



## New England Fishery Management Council

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### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** June 1, 2021  
**TO:** Scientific and Statistical Committee  
**FROM:** Chris Kellogg and Dr. Rachel Feeney, Council staff  
**SUBJECT:** **2021-2025 Council Research Priorities and Data Needs**

Council Committees, with input of Plan Development Teams (PDTs) and Advisory Panels, have developed recommendations for the 2021-2025 Council Research Priorities and Data Needs, for consideration by the Council at its June 2021 meeting. This memo summarizes the updates from the 2020-2024 list for consideration by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) ahead of its June 8, 2021 meeting.

The final list of 2020-2024 Council Research Priorities and Data Needs (approved June 2020), with 108 priorities, was the starting point for updates. That list included five few priorities that were recommended by the SSC and several other SSC recommendations for revisions to existing priorities.

Draft revisions for 2021 are provided in your June 8 meeting documents, in Excel and PDF formats. **Green** text are proposed additions, ~~red-strikethrough~~ are proposed deletions, and explanatory comments are in **blue**. Thus far, there is one new priority, no changes for 75 priorities, and 33 priorities have been modified. The Excel version has a column to insert any SSC comments.

In 2020, the SSC made several recommendations to add additional information for each research priority item to the spreadsheet and/or enhance the research priority setting process and communication about the priorities. Some of these recommendations would be simple to adopt and others would require substantially more staff resources to implement and greater coordination with other entities than the NEFMC has committed thus far. The SSC recommendations from 2020 are in Table 1 to Table 3 below, as well as staff responses to if and how the recommendations are getting incorporated.

**Table 1 . SSC recommendations in 2020 for spreadsheet changes and staff response**

SSC Recommendation	Staff Response
Highlight collaborative, interdisciplinary research	The SSC made this comment in 2019 as well. “Multiple” is used to note priorities that apply to more than one FMP or species. The spreadsheet is not designed to identify who would do the work. Most priorities could be approached collaboratively. A more specific recommendation would be helpful.
When prioritizing, look for where sequencing priorities would make sense.	PDTs do this sequencing through use of the “Rating” column.
Link the research priority to the intended benefit.	That is the purpose of the “Description, rationale, potential use” column. This column is getting populated more.
Reconsider use of the rating terms: “urgent,” “important,” and “strategic”	The approach adopted mirrors that of the NPFMC and terms are explained in the “read-me” worksheet. The NEFMC can consider adopting a different approach, but it would help to have a specific SSC recommendation. Would “intermediate” be clearer than “important”?
Add more columns to the spreadsheet for:	<p><u>“Audience”</u>. The SSC should clarify if the intent is to identify the entity type who might take on the research, e.g. NMFS, academia, or who might be interested in the results (e.g. species committee). If the former, staff are concerned that if we identify an entity type, that might make another entity feel like the Council does not want its help. The Council wants the work done and is not focused on restricting who would do it. If the latter, that would be duplicative with the current species and FMP columns.</p> <p><u>“Stock Status”</u>. This will get cumbersome if a priority applies to more than a few stocks (it does to many), and staff will need to be attentive to updates.</p> <p><u>“Approx. Cost” (\$\$\$)</u>. The recommendation is to rate between one to three “\$”. Council staff do not have sufficient expertise in project budgeting. Perhaps we could convene a group of researchers to create qualitative criteria and determine costs. Many priorities can be answered by several small projects, especially priorities that are grouped, complicating estimates. The cost in staff effort is not worth the uncertain benefit.</p> <p>In general, we have aimed to make the spreadsheet fit on a landscape piece of paper and be readable via PDF. To include all the info in the proposed new columns, we would have to abandon that goal or go the searchable database route that we decided against.</p>

**Table 2. SSC recommendations in 2020 for process improvements that would be simple to implement**

SSC Recommendation	Staff Response
Distribute the priorities to more offices/funders.	In the past, a press release has been issued and staff have emailed Sea Grant Directors and/or their grant program staff with a link to the priorities on our website and shared the list with researchers and research funders. Are there any specific recommendations?
Give more feedback on progress on topics	We have adopted the SSC suggestion to highlight the “urgent” priorities that no work has been done on, to our knowledge, by inserting a table of that subset into the cover letter to NMFS. We can continue this.
	In 2019, the new priorities had the note “priority added in 2019” included, so the Council could track how long priorities have been on the list. This has been continued.
	New in 2020 was a worksheet to house priorities that get deleted from the list, transferring the row to the new worksheet, and inserting a note to explain why it was deleted.

**Table 3. SSC recommendations for process improvements that would be more involved to implement**

SSC Recommendation	Staff Response
Give more feedback on progress on topics through creating an “annual report card”	There would need to be more discussion about the purpose, audience, extent, and expected impact of this project to justify the staff resources to create and maintain a report card. It could potentially be a lot of work, and it is not clear how it would benefit investigators.
Move towards a Northeast regional research planning and prioritization with the MAFMC	There was also some SSC discussion about coordinating with all Councils. Seeing where priorities overlap would be more simple than joint planning. This would require the commitment of multiple organizations and substantial staff effort. Research related to stock assessments used by the NEFMC, MAFMC and the ASMFC to some degree is already coordinated through the NRCC research track assessment process.
Participate in designing funding initiatives for seafood marketing	Council’s mission and scope centers on fisheries management. Marketing has been within the domain of partners and stakeholders.