SSC Social Science Subpanel

Response to TOR for Review of Groundfish and Scallops Specifications

Presentation to SSC – July 29, 2021

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Outline

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Background / Purpose

- Purpose:
  - 2018 Program Review encouraged broadened scope of the SSC to review social and economic dimensions of FMP actions
  - Council goal "to seek expert opinions on whether fishery specification actions … include the information needed for decision makers to understand the social and economic impact issues involved."
- Review focused on:
  - Groundfish Framework Adjustment 59
    - Descriptive and analytical sections relevant to the social and economic impact analyses
  - Scallop Framework Adjustment 32
    - Descriptive and analytical sections relevant to the social and economic impact analyses
  - Additional background information
    - Relevant SSC memos, NMFS and CEQ documents, and staff presentations

Terms of Reference

1. **Affected Environment** - Do the Affected Environment (AE) sections of the Environmental Assessments describing the fishery and fishing communities provide the relevant information for Council decision-makers to understand the potential social and economic impact issues specific to the alternatives under consideration (understanding that wherever possible, general background should be referenced in other sources and not repeated)?
2. **Analyses of Social and Economic Impacts** - Do the analyses of these impacts provide the relevant information for Council decision-makers to understand the social and economic impacts of the management alternatives and comply with NMFS guidance for meeting NEPA requirements?
3. Are there alternative ways to identify **key fishing communities** considering NMFS guidance? Is there a consistent approach that could be considered for different Council actions?
4. Are there alternative ways to **present and communicate** the data and analyses to Council decision-makers more effectively?

Subpanel Response Overview

- Subpanel appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback as a step towards further improvements to the incorporation and consideration of social and economic information in the NEFMC decision-making process.
- Staff working to prepare the documentation should be commended for doing important work with what information is available in the timeframes under which they must operate.
- Comments and feedback provided are not critiques of what has been completed in the past but rather ideas and opportunities for further improvements in the future in the spirit of continual improvement.

General Feedback (relevant to all TOR)

- Consider further the feedback provided on the social and economic information in other venues, i.e., Groundfish Sector Review, 2019 project on Consideration of Social Science by Council Members, and SSC feedback on the State of the Ecosystem (SOE) Report each year (see response to 2019 SSC comments or response to 2020 SSC comments).
- Continue to use the SOE process (and the SSC input on it) as an opportunity for regular input and feedback from the SSC on the socio-economic information and its interaction with other fisheries data and analyses in support of management decisions.
- Continue to work closely with NEFSC and GARFO on process improvements and ways to incorporate the latest advancements in understanding of the social and economic sciences, including through implementation of the new "Human Integrated Ecosystem Based Fishery Management Research Strategy 2021-2025."
- Continue to encourage other researchers to consider how their work can help advance these and other Council research priorities.
- Recommend continuing a review process such as this in future years for feedback on social and economic information in the NEFMC process.

Review Summary: TOR 1 (overview)

TOR 1: Affected Environment

- The AE sections describing the fishery and fishing communities for scallops and groundfish provide relevant important information but could benefit from improvements going forward.
- As methods for data collection, synthesis, and integration continue to evolve, the subpanel encourages consideration of further improvements and regular feedback from additional experts.
- Recommend addt'l focus on tracking trends in the socio-economic metrics, better integration between the AE and the impacts sections, increasing precision in language, consideration of additional metrics from other sources, streamlining of the analysis by updating metrics with less variability less frequently, consideration of automation, and increased use of the expertise available on the SSC.

Review Summary: TOR 1 (details)

a) What are the essential metrics, indicators or factors that should be included in the AE?
   a) Importance of linking and better integrating topics covered in AE and impacts sections
   b) Expand use of existing indicators tracked by NOAA and other agencies (inc. EPA and CDC)
   c) Explore additional metrics used in other regions or other fisheries

b) Are there addt'l groups that might be substantially affected that should be described?
   a) Importance of precision in language
   b) Consider use of additional metrics tracked by NOAA and other agencies (inc. EPA's EJSCREEN)

c) Is the AE sufficiently focused and/or do these sections provide info that is not needed?
   a) Support recommendations from both PDTs to streamline and narrow the scope of some analyses

d) How could the AE descriptive sections be improved to support Council decision-makers?
   a) Move from reporting trends to including interpretation of trends
   b) Use input and advice from SSC on AE sections earlier in the process
   c) Continue to synthesize and integrate across various sections within the AE
   d) Consider additional use of automation (with appropriate caution)

Review Summary: TOR 2 (overview)

TOR 2: Analyses of Social and Economic Impacts

- The analysis of social and economic impacts provides relevant information to decision-makers in the context of the guidance under which staff are operating.
- The subpanel recommends continued consideration jointly with NMFS on how to improve document readability and usefulness while still meeting NEPA reqs.
- Improve linkages between the AE and impacts sections to help structure the information in a manner that supports decision-makers in their review.
- Include more comprehensive analysis of the full range of communities that rely on and/or are impacted by fisheries to better understand the distribution of impacts
- Include more detailed treatment of the tradeoffs between economic efficiencies and social/cultural impacts.

Review Summary: TOR 2 (details)

a) What are the essential metrics, indicators or factors that should be included in the analysis of social and economic impacts?
   a) Further integration of content across the AE and impacts sections
   b) Consider geographical entities relevant to each fishery (helps understand differential impacts)
b) Are there additional groups that might be substantially impacted that should be included in the impact analyses?
   a) Providing more comprehensive analysis of the full range of communities that rely on and/or are impacted by fisheries (focus on the largest or remaining communities causes loss of context).
   b) Ensure parallel treatment in impacts analysis of any additional changes to AE
c) How could the impact analyses of the actions be improved to support Council decision-making?
   a) Create more narrative flow where possible
   b) Provide additional context for terms that some interpret as subjective based on position / impact

Review Summary: TOR 3

- Even with guidance on identifying key fishing communities (NMFS 2007), this process continues to present a challenge for analysis.
- There are characteristics unique to each fishery but some framework for consistency is beneficial for decision makers and the public to interpret the information.
- The subpanel noted challenges associated with confidentiality rules and encourages the exploration of additional methods or approaches that might improve the information while still protecting confidentiality.

Review Summary: TOR 4

- The most important information that the stakeholders and Council members want to know is how different proposed alternatives compare to each other so that informed decisions on which options to pursue can be made.
- Challenge that there are different levels of information needed at various points along the decision process and with different audiences.
- Effort to further clarify the key take-home message the writers are seeking to convey could also be beneficial (lessons from technical writing and other communications experts?)
- Create a more narrative structure that those not steeped in the analysis can better digest and interpret.
- Consider a policy analysis framing as a tool to develop structure for the documents (e.g., Bardach)

Next Steps

- Questions and discussion at SSC
- Ongoing consideration by staff
- Presentation /discussion at September Council Meeting

Questions / Discussion

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