SSC Workshop on Dynamic Reference Points

Planning Update #2

Scientific and Statistical Committee Meeting

March 30, 2026

Dr. Jamie Cournane, Council Staff

New England
Fishery Management
Council

IRA 3.2: Dynamic Reference Points SSC Workshop

- Reference points in fisheries stock assessments and management are an essential tool for understanding the condition of a resource relative to a desired state.
- Dynamic reference points, unlike static ones, are allowed to change through time in response to non-stationarity in fish population dynamics.
- While scientific approaches to define dynamic biological reference points exist, the lack of a full understanding of their appropriate application and practical concerns about this change in key management targets and thresholds has presented challenges to adoption.
- This workshop aims to develop practical guidelines for integrating dynamic reference points into fisheries stock assessment and management.

Workshop Steering Committee

Council Staff: Jamie Cournane and Rachel Feeney

SSC Members: Lisa Kerr (UMaine) and Ed Camp (UF)

NOAA & State Staff: Jon Deroba (NEFSC) and Tara Dolan (MA DMF)

Contractors/Facilitators: Hannah MacDonald, Laura Singer (SAMBAS), and Willy Goldsmith (Pelagic Strategies)

Additional: Conor McManus (NEFSC) and Michelle Bachman (Council Staff)

Workshop Goals

1. Establish a shared understanding of current approaches and recommendations from regional and national workshops on defining dynamic biological reference points, including the challenges of implementation and human dimensions.
2. Recommend ways to evaluate the effectiveness of existing reference points for NEFMC stocks to determine when it may be more appropriate to use dynamic reference points.
3. Evaluate alternative approaches to defining reference points that can account for non-stationarity, appropriateness of methods for NEFMC stocks (given data), and potential challenges in application.
4. Identify tradeoffs, pathways and potential stocks for implementing dynamic reference points within the current scientific process to inform management.

Workshop Outcomes

1. A preliminary suite of indicators and guidelines for evaluating whether to use dynamic BRPs and potentially candidate stocks.
2. Consensus on recommendations for developing, reviewing, and maintaining DRPs, building on existing CINAR, SSC8, and NS1 guidance (e.g., evaluation standards, evidence thresholds).
3. A stepwise implementation roadmap that aligns scientific advances with management, legal, and capacity constraints and identifies potential risks.
4. A prioritized list of research recommendations that could advance our understanding of DRPs and future development of best practices for implementation.

Dynamic Reference Points Working Definition

Dynamic [Biological] Reference Points (DRPs) are time-varying targets and thresholds that adjust for non-stationarity in stock productivity. DRPs can enable more responsive management by accounting for the impacts of broad and persistent ecosystem change or regime shifts to better reflect recent past and projected future stock conditions. As with conventional BRPs, DRPs can be biomass- and/or fishing mortality-based and may use proxies depending on data availability (e.g., spawning potential ratio [SPR]). In some cases, DRPs may include linkages with an environmental driver and/or productivity but this is not required.

Draft Agenda – June 1-2, 2026, Boston, MA

Day 1

- Setting the stage: where we are in 2026
- Evaluating reference points and considering potential guidelines

Day 2

- Management applications, challenges, and opportunities for implementation
- Toward operational guidance and next steps

Background Information

Summarizes information regarding development and implementation of DRPs, building off three primary sources:

1. The Cooperative Institute for the North Atlantic Region (CINAR) hosted a two-day workshop in January 2024 in New Bedford, MA, entitled Defining Biological Reference Points in a Dynamic Northeast Marine Environment.
2. The Eighth National Meeting of the Scientific Coordination Subcommittee of the Council Coordination Committee (SCS8) was held in Boston, MA in August 2024 and entitled Applying Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rules in a Changing Environment.
3. In November 2025, NOAA Fisheries published Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-261, entitled Technical Guidance for Estimating Reference Points Used for Stock Status Determination in Accordance with the National Standard 1 Guidelines.

Additional Materials Prior to Workshop

- Review of past 10 years of SSC discussions and synthesize where there have been past challenges with static reference points, underscoring the need for DRPs
- Overview: What's changed since SCS8 in 2024
- Updated NEFSC stock-by-stock table re. reference point methods (originally prepared for SCS8)
- Background materials about management system constraints that might prevent NEFMC from nimbly implementing DRPs
- Illustration of the pathways for adjusting SDCs given the NEFMC's recent Management Flexibility Omnibus

Term of Reference for Today

Review, comment on, and as needed recommend revisions to the draft goals, expected outcomes, and agenda of the SSC workshop on dynamic reference points.

Thank you for your time today!

SSC Workshop on June 1-2, 2026
Venue: Hampton Inn Homewood Suites, Seaport, Boston, MA

Phone credit: Hilton