

Research Steering Committee

Dr. Rachel Feeney, staff

**Council meeting
September 27, 2018**



New England
Fishery Management Council

Overview

RSC's tasks:

1. Receive updates on **NEFSC Cooperative Research Branch** activities.
2. Conduct **management review** of one research project.
3. Receive updates, recommend process improvements for **NEFMC research priority setting**.
4. Recommend improvements to **purpose, functions, and future of the RSC**.
5. Discuss the ongoing **RSA program review**.

Today's tasks:

- Direct the research priority setting process.
- Discuss/determine future of the RSC.



I. NEFSC/CRB program updates [selected]

by Amanda McCarty, FMRD Chief

Staff change:

- CRB Branch Chief: Henry Milliken is Acting, hiring ongoing.

Study Fleet:

- The reporting software (FLDRS) is being updated to improve data recording and utility.
- Working to get more timely data back to fishermen.
- Data used in recent summer flounder assessment.
- August 9 NEFSC inter-division meeting on increasing data use in assessments.

Longline survey:

- Continues; data used in recent thorny skate status review.
- Ongoing related research on cusk and skate barotrauma and skate DNA sequencing.



2. Management Review

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

Partners: Mass. Division of Marine Fisheries and five vessels.

Funding: Mass. Groundfish Disaster Economic Assist. Program.

Goals: target whiting in these areas two weeks prior to regular opening; quantify catch rates of whiting and bycatch.

Outcomes:

- **Area I** – whiting abundant; groundfish bycatch over 5% threshold, both in early and regular seasons. Bycatch rates varied among vessels; the high bycatch vessels were not new fishery participants.
- **Western Area** – project had low industry interest and participation.



2. Management Review

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

RSC Consensus Statement:

“The RSC finds that the report and data from the *Whiting Experimental Fishery* project is suitable for consideration in management. The RSC suggests examining temporal changes in bycatch rates in the whiting fishery in Exemption Area I or conducting additional research with more predictive variables or gear refinements.”



3. Council research priorities

January 2018 Council meeting:

- Tasked staff to explore feasibility of a database to house the Council's 5-year research priorities, with a spreadsheet as a first step.
- Urge the CCC to urge NMFS that its national funding programs require proposals to indicate how they would meet a Regional Council priority.



3. Council research priorities

Doc
#6

- NEFMC letter asking for clarification on how NMFS uses the research priority lists prompted discussion at May 2018 Council Coordination Cte. meeting.
- NMFS leadership response:
 - Staff are aware of Council research priorities through participation in the Council process,
 - There is not a systematic process for giving feedback to Councils on their priorities.
 - Committed to better integration of Councils' research and improved communication.



3. Council research priorities

Doc
#3

Existing information:

- Priority title
- Broad category

NEW information:

- Description, rationale, potential use
- Priority level (urgent, strategic)
- Status (not begun, underway, unknown)
- Related FMPs & species
- Cross-listing (assessment, RSA, etc.)
- Notes

#	Title	Description, rationale, potential use	Priority	Status	FMP	Species	Broad categories	Cross-listing	Notes
1	Efficiency estimation of NMFS trawl survey gear for monkfish, silver hake, and red hake; estimate efficiency based on gear configuration.	Identify any issues regarding the use of a constant catchability coefficient.	Strategic (future needs)	not begun	Monkfish, Small mesh multispecies	Monkfish, Silver hake, Red hake	Fish surveys	unknown	Absolute abundance and biomass indices are not used for small-mesh multispecies.
2	Supplement existing surveys with the use of fixed gear and/or advanced sampling techniques to facilitate sampling in inaccessible areas.	e.g., use of longline or pot/trap gear to sample within complex habitat areas.	Important (near term)	underway	Monkfish, Small mesh multispecies	Multiple	Fish surveys	unknown	NEFSC/CRB funding a longline survey.
3	Continue development of hydroacoustic surveys and other resource surveys of pelagic species to provide an independent means of estimating stock sizes and/or defining localized depletion (long-term research).	This priority has two parts, the first is to help evaluate status of resource with acoustic survey and the second to test if that tool could be useful for defining localized depletion.	Important (near term)	underway	Atlantic herring	Atlantic herring	Fish surveys	assessment, RSA	One RSA project looked at defining localized depletion, but the work was not completed due to issues securing the research funds. It did test the utility of that survey technology.
4	Develop fishery acoustic indices for herring, and develop a volume-to-weight conversion factor for herring.	To improve data on estimate of herring biomass.	important (near term)	underway	Atlantic herring	Atlantic herring	Fish surveys	unknown	This is similar to Priority #3 on acoustics.

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- PDF available online; contact staff for Excel version.



3. Council research priorities

- A few ideas surfaced for new/revised priorities.
- Possibility/process for mid-cycle updates to 5-year priorities is unclear.

RSC Consensus Statement:

The RSC recommends that annual updates to the NEFMC five-year research priorities come through the species PDT/Committees with NEFMC approval. However, the process should not be onerous. This would be better than the current five-year cycle in informing proposal reviews and ensuring projects have management relevance.



4. RSC purpose, functions, future

2018 Council Program Review

Doc
#4, p. 7

Observations

- RSC is a constructive forum for bringing scientists, fishermen, and managers together.
- Effectiveness of the *Research Review Policy* in guiding Council actions is unclear.
- Purpose, roles and tasks of the RSC are unclear (e.g., research priority setting).

Recommendations

- Review the research priority setting process of other Councils. Collaborate with regional partners.
- Identify the roles of each agency/subsidiary in research planning/prioritization to increase efficiency.
- Update *Research Review Policy*/RSC guidance if needed.



4. RSC purpose, functions, future

RSC History

Doc #4,
p. 2-6

1999 - 2002

- \$\$\$ for collaborative research was on the rise.
- Congress directed NMFS to work with NEFMC on designing a research program and developing priorities.
- The RSC formed as the forum to do so (program design, proposal review, Scallop RSA program). Met frequently.

2003 - 2005

- NEFMC staff were barraged with data, reports, and requests to use results in management.
- RSC developed the *Research Review Policy* with standards for what can be used in management and a management review process to ensure sufficient technical review.



4. RSC purpose, functions, future

Doc #4,
p. 2-6

2006 - 2015

- RSC did many management reviews of selected projects.
- Gave much input to NCRPP: budget, planning, priorities. Less so after NCRPP shifted to funding research networks (2011).
- Helped set NEFMC-funded project priorities.

2016 – present

- Input: On 5-year priority setting process.
- Management reviews: Council-funded and selected RSA projects.
- Recommended: That the CRB network approach be evaluated.
- Soul-searching: what is the RSC's future?



4. RSC purpose, functions, future

RSC Consensus Statement: The Council program review raised legitimate concerns about the need to revisit the purpose and functions of the RSC. The RSC has identified several potential roles for itself in setting research priorities, helping to see that the priorities are fulfilled, and in research communications. The RSC recommends that the Council examine the facets of engaging in the research enterprise (e.g., set priorities, promote cooperative research, coordinate how priorities may be met, ensure project quality, promote use of results) and determine if continuing a standing RSC is necessary.



4. RSC purpose, functions, future

RSC Potential roles:

- Identify research priorities
 - Continue to assist in priority setting for future RFPs for Council funds.
 - Track what has been funded, how priorities are being addressed.
- Encourage having research priorities met
 - Identify what 5-year research priorities have fallen through the cracks.
 - Be a platform for considering questions on the relevance of research results to Council FMPs.
 - Provide input on EFP decisions.
- Enhance research communications
 - Be a conduit between the Council, GARFO and NEFSC.
 - Convene scientists and fishermen, as outreach for projects.
- Be a forum to discuss big ideas that may fall outside of immediate management priorities (e.g., full retention, climate change).



4. RSC purpose, functions, future

Research Enterprise Matrix

Doc #4,
p. 9

Step/Task/Role

- Planning & Priority Setting
- Promoting Cooperative Research
- Proposal Selection for Funding
- Project Oversight
- Research Results
 - Quality assurance
 - Promoting/using

Entity/Subsidiary

- NEFMC
 - RSC
 - PDTs & staff
 - FMP Aps & Ctes.
 - SSC
 - Full Council
 - Observer Policy Cte.
 - Fishery Data for Stock Assess.WG
- NEFMC/MAFMC
 - Trawl Advisory Panel
- NRCC
- NMFS
 - NEFSC
 - Directorate
 - Cooperative Research Branch
 - SAW/SARC
 - GARFO
 - Headquarters



4. RSC purpose, functions, future

Doc #4,
p. 10

- Is there enough need to maintain a standing RSC?
- If so:
 - Determine purpose and functions
 - Align *Research Review Policy* with Council intent
- *Policy* inconsistent with current practice, e.g.:
 - RSC not setting research priorities annually.
 - RSC no longer involved in identifying focus of NMFS RFPs.
 - RSC not reviewing proposals.
 - *Policy* implies all science used by Council must be subject to a RSC management review.

