

## 2020 SPRING NRCC MEETING SUMMARY

Webinar  
May 14, 2020

### *Attendees*

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

Patrick Keliher, Chair

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)

Kyle Molton, Sustainable Fisheries Division (NRCC staff support)

Dave Gouveia, Assistant Regional Administrator for Analysis and Program Support

#### Guest Presenters

Mike Ruccio, GARFO

Moira Kelly, GARFO

Amanda McCarty, NEFSC Fishery Monitoring and Research Division Chief

#### Additional Attendees

Dr. Jamie Cournane, NEFMC Staff

Jonathon Peros, NEFMC Staff

José Montañez, MAFMC Staff

Holly McBride, NEFSC Staff

Public Attendees

None

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

1. Shared GARFO-NEFSC Catch Accounting and Monitoring System project (CAMS)

Mr. Dave Gouveia provided an update on CAMS, which will provide a single comprehensive source for all commercial catch (landings and discards) for quota monitoring, stock assessments, protected resources estimation, ecosystem modeling, and other needs of GARFO and NEFSC in a fully documented relational database with appropriate user views and tables. The presentation outlined the primary objectives; project implementation, milestones, and deadlines; and challenges and solutions to meeting deadlines.

Mr. Tom Nies asked about keeping data consistent, as well as having written decision rules. Mr. Gouveia noted that they are contracting a technical writer for the project to document the relational databases, binning rules, etc. GARFO and the NEFSC will work in close coordination to ensure data consistency for both office's responsibilities. The intent is to document how CAMS supports the NEFSC for stock assessment purposes and GARFO for its quota monitoring responsibilities, as well as the relationship between these two functions. One of the major components of CAMS will be to expand DMIS, the current process used to monitor commercial catch and discards for quota monitoring purposes, will be expanded to also support the stock assessment process, thus replacing the AA Tables currently used for stock assessments. Mr. Nies asked if DMIS had been documented and vetted like the AA Tables process had been. Mr. Gouveia noted that DMIS was documented and vetted through NEFSC, but the documentation was not finalized as work began on CAMS. CAMS will be documented and vetted although Mr. Nies pointed out that there are other uses beyond the GARFO and NEFSC and that the vetting process should be beyond the Center's documentation process. Mr. Gouveia also noted that while ACCSP is involved, these are mostly federal (i.e., GARFO and NEFSC) data, and so ACCSP involvement is somewhat limited to datasets that support state only landings data needed for stock assessments and our coordinated efforts on dealer data.

Dr. Chris Moore asked about a disconnect between bluefish landings generated from ACCSP data and the bluefish landings generated from GARFO/NEFSC data, and expressed a need for the landings discrepancy to be reconciled. Mr. Gouveia noted that because of the complexities of the respective data sets these types of discrepancies extend beyond bluefish. To help remedy this issue, he stated that through the CAMS development process they are also contracting a state data coordinator to work exclusively with ACCSP on state data coordination issues between ACCSP, NEFSC and GARFO. With respect to the specific bluefish issue, Dr. Jon Hare indicated that he would follow up with the appropriate biologist.

2. Fisheries Dependent Data Initiative

Mr. Dave Gouveia and Ms. Amanda McCarty provided updates on Fishery Dependent Data Initiative (FDDI).

Regulatory Team (GARFO-led):

- Focus on eVTR, to support policy, implementation, and outreach to support transition to eVTR. They are developing and better documenting eVTR API to assist developers, etc.
- One-stop reporting (OSR). The OSR project is intended to develop the technical specifications of an eVTR system that will enable fishing vessel operators to submit a single eVTR form which will satisfy the reporting requirements of all the affected fishing management authorities along the East Coast (SERO, SEFSC, HMS, GARFO, and states) as well as other invested programs (e.g., cooperative research, electronic monitoring). The OSR team will host a series of virtual meetings attended by subject matter experts. The first series of meetings will serve to capture the various program requirements of all affected vessel data collection programs. The second series of meetings will serve to identify the technical solutions required to support the comprehensive program requirements and that will serve as the basis for the OSR Technical Specifications. GARFO is continuing communications with other regions and project investigators relative to these meetings to minimize delays caused by COVID-19 pandemic and will continue collaborations with ACCSP, HMS, SERO, SEFSC to develop valid codes to be used by ACCSP's eTrips eVTR application by dual-permitted vessels (precursor to one-stop reporting).
- Support Maine DMR eVTR development to ensure seamless data, compatibility, etc.
- Outreach and education are critical, especially for party/charter fleet.
- Other projects include CAMS, CFDEERS.

Technical Team (Center-led):

- Major upgrade of Pre-Trip Notification System (PTNS) interface and tools rolled out late March. PTNS is now collecting pre-trip information not solely related to observer deployment. This transition will allow the system to better support FDDI. Upgraded to support the Atlantic herring notification requirements.
- Working on eVTR and PTNS integration.
- Modernizing documentation.
- Developing vision/road map that can be shared more broadly, with a 5 year horizon.
- Some delays due to COVID, but continue to roll out priority projects.

Dr. Moore asked about the timeline for “one-stop reporting”. Mr. Gouveia noted that the goal is to have the one-stop reporting initiative completed simultaneously with the omnibus framework action proposed by the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils, which if approved, would require commercially permitted vessels in both New England and mid-Atlantic regions to submit electronic vessel trip reports (eVTR) rather than the traditional paper VTR submission. He noted industry’s desire for a one-stop functionality for eVTR applications during the rules development and explained the need to develop specifications for new or existing eVTR applications that can share regional specific information to appropriate offices responsible for collecting the respective fishery information (GARFO, SERO, HMS, ACCSP, etc.).

Additionally, Dr. Moore asked if the development of the one-stop reporting initiative is linked to the effective date of the rule whereby it might delay implementation of the omnibus eVTR action

if the specifications were not completed on time. Mr. Gouveia underscored the need to have a well thought out plan for how all the systems will work together and noted the anticipated timeline for the action. He said that although there should be enough time for the simultaneous implementation of both the new eVTR requirements and the one-stop reporting initiative, there is no direct link to their respective effective dates.

Dr. Moore also asked how development of the vision/road map would include the Councils, Commission, and stakeholders. Ms. McCarty confirmed that they are including all of these groups, as well as the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP). The 2015 vision document had general engagement plans, but she explained that they are moving towards deeper engagement moving forward to make sure all pieces of the plan are inclusive.

### 3. East Coast Scenario Planning Working Group

Mr. Mike Ruccio provided an update on the Scenario Planning working group, for which he is serving as chair. There are members from each of the relevant organizations, as well as Ms. Wendy Morrison from NMFS Headquarters. They have had numerous conversations with Diane Borggaard, from GARFO's Protected Resources Division, as well as staff from NOAA, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Pacific Council. The goal of these conversations was to get a broad understanding of how scenario planning has been used, how it has been set up, and potential funding sources. Mr. Ruccio explained that he was not tasked with developing a scenario plan, but instead to look at capacity in the region to develop scenario planning as a potential tool.

Dr. Moore provided background that the MAFMC was the organization to bring up scenario planning at the Fall 2019 meeting, and a climate change scenario planning project is part of MAFMC's 2020 implementation plan. He raised that there might have been some disconnect in the intent of having a scenario planning working group. Mr. Pentony commented that, despite the presentation from Ms. Borggaard at the Fall 2019 meeting and the good discussion following that presentation, there were still outstanding questions, and a working group was needed to scope out things like budget, timeline, who should be involved, and the possibility of expert facilitators, so that the NRCC, as a larger group, can take that information into account before proceeding with scenario planning. Ideally, the working group could have reported on those things today, but has been delayed due to things like COVID. Mr. Beal agreed with Mr. Pentony.

Mr. Ruccio indicated that the plan was to come up with some options for the NRCC to consider, and the possibility of having an intersessional meeting was raised at which the working group could report out the scope of different options, and the estimates for the requirements of those options (**Action Item #2**). Mr. Nies asked that the working group keep the focus on climate change, and not try to broaden the scope to other topics for which scenario planning could be used.

### 4. Stock Assessments and Related Topics

*2025 research track recommendations*

Dr. Mike Simpkins provided a list of the 2025 research track recommendations, based on the work from the NRCC Assessment Working Group. He explained that there were two slots available (Spring and Fall 2025) and each slot could accommodate one research topic or two species/stocks. Prior to this meeting, the working group had created an initial list for NRCC consideration, which was winnowed down to a couple options for each of two slots, based on a number of evaluation factors, such as the importance and feasibility of expected scientific advances. The working group recommended that the NRCC select one research topic and 1-2 stocks. For the first slot (research topic), the working group recommended selecting between ecosystem and dynamic reference points, or ensemble modeling. For the second slot (1-2 stocks/species), the working group recommend selecting from the following options: Herring and lobster, herring and Jonah crab, or three stocks of winter flounders. For the 2026 priorities, Dr. Simpkins explained that whichever was not selected for 2025 would be included, in addition to longfin squid and monkfish, as initial placeholders for future discussion.

For the first slot, Mr. Nies asked for more explanation of how the ecosystem and dynamic reference points were linked, and Dr. Simpkins explained that the ecosystem can influence stock productivity and therefore ties in with dynamic reference points. Dr. Hare added that by changing the time frame, the reference points become more dynamic. Mr. Nies said that he was supportive of incorporating ecosystem information, like temperature, but as a manager, it was hard to know how dynamic we would want reference points to be, since the Magnuson-Stevens Act says that MSY is based on current conditions, and constantly changing reference points can be challenging to manage for. Mr. Nies expressed that he felt ensemble monitoring would be a better priority for 2025. Mr. Muffley said that the stock assessment working group had been split on which option should be a priority. While the National SSC meeting was supposed to focus on how to incorporate ecosystem information into assessments (but not necessarily dynamic reference points), that meeting has been postponed until next year; however, once held, that meeting might produce more information, which could help inform this research topic. Dr. Simpkins indicated that it would be best to have an answer at today's meeting, and Dr. Moore agreed with Mr. Nies that it would be more appropriate to put ensemble modeling on the priority list for 2025, and wait until the National SSC group had a chance to meet for further work on the ecosystem and dynamic reference points topic. The NRCC decided that ensemble modeling should be the 2025 research topic.

For the second slot, Mr. Beal expressed support for herring and lobster, rather than Jonah crab. He suggested that it would likely be important for the lobster fishery, given the many issues such as whales, climate and temperature changes, and potential ecosystem changes 5 years out. Mr. Nies expressed concern for the winter flounder stocks, two of which are overfished. He reminded the group that there had been lots of work on the Southern New England stock since the last benchmark in 2011 and several papers on how climate affects winter flounder recruitment, although with different conclusions. Mr. Nies asked if it was possible that some of the issues with winter flounder could be worked on through a Level 3 management track assessment, since we are currently using old benchmarks. Dr. Simpkins indicated that current guidelines only preclude a change in stock structure or a new model during a management track assessment, but could not answer definitively whether the winter flounder issues could be addressed without a research track assessment. Mr. Nies also expressed interest in including one of the winter flounders in 2025, rather than herring. Ms. Toni Kerns raised that the winter

flounder/climate papers would be addressed in the 2020 assessments. Dr. Russ Brown indicated that he was hesitant to select one winter flounder for the research track without including the other stocks. The NRCC agreed that herring and lobster would be selected for 2025.

For 2026 priorities, this decision meant that the three winter flounder stocks and Jonah crab would be added to the list with squid and monkfish. Dr. Simpkins noted that this was informational, and that other stocks could be added or removed, and could be addressed at the next meeting.

#### *Management track peer review guidelines*

Dr. Simpkins presented potential changes to the management track peer review guidelines. The first was clarifying the biological reference point (BRP) language, including updating BRPs using the same methods and calculating updated BRPs using new or modified methods. The second was addressing stock status changes, specifically that any Level 1 assessment with a stock status change automatically becomes a Level 2, and in such a situation, the Assessment Oversight Panel (AOP) is informed, but not necessarily reconvened.

Mr. Nies mentioned that there might be other issues beyond stock status changes that deserve peer review, and Dr. Brown pointed out that there have been times when the AOP selected a higher level because of multiple, smaller changes.

The NRCC agreed with the proposed changes. The NEFSC will update the Assessment Guidance document and provide it to NEFMC to be posted on the NRCC webpage as soon as possible (**Action Item #3**).

Mr. Nies also brought up that he had believed that new MRIP data would make an assessment automatically a Level 2 assessment, but that Georges Bank cod was a Level 1. Dr. Brown replied that the magnitude of GB cod recreational catch was small compared to commercial, and was not a significant impact on the assessment. Mr. Nies had thought it would be an automatic decision, and expressed concern regarding the upcoming winter flounder assessments. Dr. Brown stated that for those stocks, the recreational catch is more significant and would likely be Level 2 (or 3).

#### *Assessment schedule changes*

Dr. Simpkins proposed switching the mackerel assessments to odd years, to be consistent with Canada. The NRCC approved the change. Mr. Nies raised that while the scallop stock assessments were currently set for fall, a spring assessment might make more sense in the future.

#### *Assessment reports and data portals*

Dr. Simpkins gave an update on the assessment reports and data portal content. The NEFSC staff has had discussions with staff from the Councils and Commission, and has incorporated feedback received from those conversations. The updated template is planned for use in the June management track assessments, and then continue to adjust as feasible. A contractor was hired to work on 508 compliance.

Mr. Nies asked whether the data portal had transitioned to the new NOAA webpage. The data portal is currently available and Dr. Simpkins can provide a direct link to it.

#### *Assessment communications*

Dr. Simpkins provided an update on the stock assessment communication meeting that was held in February 2020. The outcomes of the meeting included the identification of high priority species that need coordinated communication efforts in 2020, better coordination of web information, better information sharing about assessment results and issues, and more targeted outreach materials on the assessment process. The next meeting is scheduled for November 2020.

Ms. Kerns raised that it is still not clear how the public can become engaged. While information may be on the website, you need to know what you are looking for. She provided as an example an AP member who wanted temperature data to be included in the winter flounder assessments. Mr. Nies mentioned the NRCC page on the NEFMC's website, which keeps track of assessment schedules, etc.

#### *Break for lunch*

### 5. Regional BSIA Framework Working Group

Ms. Moira Kelly presented on the Regional BSIA Framework Working Group. Following the finalization of NOAA Fisheries BSIA procedural directive in 2019 and, within three years, each region is supposed to develop a regional BSIA framework that describes how it applies the general NOAA Fisheries BSIA Framework. The framework should include a general timeline, identify roles for each partner, be publicly available, and describe necessary modifications from the general framework. The Working Group developed a draft table and narrative detailing each NRCC partner's role in the steps described in the Policy Directive. The table and narrative were circulated prior to the meeting and comments or suggested edits can be provided to Ms. Kelly. A final version of the table will be presented at a subsequent meeting.

As a point of discussion and as identified in the procedural directive, Ms. Kelly raised the issue of a NOAA Fisheries liaison to the SSC to provide guidance during the SSC's discussion to minimizing recommendations outside the bounds of BSIA. The working group suggested that the liaisons could support the SSC by, if possible, identifying potential NMFS concerns, with the ABCs as they are developed. Mr. Nies asserted that it needed to be someone from the agency, rather than the PDT. When questions are raised by the SSC, such as whether a survey tow was discounted, there is nobody in the room to say whether that was considered by the assessment biologist. Dr. Hare and Dr. Simpkins pointed out that it would be a challenge to have a single person who knew the details of each assessment, and a workload concern to try to have every assessment biologist join the SSC. Mr. Nies raised the issue of National Standard 2 determinations being made in an open and transparent manner, but Mr. Pentony countered this, asking why NS2 stands alone as the only National Standard needing the Agency to commit before the final decision is made. Dr. Hare pointed out that the discussion had split between two different concepts: A liaison to provide advice during an SSC meeting, versus someone who could weigh in on the approvability or consistency with a National Standard. Mr. Nies offered to

work on the description of the liaison offline and bring it back to the working group. Once the working group had agreed, it would be brought before the NRCC, either at an intersessional meeting or through correspondence (**Action Item #1**).

## 6. COVID-19 Response and Implications

Mr. Pentony and Dr. Hare reported on the current working conditions for both GARFO and NEFSC. The facilities are closed to the public, and staff are on mandatory telework, with some exceptions due to duties that require presence at the office, such as receiving paper VTRs. Most of the work on observer waivers has been done by Dr. Hare's staff, although the actual waiver is issued under the Regional Administrator's authority. There have been some delays at headquarters due to COVID. The emergency requests that have come through the Councils are mostly falling on GARFO's staff to complete. Mr. Nies asked if there were ways that Council staff could assist on the emergency requests, and Ms. Bland replied that help from Council staff would be appreciated. Mr. Pentony briefly mentioned the new Executive Order (EO) to reduce the burden on industry, which also made NOAA the lead agency for aquaculture, but noted that GARFO does not currently have the staff necessary to implement the EO, and is awaiting guidance.

Dr. Hare reported on the NEFSC surveys that had been canceled, and that their new schedule for the summer based on ship resources and being able to use NOAA vessels as much as possible. Dr. Hare noted the importance of the scallop surveys, as well as those for surfclam and shrimp.

Ms. Kerns said that there was a list of the state-level surveys that had been canceled and would send it out to NRCC members. Mr. Beal added that the funds from the CARES Act will be distributed through the ASMFC, and that information and contacts are on its website.

## 7. Offshore Wind Energy

Mr. Pentony reported on the ongoing wind projects. For Vineyard Wind, DOI pulled back the EIS and is continuing its review. There are some concerns regarding South Fork Wind, regarding the changes that BOEM made in the potential lease area, and the narrowly constrained alternatives; GARFO is working with BOEM on these issues. Skip Jack was kicked off earlier this month, and there were apparent disconnects regarding the schedule, and so GARFO is working with BOEM to update the timeline. Mr. Pentony reported that there is a possibility of developing an MOU with BOEM to create a stronger working relationship. Additionally, GARFO is working on a regional wind implementation team.

Dr. Hare provided some updates on RODA and ROSA, and an ICES working group, chaired by Andy Lipski, that includes multiple north Atlantic countries, including some from Europe. NEFSC is supporting GARFO in their regulatory reviews, and is working off of one year of funding, but hopefully will be able to continue this work.

Mr Muffley added that at the MAFMC's SSC meeting, there had been an agreement to form a wind team, with biological and socioeconomic leads.



## 8. Fixed Gear

Mr. Nies led a discussion regarding the issue of federal and state surveys encountering fixed gear. Mr. Nies explained that generally it has worked better to conduct outreach with industry, rather than trying to find regulatory solutions. Dr. Hare agreed that this is a growing issue. From the survey perspective, there are areas that cannot be surveyed using current methods. The West Coast uses recreational fishermen for some surveys, and while there are not resources to do that currently, NEFSC is open to ideas for how to improve the coverage. Mr. Muffley, who sits on the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) operations committee, which has been discussing this issue. Some states have reached out to fishermen to ask them to remove their gear during surveys, and Mr. Keliher confirmed this approach for the Maine/New Hampshire surveys. Mr. Nies suggested that NEFSC could work with the states to alert industry to the timing and location of surveys and Dr. Hare agreed that it was worth discussing with the states, even though surveys would be outside state waters. Mr. Nies brought up that there would still be issues with competition between different members of the industry, but that industry should be encouraged to work together to solve these gear disputes.

## 9. GARFO's Annual Implementation Plan

Mr. Pentony presented on the GARFO annual implementation plan, including the three strategic goals: Amplify the economic value of sustainable commercial and recreational fisheries; conserve and recover protected species while supporting responsible fishing and resource development; and improve organizational excellence and regulatory efficiency.

## 10. Other Business

Dr. Simpkins raised an outstanding issue from the assessment discussion. While the NRCC had selected a research topic and the stocks for 2025, they had not assigned those decisions to the spring or fall. It was decided that stocks (herring and lobster) would be addressed in the spring, and the research topic (ensemble modeling) would be looked at in the fall.

### *Next Meeting*

The Fall 2020 NRCC meeting is scheduled for November 9-10, 2020. Depending on the conditions of COVID-19, it will likely be a webinar. MAFMC is chairing.

**Note:** Due to the abridged nature of the Spring 2020 meeting, the discussion of Council and Commission involvement in the federal waters aquaculture siting approval process was postponed until the Fall 2020 meeting (**Action Item #4**).

An intersessional call was subsequently scheduled for July 30, 2020.