, 2018
 - e. NMFS response to CCC, June 29, 2018
7. **RSA Program Review**
 - a. Draft report outline
 - b. Presentation slides

8. Management Review

- a. Project final report: *Early Opening Experimental Fishery for Silver Hake/Whiting in Small Mesh Area I and the Western Raised Footrope Exemption Area*, July 2018
- b. Presentation slides
- c. RSC management review worksheet

FUTURE OF THE RESEARCH STEERING COMMITTEE

Prior activity

The RSC, first called the “Experimental Fisheries and Research Program Steering Committee” has been a standing committee of the NEFMC since 1999. This committee formed in response to legal mandates for more accurate/timely science to support decision-making, a rise in funding for collaborative research, and a sense that regional research planning should be better coordinated. Additional information on the history and evolution of the RSC is summarized in a staff memo (Document #5c). During the last few RSC meetings, members have raised questions about the purpose and functions of the RSC. The recent NEFMC program review, finalized in May 2018, recommended reevaluating the Research Review Policy and the purpose and functions of the RSC (Document #5b). Executive Director Tom Nies is asking the RSC to develop recommendations on this topic.

Next steps

On August 8, we will discuss the past and current activities of the RSC and how it may best contribute to fulfilling the mission of the Council: “conserving and managing fishery resources by relying on sound science, promoting public participation, and balancing competing interests” (www.nefmc.org). The RSC could develop recommendations to the NEFMC on the future of the RSC. Our discussion will be guided by the following questions:

1. Is there sufficient need to maintain an ongoing RSC? If so:
 - a. How can the RSC best support the mission of the Council? What should be its essential functions?
 - b. Should the RSC continue to do management reviews? If so, what criteria should be used to identify projects to review?
 - c. Are there benefits that a non-issue-based committee can bring to the Council process? Can the RSC help Council members reach compromise and/or think longer term? If so, how would this occur through RSC meetings?
 - d. Should the RSC be more active in urging NMFS take up Council research priorities and facilitating communication? How might this occur through RSC meetings?
 - e. Should the RSC be a forum to discuss the state of knowledge and future needs for specific topics (e.g., a day-long meeting on a discard mortality)?
 - f. How frequently should the RSC meet?
2. If there is insufficient need to maintain the RSC:
 - a. Should the RSC be suspended, reforming when there is a specific need and keeping a staff person and Council member assigned as chair to “keep the lights on”?
 - b. Would there be value in joining with the MAFMC on a joint RSC to give input to NMFS? What about a NMFS-NEFMC-MAFMC-ASMFC research committee?
3. Are there potential improvements to the Research Review Policy?

A worksheet (Document #5d) has been developed to support discussion of these questions and development of recommendations for the Council to consider. RSC members are encouraged to think about these questions in advance and jot individual responses on the worksheet. Worksheets will not be formally collected. RSC members who will be absent are welcome to email comments to Dr. Feeney by **August 3** if possible to contribute your input on this important topic.

NEFMC RESEARCH PRIORITIES AND DATA NEEDS FOR 2017-2021

Prior activity

On January 30, 2017, the Council approved the following motion by majority vote (16/0/1), which was based on an RSC consensus statement (Document #3, page 3):

“For improving Council research priority setting:

- **Process**: PDTs will continue to have the lead in developing and updating research needs, with RSC and SSC review prior to Council approval. The RSC should also help track if and how research needs are being met.
- **Product**: The feasibility of developing a database should be explored, but a spreadsheet will be developed as a first step. Information should include: a description/rationale, priority category (e.g., "near-term"), FMP/species, broad category, other priority lists it is included on (e.g., assessment, RSA), and research status (e.g., no action, underway).
- **Feedback**: The Council Coordination Committee should be asked to send a letter to NMFS requesting that its national research funding programs require proposals to indicate if and how the work would meet an identified Regional Council priority in addition to the national priorities of the program.”

The costs and benefits associated with creating and maintaining a database have been considered, and at this time, the list of research priorities has been transformed into a simpler spreadsheet (Document #6b). A January 2018 letter from the Council’s Executive Director to NMFS Headquarters seeking clarification about the end use of Councils’ research priority lists. This prompted a national discussion at the May 2018 meeting of the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) in Sitka, Alaska and follow-up letters between the CCC and NMFS (Documents #6c-e).

Next steps

On August 8, staff will update the RSC on progress on transforming the listing of research priorities from a Word document to a spreadsheet and any additional details on the CCC discussion. The RSC could develop any further recommendations for improving research priority setting.

NORTHEAST FISHERIES SCIENCE CENTER

Prior activity

At its July 2017 and January 2018 meetings, the RSC had a discussion with NEFSC staff regarding steps towards implementing recommendations of the 2017 programmatic review of its Northeast Cooperative Research Program.

Next steps

On August 8, the newly appointed Fishery Monitoring & Research Division Chief, Amanda McCarty will attend the RSC meeting to be introduced and comment on the future direction of the Cooperative Research Branch. She and/or other NEFSC staff will also provide any updates on implementing the recommendations of the program review (e.g., particularly on integrating

cooperative research across the NEFSC) and other cooperative research activities. The RSC may develop any recommendations to the NEFMC for input for the future direction of cooperative research within the NEFSC, or research generally, including how the NEFSC may help address NEFMC research priorities.

RSA PROGRAM REVIEW

Prior activity

The NEFMC is currently reviewing the Research-Set-Aside program. While the RSA program is generally viewed as successful, the NEFMC is interested in identifying potential improvements. The steering committee has been meeting with the relevant NEFMC species committees (Scallops, Herring, Monkfish) and expects to collect additional input through interviews and an on-line survey.

Next steps

On August 8, members of the RSA program review steering committee will present an overview of the review process, timeline, and the current activities of the review (Documents #8a & b). We will have time for informal dialogue with the steering committee and the RSC could develop recommendations. The following link has additional information about the review and will include a link to the survey when it becomes available:

<https://www.nefmc.org/committees/research-set-aside-program-review-panel>

MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF RESEARCH FINAL REPORTS

On August 8, the RSC will conduct a management review of one project. The Research Review Policy in the Council's *Operations Handbook* contains guidance for conducting such reviews (Document #5a, pages 51-52). The project leader and/or partners have been invited to attend to present a project overview and its findings and be available for questions. The RSC is asked to submit preliminary comments in advance using the management review worksheet (Document #9c). Please email comments to Dr. Feeney by **August 3** if possible. Comments will be compiled and appended to the meeting summary.

Early Opening Experimental Fishery for Silver Hake/Whiting in Small Mesh Area I and the Western Raised Footrope Exemption Area

Prior activity

In June 2016, a *Federal Register* notice (vol.81, no. 115, p. 39025) indicated that the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries had submitted an Experimental Fishing Permit application to the National Marine Fisheries Service to assess the use of small-mesh raised-footrope trawl gear to target whiting within two Gulf of Maine whiting exempted fishing areas two weeks prior to the regular opening of these areas to the whiting fishery. The project aimed to partner MADMF with five vessels to provide data on catch rates of whiting and groundfish bycatch to help evaluate the potential for opening these areas earlier in the year. The project was funded by the Massachusetts Groundfish Disaster Economic Assistance Program.

Next steps

On August 5, the RSC will conduct a management review of this project (Document #9a). It would be helpful if the RSC weighed in on whether the experiment was adequate and properly performed. However, the RSC will not make recommendations on any specific management actions.