

Social Science Subcommittee update to the SSC

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**New England Fishery
Management Council**

Reminder of SSS purpose and objectives

Purpose: To foster communication and collaboration between the NEFSC Social Sciences Branch (SSB) and Council to improve the use of social science information in the Council process.

Objectives:

1. Create more opportunities for integrating social sciences tools to inform management.
2. Better understand the Council's socioeconomic objectives to help address management needs.
3. Increase coordination between SSS and SSB staff in various Council PDTs.
4. Better integrate existing tools and data from SSB and other sources into fisheries management advice and decision-making processes.
5. Improve effectiveness and optimize timing of social science data inputs and recommendations.



SSS activity since August 2025 report

SSS Meeting Nov. 12, 2025	Recommendations for improved fishery performance reporting for use by SSC and Council.
SSS Meeting March 10, 2026	Input to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center Social Sciences Branch (NEFSC/SSB) on data products, plans for future projects, and pathways for use by the Council in management.
	Input to the Council Plan Development Teams on 2026 work priorities: what social and economic work is anticipated, what information is needed to support the work, and ideas overcoming any barriers.
CINAR Workshop March 24, 2026	Enhancing use of fisheries-dependent data for social and economic considerations in management.



Highlights of SSS meeting outcomes

Fishery Performance Reporting

- Noted opportunities to make substantial progress with enhanced interest by the Council in consistent and efficient reporting and advancements in automation technology to assist with data query and report generation.
- **Advisory Panel (AP) Feedback:** Implement a standard set of annual open-ended questions for APs covering market factors, current regulations, and research priorities (MAFMC model).
 - **Specification Context:** During years when specifications are set, request additional relevant data from APs.
- **Standardized Overviews:** Develop 1-2 page summaries for SSC meetings featuring "Flashpoints for Consideration."
 - **Operational Efficiency:** Prioritize consistent, concise summaries across all fisheries rather than long reports, leveraging automation to streamline data queries and visualization.



Highlights of SSS meeting outcomes

Short-Term Recommendations to the SSB

Risk Policy Integration

- Coordinate with the Risk Policy Working Group to identify relevant data products for scoring exercises.
 - Follow-up:
 - SSB staff met with WG in March 2026 and provided written comments.
 - Integration of Port Activity indicators being considered.



Highlights of SSS meeting outcomes

Short-Term Recommendations to the SSB

Indicator Development and Expansion

- Repackage information at the FMP level to increase management utility - SSB is currently consulting with GARFO on specificities of FMP data and plan to consult councils:
 - Revamp the [Performance Measures](#) to better reflect FMP level data and align with council characterization (e.g., replace 50% rule).
 - Develop a method to more effectively and consistently characterize communities by FMP.
 - Finalize environmental variability risk and landings portfolio analyses at the fleet level.
- Development of SSB [metrics catalog](#).
- Socioeconomic concepts and SSB metrics mapping and alignment with management objectives:
 - SSB internal mapping approach (ongoing).
 - Collaboration with Dr. Mateja Nenadovic (ongoing).



Highlights of SSS meeting outcomes

Stock Assessment Integration

- Collaborate with assessment scientists to incorporate social science information and Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) into assessments:
 - Pilot scup project SSB/PDB to test solicitation of input from industry as a strategy to integrate Local Knowledge in the stock assessment process (ongoing).

Integrated and Collaborative Reporting

- Partner with Council staff to develop standardized meeting documents that feature SSB products.
- Review annual Council work priorities to strategically align the information provided by the SSS.



CINAR Workshops

- CINAR funded workshops initiated by the social scientists of the SSC.
- Two workshops focused on *available social and economic information* and the *barriers to its use* in decision-making.
- Workshop 1 (May 2024, Woods Hole, MA) focused on formal social science research and how it might be better integrated into decision-making.
 - Lead to the formation of the Social Science Subcommittee (SSS).
- Workshop 2 (March 2026, 2026) focused on *fishing industry generated information* and how it might be better integrated into decision-making.



CINAR Workshop 2: Goals

- Develop shared understanding of *existing tools and data* from industry.
- Explore range of *barriers* to using industry data in decision processes.
- Identify *characteristics* of barriers and *approaches* to address them.
 - Identify *where* (at what stage) each barrier exists within the science-to-decision-making process, and the *nature* of the barrier.
 - Brainstorm approaches to address barriers and enhance consideration of industry information in decision-making.
- Develop initial *recommendations* for follow-up.
- Strengthen *connections* and *dialog* for future opportunities.



CINAR Workshop 2: Context

- The *reduction of federal scientific capacity* at the National Marine Fisheries Service, including social science capacity.
- The Council's adoption of a revised *Risk Policy* that creates new entry points for socioeconomic considerations.
- Persistent frustration of industry participants that the *data they provide, collect, and report is not meaningfully incorporated* into the decisions that affect their livelihoods.
- Ongoing *industrial change and community crises* - access, consolidation, working conditions, decline in services, socio-cultural and environmental transformations.



CINAR Workshop 2: Information Drawn Together

- Participants: SSC members, NEFSC SSB researchers, Council staff, academic social scientists, groundfish sector managers, fishing industry representatives, and community-based fishing organizations.
- Case studies highlighted the range of *industry data already available*.
 - Sector annual reports submitted to GARFO.
 - Input into Advisory Panels.
 - Cooperative research products.
 - Cost and operations data from fishing businesses.
 - Oral history and AI assisted content analyses.
- Engaging presentations and lively discussions.



CINAR Workshop 2: Barriers Identified

- *Barriers identified* and discussed at length include:
 - Existing data streams (sector reports) lack standard format and content.
 - Treated as supplementary or anecdotal.
 - Socioeconomic and industry data relegated to “back end” of decision-making process.
 - Informant fatigue and mistrust – repeatedly asked for information but where does it go?
 - Institutional inertia and legal constraints.
 - Reduction in federal scientific capacity.
- Each barrier was discussed *using actual examples*.
- Participants (in plenary and breakout sessions) brainstormed how to address the barriers identified.



CINAR Workshop 2: Proposed Strategies

- Strategies for overcoming barriers *coalesced around four themes*:
 - **Standardizing and activating existing data streams.**
 - *Sector annual reports.*
 - **Integrating socioeconomics into the science-to-management pipeline.**
 - *TORs explicitly calling for socioeconomic analyses, Risk Policy.*
 - **Deploying fishery performance reports and AI analysis tools.**
 - *Synthesizing data and making it accessible.*
 - **Strengthening connectivity and communication across the management system.**
 - *What information exists, where, how can address which questions, and so on.*
- Implementation of these strategies must be a *collective effort and shared responsibility* across the many sites of the science/management system.



Next steps

- Advisory panel feedback
 - AP input now included in Risk Policy scoring.
 - Staff discussing how to generate AP feedback on fishery performance more consistently.
- Standardize fishery performance reporting
 - Staff focused on Risk Policy implementation (automated, portal, scoring, revised matrix).
 - Planning for what information can be consistently provided to SSC across FMPs.
 - Considering how to expand the portal to other uses (automation of 1-2 page summaries).
- SSS opportunities
 - Further develop socioeconomic indicators for dynamic reference points
 - Nexus for communication to coordinate Council and NMFS work on metrics, reporting.

