

## 2020 FALL NRCC MEETING SUMMARY

Webinar  
November 9-10, 2020

### *Attendees*

#### Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)

Bob Beal, Executive Director  
Toni Kerns, Interstate Fishery Management Program Director  
Patrick Campfield, Fisheries Science Program Director

#### Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC)

Mike Luisi, Chair  
Dr. Chris Moore, Executive Director  
Brandon Muffley, Staff  
Dr. Paul Rago, Chair, Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)

#### New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC)

Dr. John Quinn, Chair  
Eric Reid, Vice-Chair  
Tom Nies, Executive Director  
Chris Kellogg, Deputy Director  
Dr. Jason McNamee, Chair, SSC

#### NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)

Dr. Jon Hare, Science and Research Director  
Dr. Michael Simpkins, Chief, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division  
Dr. Russell Brown, Chief, Population Dynamics Branch

#### NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO)

Mike Pentony, Regional Administrator  
Sarah Bland, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries  
Liz Sullivan, Sustainable Fisheries Division (NRCC staff support)  
Laura Hansen, Sustainable Fisheries Division (NRCC staff support)

### Guest Presenters

Chris Schillaci, GARFO Habitat and Ecosystem Services Division  
Kevin Madley, GARFO Habitat and Ecosystem Services Division  
Emily Gilbert, GARFO Sustainable Fisheries Division  
Jen Anderson, GARFO Protected Resources Division  
Dr. Mike Asaro, GARFO Protected Resources Division  
Moiria Kelly, GARFO Sustainable Fisheries Division  
Amanda McCarty, NEFSC Fishery Monitoring and Research Division Chief  
Kiley Dancy, MAFMC Staff

### Additional Attendees

Dr. Anthony Wood, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch  
Dr. Brian Linton, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch

Dr. Charles Perretti, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch  
Dr. Dvora Hart, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch  
Gary Shepherd, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch  
Katherine Sosebee, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch  
Dr. Mark Terceiro, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch  
Paul Nitschke, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch  
Susan Wigley, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch  
Dr. Timothy Miller, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch  
Toni Chute, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch  
Dr. Jamie Cournane, NEFMC Staff

#### Public Attendees

Greg DiDomenico, Garden State Seafood Association

*Note: NRCC decisions and action items that resulted from this meeting are in bold for ease of reference.*

#### **– Day 1 –**

##### 1. Aquaculture

Mr. Chris Schillaci and Mr. Kevin Madley, the Regional Aquaculture Coordinators at GARFO, provided a presentation regarding NMFS aquaculture efforts at GARFO and nationally. Mr. Schillaci first gave an overview of the aquaculture aspects of the Executive Order (E.O.) on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth, which focuses on regulatory reform to maximize commercial fishing, seafood trade, and the expansion of U.S. seafood production through more efficient and transparent aquaculture permitting. Mr. Schillaci highlighted Section 6 of the E.O., which designates NOAA as the lead agency for NEPA when an aquaculture project requires environmental review or authorization by two or more agencies, requires an environmental impact statement, and is located outside of the waters of any state or territory and within the EEZ of the U.S. He also gave an update on Section 7 of the E.O., which charges NOAA with the designation of 10 Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOA) nationally. He explained that NOAA is using a combination of National Ocean Service (NOS) siting analysis and mapping, combined with stakeholder input, and state and federal interagency coordination to identify two AOAs annually over the next 4 years.

Mr. Tom Nies asked if AOAs have any regulatory authority. Mr. Schillaci explained that there are no permits issued for these areas and that this is a science and planning effort. NOAA is using existing spatial data combined with stakeholder input on potential user and resource conflicts to inform an impact assessment for each AOA. Dr. Chris Moore asked about the process when multiple agencies are involved. Mr. Schillaci explained that USACE and EPA are the permitting agencies for aquaculture, and generally serve as the lead federal agency under NEPA. NMFS generally serves as a cooperating agency, conducting Endangered Species Act and Essential Fish Habitat consultations. When two agency authorizations are required, agencies have to coordinate to determine which agency will be the lead. CEQ regulations allow for a cooperating agency to be designated as the NEPA lead if they have special experience.

Mr. Madley provided a presentation on the Gulf of Mexico litigation regarding the Aquaculture Fishery Management Plan. The Fifth Circuit issued an opinion affirming the district court's decision that NMFS exceeded its statutory authority when it issued the final rule implementing the FMP for aquaculture in the Gulf of Mexico. At the time of the NRCC meeting, NOAA Fisheries was standing by to continue assistance to DOC and DOJ as they assessed whether to "appeal" or seek further review of the Fifth Circuit decision.

Mr. Madley gave an overview of the current process for EEZ aquaculture site screening. The informal process includes coordination with permitting agencies, site scoping, site decision and baseline environmental surveys. Following those pre-application steps, submittal of applications to the appropriate state and federal agencies would likely follow.

Mr. Nies asked if GARFO had looked at the aquaculture policy adopted by the New England Council in the late 1990s, which included elements such as having a single point of contact. Mr. Madley explained that the site screening process described is not a formal policy, and if a project required coordination with the New England Council, GARFO intent would be to inform the New England Council of the proposal and inform the project proponent of the New England Council aquaculture policy. Mr. Schillaci added that the NEFMC Habitat Committee is working on an aquaculture policy, and the goal is to make sure the Council is able to focus on the projects that have a higher potential for conflicts or impacts. There is a NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Region Aquaculture Team that includes both GARFO and NEFSC staff. Mr. Schillaci explained that GARFO does not always know about potential projects until another agency comes to GARFO for consultation. NOAA resources, such as NOS siting tools, are often used by project proponents, but applicants can submit directly to USACE without coordination through NOAA.

Dr. Moore asked how the informal process for site screening relates to the E.O. Mr. Schillaci explained that the site screening process outline is an example of what a permit applicant would go through. It is very similar to what NOAA is doing for AOAs, except they take the next step to identify the most desirable alternative.

Mr. Nies asked if MAFMC or ASMFC had any plans to comment on the Manna Fish Farm proposal. Neither Dr. Moore nor Mr. Bob Beal indicated they did. Mr. Mike Pentony raised that at a state directors meeting, multiple states indicated concerns with the Manna Fish Farm, due to potential implications for striped bass. Mr. Beal explained that since Manna had shifted away from striped bass, states became less concerned. Mr. Madley added that regulatory constraints had pushed the applicant away from striped bass. Manna has recently indicated they do not plan to include striped bass as a culture species in their applications.

## 2. SAFE Reports

Ms. Emily Gilbert provided a brief update on the status of SAFE reports. Several years ago, the NRCC had decided that GARFO would be most appropriate to host the reports, and GARFO undertook uploading all relevant documents (which includes SSC meeting documents, appendices, stock assessment reports) to the website. However, website redesign, 508 compliance, and workload have hindered GARFO's ability to continue to update the SAFE

report webpage. Ms. Gilbert explained that to solve this, a working group has suggested that GARFO would want to use a hybrid approach, where the GARFO website would be used to search for the documents, but the documents would be stored on other websites.

Mr. Nies pointed out that there are some SAFE report documents that aren't on Council websites. For instance, stock status is not updated annually. He cautioned about setting the expectation that the Councils would compile the information for the SAFE report. Dr. Mike Simpkins raised that 508 compliance is a wider issue, which affects documents such as stock assessments. Dr. Paul Rago added that the national control over the NMFS webpage has caused problems, making it challenging to find the desired information on the webpage. Ms. Sarah Bland stated that GARFO would revisit. Councils should identify points of contact for GARFO staff to help identify challenges that GARFO would need to work through, and GARFO would provide an update at the Spring 2021 NRCC meeting (**Action Item #1**).

### 3. Wind Update

Mr. Pentony and Dr. Jon Hare provided an update regarding wind energy. The Synthesis of the Science Workshop, sponsored by the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance (RODA), took place in mid-October, and there was a lot of useful questions and exchanges of information. For Vineyard Wind, the regional wind team provided comments on the FEIS. The preferred alternative is not currently available, but at the DEIS stage, GARFO did not concur with the preferred alternative. If we do not concur on at the final stage, it would be related to process, rather than the permit. The biological opinion has been signed. **Update:** As of December 16, 2020, the Department of Interior announced that the federal permitting process for the Vineyard Wind project is canceled.

For South Fork Wind Farm, GARFO submitted comments to BOEM in October. The range of alternatives included one that would minimize fish habitat impacts. Mr. Pentony provided updates on staffing for the wind team, as well as new wind tools and analyses that are available online. Currently, there are 10 construction operations that require review, which will mean high workloads.

### 4. Scenario Planning

Ms. Kiley Dancy provided an update from the Scenario Planning Working Group. The Nature Conservancy has been approved for a grant from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation to support East Coast climate change scenario planning. The ASFMC has agreed to administer the grant, which could alleviate issues of the Councils or Agency receiving funds. The funding is intended to be used for costs such as hiring a facilitator or travel, while the Councils and Agency would continue to be responsible for their respective staff costs.

The working group recommended appointing a small core team comprised of NRCC membership technical staff. The working group also recommended the appointment of chair(s). The core team would be responsible for technical work and logistics, analogous to a plan development team or fishery management action team. The working group also recommended the formation of an ad-hoc committee, but the NRCC did not pursue this recommendation. The

next steps would be to secure a facilitator, identify the key questions, establish a timeline, and identify goals and objectives. Dr. Moore added that the South Atlantic Council is very interested in being involved in the process, and the NRCC was supportive of their involvement. Mr. Nies reported that NEFMC has adopted scenario planning as one of the priorities for 2021. Mr. Beal added that ASMFC is also very interested, and that the Commission has agreed to handle the administration of the TNC grant.

Dr. John Quinn asked whether NOAA grant attorneys had concerns about using outside funds. While it was thought to only be an issue if the Council or Agency directly received the funds, Dr. Moore agreed that MAFMC would check with NOAA attorneys regarding having ASMFC administer the funds from TNC (**Action Item #2a**).

**On the topic of governance, the NRCC agreed that it would serve as the Scenario Planning Steering Committee, and the South Atlantic Council should be included as well. There would need to be a meeting ahead of the Spring 2021 NRCC meeting.** If a contractor were hired, they would be responsible for logistics, while the Steering Committee would focus on higher level issues. To make the process effective, the members of the NRCC would need to agree on the desired outcome, which might take a few meetings.

The Core Team (or technical team) would be made up of the Scenario Planning Working Group. The NRCC discussed whether TNC should be also included in the Core Team. In the Pacific, TNC is part of the Core Team, but this could raise perception concerns, and questions of why TNC would be included, and whether other groups should be invited to participate as well. While the idea of having a separate team was proposed, which could be opened up to multiple groups for membership (e.g., TNC, industry), members of the NRCC had concerns about how this would affect costs, as well as what its role would be, such as serving as advisors to the Steering Committee or Core Team. Mr. Pentony suggested that TNC could be a technical advisor, given that, for all participants, scenario planning is new, and TNC has experience that would be useful. TNC should not be deciding the outcome of the process, rather providing input on the process. Dr. Moore agreed, and expanded that TNC could advise the Core Team. **Update:** Following the meeting, Dr. Moore contacted the Pacific Council to confirm that they recommend the approach of using TNC as a technical advisor.

**The NRCC agreed that ASFMC would take responsibility for hiring a facilitator for scenario planning, but would solicit input from the rest of the NRCC before making a selection.** ASFMC will confirm that it is able to hire using a sole source contract, rather than going through an RFP, given that the source of the funding is private (**Action Item #2b**). The NRCC will identify the members of the Core Team (**Action Item #2c**).

## 5. Ropeless Technology

Ms. Jen Anderson and Dr. Mike Asaro provided a presentation on the current status of ropeless gear technology. The three styles of retrieval systems are gaining interest as an alternative to closures as entanglements of North Atlantic Right Whales have increased. NEFSC is conducting field testing of all three systems, and economists are working on cost estimates to forecast how costs could decrease over time. There are a number of challenges, including location markings

for other mariners, enforcement, privacy concerns, gear conflicts, and how to transition away from the current requirement to have an exempted fishing permit (EFP) when using ropeless gear. There is a Ropeless Consortium, which is very focused on gear markings and gear conflicts. GARFO and NEFSC plan to keep the NRCC updated as they work through the issues. Most potential solutions would require changes to regulations, and will require coordination between many groups.

#### 6. BSIA Framework and SSC Points of Contact

Ms. Moira Kelly followed up on the Summer Intersessional conversation about the agency having point(s) of contact at SSC meetings. GARFO and NEFSC have had staff at all of the SSC meetings held this fall, but it was not clear how the agency should notify the Council or the SSC that staff that were present were satisfying the goal of having POCs at the meetings. Both Mr. Nies and Dr. Moore indicated that formal notification was not necessary, but that the agency should email Mr. Chris Kellogg or Mr. Brandon Muffley, respectively, which staff in attendance were there as the representative of GARFO and/or NEFSC. GARFO and NEFSC should identify a point of contact to the Councils, for the Councils to reach out to once an agenda is created for the SSC meeting. Dr. Simpkins added that under the current situation of virtual meetings, having staff present was relatively easy. In the future, when meetings return to in-person, it might be more challenging to have as many staff present, unless the SSCs continue to keep virtual attendance an option.

#### 7. Gear Conflicts

Mr. Nies reported that the NEFMC has discussed making a priority the issue of how to deal with gear conflicts. The Council and Scallop Committee have discussed conflicts between lobster and scallop fisheries, and NEFMC repeatedly receives comments that there is nowhere for trawl fisheries to operate. The proliferation of Jonah crab gear in the EEZ has also led to additional conflicts, as well as more lobster gear moving offshore. The Council did not establish this as a priority for 2021, but the situation seems to be getting worse. Ms. Toni Kerns added that NMFS is catching up with the ASMFC rulemaking that requires a lobster permit to fish for Jonah crab, which may limit the number of traps that would qualify to be set.

#### 8. FDDI Updates

Ms. Amanda McCarthy provided an update on FDDI. FDDI is currently focused on the technical programming led by NEFSC and policy work led by GARFO. The NEFSC is focused on linking datasets and developing and upgrading data systems, and GARFO is focused on eVTR. Both have been working on a vision and roadmap that lay out future efforts and resource needs, and these documents should be available to share in early 2021. Systems such as PTNS, OASIS, FLDRS have been redesigned and upgraded, and there has been redesigns of systems to issue and track COVID-related observer waivers. The Catch Accounting and Monitoring System (CAMS) project, which is a joint initiative to create a single comprehensive source for all US commercial catch, is currently on track for milestones. There is a contractor that is entirely focused on state data, to make sure that CAMS works with ACCSP.

Ms. McCarthy acknowledged that, when databases change, there are often issues, but part of the plan is to see how well CAMS lines up with the data currently in DMIS. Mr. Nies raised the issue of data from 2020, which will have inherent issues due to COVID, and asked if there was a plan to create CAMS data for years before 2019. Dr. Simpkins replied that if CAMS and DMIS data match well for 2019, that might not be necessary, but if not, it might be necessary to recreate data for earlier years. Regarding the “one-stop shop” for data, Mr. Pentony stated that, given the Joint Omnibus Electronic Vessel Trip Reporting Framework Adjustment publication date of November 10, 2020, the one-stop shop should be effective a year from then.

Mr. Greg DiDomenico, a member of the public, asked whether the agency would make eVTR mandatory for vessels that are not fishing. Mr. Pentony stated that this would essentially be a “did not fish” (DNF) report, which is no longer required, although the Councils could request that it be used again. Mr. DiDomenico suggested that DNF reports would show whether vessels are reporting, and whether permits are getting used. He argued that permit renewals should be tied to use of permits and reporting compliance.

– *Day 2* –

## 9. Stock Assessments

### *Year 1 Suggestions and Lessons Learned*

Dr. Simpkins led a discussion on the suggestions and lessons learned from the first year of the NRCC stock assessment process, including a summary of the assessment processes for Atlantic herring, red hake, and ocean pout. He provided an update on the index-based methods research track assessment, which needed more time and so the review was delayed. The peer review was scheduled for early December, and it was suggested that an SSC member chair that meeting (**Action Item #3a**). **Update:** The peer review panel was chaired by Dr. Paul Rago.

Several members of the NRCC brought up concerns with the past year of stock assessments. Ms. Kerns expressed disappointment that recent papers (Bell *et al.*) were not included in the winter flounder assessments, despite the NRCC previously agreeing that they would be. Dr. Simpkins agreed that there are challenges for how to include information when it does not fall within the existing framework and that guidelines for the types of updates that can be done through a management track assessment could possibly be adjusted in the future.

Mr. Nies brought up several issues, including his concern regarding Atlantic herring having originally proposed as a level 1 assessment by the AOP. He raised that assessment oversight panel (AOP) meetings had become a mini review of the stock assessments, which was not the original intent. In addition, the AOP summary for the fall management track assessments inaccurately described the results of the red hake research track assessment and several sea scallop activities. Some of these errors mislead reviewers during the fall management track assessment. A potential solution for this is having the AOP chair run the report through the Council staff who were present at the AOP and research track meetings. Mr. Nies also brought up the data issues that were raised by the Atlantic halibut assessment. For the second year in a row, errors in the catch in a Level 1 assessment were not detected by the NEFSC’s internal

review and had to be corrected later by the Council's Plan Development Team. Relating to red hake, Mr. Nies expressed the concern that work that was expected to be done for the Level 3 assessments was not completed. For Level 3 assessments, it may be beneficial to consider forming a working group rather than rely on a single assessment biologist.

Regarding stocks with Plan B assessments, Mr. Nies raised the concern that, while Plan Bs provide catch advice, they do not provide information about the status of the stock. There also seems to be an assumption at the NEFSC that once a Plan B approach is used, the original approach cannot be revisited without a research track assessment. Dr. Simpkins replied that there could be a way to fix or improve the assessment so that it is approved the next time, but that this would need follow-up discussion with the assessment level guidelines working group.

Mr. Nies relayed that reviewers at the fall assessment were frustrated that not all background information they needed ahead of the peer review. Research track documents were not available and in some cases presentations were not available in advance. Mr. Nies also expressed concern that the data portal does not provide consistent information across all stocks. The management track assessment reports have not been updated to provide the information that has been requested in the past. Following up on the issue raised earlier by Ms. Kerns, Mr. Nies also relayed that the SSC has been frustrated about how long it takes to incorporate environmental concerns into research track assessments. As an example, analytic winter flounder assessments incorporating environmental variables were published several years ago, yet it seems the earliest they will be considered is after 2025 in a winter flounder research track assessment. Dr. Simpkins replied that, while the assessment schedule currently does not have a climate change topic based research track, the NRCC can change the schedule and include a research track topic focused on these issues. Ms. Kerns raised that when there are topic-based research assessments, it is unclear how those then get incorporated into the individual stock assessments, and whether they have to wait for a research track or it can go into a management track assessment.

Mr. Eric Reid brought up the question of how the industry can assist in developing research track terms of reference (TOR), and several replied that this has been something that has been attempted, but the process can always be improved.

Dr. Simpkins recorded the issues raised and recommended forming an NRCC assessment work group to review and address the list of issues.

### *2021 Preparations*

Dr. Simpkins gave a summary of 2021 plans and potential issues. The TORs for haddock were negotiated with the NRCC and TRAC/Canada, and a working group is underway with Canadian members. For *Illex* and butterfish, TORs were developed via the existing NRCC process, however concerns were raised after the TORs were final. Candidates for a working group have been solicited. Mr. Muffley recommended improvements for outreach to solicit membership for working groups, to increase participation beyond the NEFSC. It would also be useful to get a standardized TOR for climate change. Dr. Moore recommended that these suggestions be included in the proposed assessment work group priorities.



Regarding the impact of COVID-19 on management tracks, Dr. Simpkins provided an overview of data gaps (surveys, observer data, MRIP data, biosampling). Index assessments will not be able to be updated in 2021, and there would be large uncertainty in the 2020 terminal year estimates. There is the potential that unbalanced data could warp a model, given missing data across several different data streams, and variability in the extent of missing or potentially biased data. This could have a strong influence, if used as the terminal year. Dr. Simpkins recommended, and **the NRCC agreed, that, for 2021 management assessments, NEFSC use 2019 as the terminal year, but use 2020 to inform projections if appropriate.**

The NRCC had an in-depth discussion regarding the stocks on the 2021 management track schedule. **The following table shows the final NRCC decisions:**

<b>Timing</b>	<b>Stock</b>	<b>NRCC Decision for 2021 Assessment</b>
June	Mackerel	Keep
June	Summer flounder	Keep
June	Golden tilefish	Keep
June	Bluefish	Keep
June	Scup	Keep
June	Black sea bass	Keep
July	Cod - EGB (TRAC)	Keep
July	Yellowtail - GB (TRAC)	Keep
July	Haddock - EGB (TRAC)	Keep
June	Striped bass	Postpone
Sept	Scallops (area allocation model)	Keep
Sept	Cod - GOM	Keep
Sept	Cod - GB	Keep
Sept	Haddock-GB	Keep
Sept	Haddock - GOM	Keep
Sept	White Hake	Postpone
Sept	Scallops (status determination model)	Postpone
Sept	Witch Flounder	Postpone
Sept	Yellowtail - SNE/MA	Postpone

Sept	Pollock	Postpone
Sept	Yellowtail - CC/GOM	Postpone
Sept	American plaice	Postpone
Sept	Skates	Postpone

Dr. Simpkins will work with the Councils and provide an update at the Spring 2021 meeting regarding how the postponed stock assessments will be dealt with, and the downstream effects of these changes (**Action Item #3b**). The NRCC discussed encouraging the use of Level 1 assessments for as many stocks as possible, although there would be several stocks for which Level 1 would not be appropriate.

#### *Future planning*

Dr. Simpkins indicated that forming the research track working groups one at a time has kept the working groups on single year timelines. Dr. Simpkins put forward several options, such as having a steering committee for each stock or topic, having cross-cutting steering committees, either by FMP, region/area, or a single standing steering committee. He proposed a bulk solicitation of working groups through 2025, and the development of a steering committee(s) plan. Additionally, he recommended developing standardized TORs for research tracks to enable a bulk solicitation, while still allowing for additional, stock-specific TORs. Several raised the issue of ensuring a diversity of backgrounds (beyond Science Center staff) on the working groups. **The NRCC supported standardizing TORs to the extent possible and bulk solicitation, but more discussion is needed regarding steering committees.**

Dr. Simpkins recommended convening an assessment process technical team (working group) to discuss the assessment process issues brought up over the course of the Fall 2020 meeting, and develop recommendations. The NRCC would need to provide representatives from each group, and Dr. Simpkins would provide a collation of needs, to inform membership (**Action Item #3c**).

For the possible 2026 research track schedule, the left-over list from the Spring 2020 meeting included the following stocks: winter flounders, Jonah crab, longfin squid, and monkfish; and the following topics: incorporation of ecosystem information and dynamic reference points. Mr. Nies suggested that the list also include a consideration of the recommendations from the Fishery Dependent Data Working Group, but this could change depending on the results of the working group. **The NRCC agreed that they would follow the same approach (proposal, review, recommendation) as last time, as well as using a Working Group or team.**

Regarding communication, the goal is to target existing groups that represent and connect with key stakeholders, including advisory panels and sector managers. While the website has created problems with how best to make information available, the Science Center is working on ways to make it more functional and searchable.

## 10. Joint Fishery Management Plans

Regarding FMPs with joint management, namely spiny dogfish (MAFMC lead) and monkfish (NEFMC lead), Mr. Nies raised the issue of how the MAFMC has committees-as-a-whole (made up of all Council members), whereas the NEFMC has committees (made up of a sub-set of Council members), which can lead to an imbalanced joint committee meeting. Mr. Luisi and Dr. Moore agreed that it would make sense to have a committee meeting, rather than a committee-as-a-whole in these cases.

#### 11. Other Business and Public Comment

Mr. DiDomenico stated that there needs to be a clear set of rules when research track assessments are scheduled and underway, including having clear TORs that are available for the public to review and comment on. Several NRCC members responded that the assessment process work group could include this issue in their review. Dr. Hare suggested that it would be useful to provide guidance on when it is an appropriate time for groups to comment on stock assessment TORs.

#### **Next Meeting**

The Spring 2021 NRCC meeting will be a 2-day meeting, to be scheduled during May 25-27, 2021, chaired by NEFSC. The NRCC will decide via correspondence which of the 2 days to hold the meeting, and the decision to hold the meeting virtually or in-person will be made closer to the date, based on current conditions.