

2020 SPRING NRCC MEETING SUMMARY

Webinar
May 25-26, 2021

Attendees

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)

Patrick Keliher, Chair, Day 2

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. 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)

Dave Gouveia, Assistant Regional Administrator for Analysis and Program Support

Guest Presenters

Kiley Dancy, MAFMC Staff

Andrew Lipsky, NEFSC Fisheries & Offshore Wind, Day 2

Additional Attendees

Geoff White, ASMFC, ACCSP Director, Day 1

Julie Defilippi Simpson, ASMFC, ACCSP Deputy Director

Julia Beaty, MAFMC Staff, Day 2

Dr. Jamie Cournane, NEFMC Staff, Day 1

Jonathon Peros, NEFMC Staff, Day 1

Lou Goodreau, NEFMC Staff, Day 2

Deirdre Boelke, NEFMC Staff

Janice Plante, NEFMC Staff
Sam Asci, NEFMC Staff
Jennifer Couture, NEFMC Staff
Brooke Carney, NEFSC Fisheries Monitoring and Research, Day 1
Dr. Kiersten Curti, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch, Day 1
Paul Nitschke, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch
Dr. Anthony Wood, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch
Dr. Larry Alade, NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch
Travis Ford, GARFO Sustainable Fisheries Division, Day 1
John Carmichael, SAMFC Deputy Executive Director, Day 2
Roger Pugliese, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Staff, Day 2

Public Attendees

George Lapointe, Fisheries Survival Fund, Day 1
Jackie Odell, Northeast Seafood Coalition
Greg DiDomenico, Lund's Fisheries
M Smith, Day 2
Jay Odell, The Nature Conservancy, Day 2
Dr. Alex Hansell, MA DMF Staff, Day 1
Melanie Griffin, MA DMF Staff, Day 1
Kelly Whitmore, MA DMF Staff, Day 2

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

– Day 1 –

1. Stock Assessments

Dr. Mike Simpkins led the discussion on stock assessments, beginning with the schedule revisions for both research and management tracks. Due to delays in the haddock, *Illex*/butterfish, and plaice/dogfish research track assessments, Dr. Simpkins proposed extensions for all three. Haddock would be extended to February-March 2022 (from July 2021), *Illex*/butterfish to February-March 2022 (from November 2021), and plaice/dogfish would be scheduled for July 2022 (typically would have been scheduled in March 2022). The first extension (haddock) would delay the incorporation into management track assessments by a year, but the other two would not affect the management track assessment (June 2022 and September 2022, respectively). **The NRCC generally supported the proposed extensions, with a few noted concerns.** Mr. Eric Reid expressed concern regarding the delay for *Illex*; however, the issues that led to the delay, which included access to full data by members of the working group, were significant and unexpected. Additionally, the extension for *Illex* would not result in a change to the management schedule. Others indicated their supported the extension, and Mr. Reid stated that he would not stand in the way of consensus. Mr. Tom Nies expressed concern regarding the impact the delay for plaice/dogfish would have on other assessments,

specifically the review of the scallop area management simulator (SAMS), which is used to set specifications and NEFMC has been pushing to have an external review. **Update:** Due to staffing conflict and after consultation with Canadian participants, the haddock research track peer review will be late January 2022.

For management track assessments, Dr. Simpkins proposed that seven assessments (plaice, pollock, striped bass, white hake, witch flounder, and two stocks of yellowtail) be postponed from 2021 to 2022 due to COVID-19. The downstream effects of this would be the postponement of river herring, sturgeon, and both windowpane flounder stocks until 2023, and the postponement of Northern shrimp to 2024. Additionally, the clam survey was missed last year due to Covid, resulting in a shift in the clam assessments to line up with the surveys. For scallops, Dr. Simpkins indicated that the area management analysis would continue each year in the fall, and a separate management track assessment for stock status would be conducted every 2-3 years in the spring, beginning 2023. The NRCC discussed how to fit the management track review of the SAMS model for scallops into the schedule, potentially in spring of 2023. The NRCC also discussed Northern shrimp, which is generally a quick update, and not a full blown assessment. Members ultimately decided that it was acceptable to leave it off the schedule now, but potentially add it to 2024, if needed.

For haddock, the extension of the research track requires the postponement of the management track peer reviews from 2021 to 2022, which requires the shift of at least two stocks scheduled for 2022. Dr. Simpkins provided a few options, namely the winter flounders, redfish, or halibut. Mr. Nies argued strongly against delaying the redfish assessment, which had signals in the 2020 assessment that it was not following trends. Winter flounder is rebuilding, and it is necessary to assess every two years, and for halibut, Canadian catch is increasing, which could cause issues for the U.S. quotas. Dr. Simpkins agreed to facilitate discussions with the NEFMC, NEFSC, and GARFO to find a solution to the challenges caused by the haddock extension (**Action Item #2**). NEFSC will also follow up on the progress for aging of redfish. Ms. Jackie Odell expressed concern that haddock would be in its third year of specifications in 2022, and would have a lower ABC, unless a new management track were conducted in 2021. Mr. Nies said that NEFSC could provide a data report this fall, but there would need to be overwhelming evidence to increase the haddock ABCs for 2022.

Dr. Kiersten Curti presented proposal recommendations for the 2026 research track assessments developed by the NRCC Assessment WG., and the NRCC was asked to choose two from the following three options: 1) Incorporation of ecosystem information into stock assessments/advice; 2) winter flounder (three stocks); 3) longfin squid and monkfish. While **the NRCC agreed that the winter flounders and longfin squid/monkfish stocks should be scheduled for 2026**, several expressed concern that the ecosystem topic was repeatedly taking a back seat to the stock specific research tracks. Mr. Brandon Muffley suggested including the ecosystem topic as a term of reference in species specific research tracks. The decision regarding the season for the two research tracks (spring vs fall) would be made via correspondence following decisions regarding the haddock extension (**Action Item #3**).

There was a brief discussion regarding the 2027 research track “wish list,” which previously had included: Including ecosystem information in assessments, Jonah crab, longfin squid, monkfish,

winter flounders. Other topics that had been proposed in the past included retrospective patterns, spatial analysis of survey data, blueline tilefish, and chub mackerel. Mr. Nies suggested considering whether a management track assessment would immediately follow after a research track assessment (e.g., monkfish will get specifications for 2026-2029). Ms. Toni Kerns suggested adding river herring to the list, and Mr. Nies suggested witch flounder and pollock. Dr. Moore also suggested others that been on the past wish list (i.e., Jonah crab, blueline tilefish, chub mackerel, and scup).

Mr. Muffley provided an update on NRCC Deputies' work to establish Research Track Steering Committees. The concept is to have standing, cross-cutting committees, rather having individual committees for every research track. These committees would include members from all sectors, and would be approved by the NRCC Deputies. Steering committees would be charged with considering stock structure early, developing out-year research track proposals, and promoting research. Other related process changes discussed by the NRCC Deputies included bulk solicitation for research track working groups, generic terms of reference for research track assessments, and using the phrase "backup assessment approach," rather than "Plan B," which has the potential to be confused with the specific PlanBSmooth index-based approach used for some stocks. Dr. Moore and Mr. Nies both expressed concerns about the concept of the steering committees, questioning whether this was simply one more set of groups that need to be staffed, and would provide additional research priorities that would need to be balanced with other committee's priorities (i.e. Research Steering Committee). And while the Deputies had identified 6 subgroups, all were species specific, and therefore it was unclear how the "subject research track" (e.g. ecosystems) would be handled. While the 6 sub-committees would be a reduction from each research track having a separate steering committee, Dr. Moore questioned whether a steering committee was necessary at all, and whether this was replacing some of the NRCC's duties. The NRCC agreed that it would be useful to see additional alternatives to the Research Track Steering Committees concept at the fall 2021 meeting (**Action Item #4**).

Dr. Simpkins provided an update on the NRCC Stock Assessment Working Group (also known as the Stock Assessment Urgent Request and Operational Needs (SAURON) Working Group), which has been staffed and met several times this spring. The Working Group has a running to-do list based on issues and concerns with the assessment process raised by the NRCC, to continue to adapt and make improvements (**Action Item #5**).

Dr. Simpkins opened up the discussion for new and other issues. Ms. Kerns raised the issue of winter flounder. The 2020 management track assessment did not include climate change in the winter flounder assessments, despite the Bell, et al. paper (2018). Although the guidelines regarding the management track assessments are intended to have consistency, it is also possible that they restrict the biologists from getting more "creative" and finding ways to incorporate elements such as climate into the assessments without a research track. And while a large majority of model improvements and new data and ideas can be included in a management track, current guidelines restrict new models and changes in stock structure from being included. Dr. Russel Brown raised the example of black sea bass, for which the assessment biologist went back to the assessment oversight panel (AOP) to have the review level raised. The NRCC also discussed when stocks lose biological reference points, after moving to an index-based assessment. Although it often seems that once an analytical assessment fails and moves to the

backup method, it cannot go back, Mr. Nies pointed out that is not prohibited in the guidance. There are still questions, even after the index-based method research track peer review, whether it is better to use rho adjustments for the analytical model or switch to the backup method, and whether a rho adjustment can give an accurate stock status.

– *Day 2* –

2. Fisheries Dependent Data Initiative

Mr. Dave Gouveia provided an update on the Fishery Dependent Data Initiative (FDDI) and Catch Accounting and Monitoring System (CAMS). So far, the FDDI working group has developed data systems, including: EM data processing to support operational EM in the groundfish fishery; PTNS development to support herring IFM; regional coding standards. The eVTR development and implementation has been expanded to all fisheries, which is the foundational building block for FDDI. The working group has developed a FDDI Vision Document, which needs to be finalized and shared with the NRCC. The working group still has more work to do, including revising and soliciting feedback from the NRCC on the Roadmap/Implementation Plan and planning for PTNS expansion into new fisheries, among others. For CAMS, the output tables for calendar year 2020 data should be available by November 2021, and there will be development of a peer review process over the winter. By April 2022, CAMS data from 2020 and 2021 will be available to inform 2022 assessments.

Mr. Nies asked if there is an intention to convert past data (AA tables) to CAMS. Mr. Gouveia explained that before deciding whether it is necessary to convert older data to CAMS, the current plan is to compare the 2019 CAMS data to the 2019 AA table data to see how the two systems compare. After working through any potential concerns, the 2019 CAMS data will be finalized and CAMS would then be used to generate the 2020 and 2021 data for use in the 2022 assessments. After that has been complete, a discussion on past data will likely occur. Regarding FDDI, Mr. Nies asked if enforcement is committed to enforcing the use of PTNS for fisheries that do not currently use it. Mr. Gouveia responded that the potential use of PTNS for fisheries that are not currently required to use PTNS would be behind the scenes as the interaction with PTNS would be communicated automatically via the vessel operator's eVTR application when the vessel operator signifies the start of a trip. Therefore, there would be no additional burden to enforcement. Mr. Gouveia further clarified that the PTNS and eVTR application would work together to generate a universal trip identifier (UTID) that would follow the trip's fishery dependent data to all appropriate data sets, thus linking all data together for a given trip. Dr. Moore asked about timing of the vision and roadmap documents, and Mr. Gouveia stated that the vision document should be available the summer of 2021. Additionally, a project manager should be in place by June to help staff develop a comprehensive plan for moving the project forward and staying on track. Mr. Reid asked about the ability to correct mistakes in reports, and Mr. Gouveia responded that the eVTR apps and GARFO's API have the ability to flag inputs upfront prior to the vessel operator submitting erroneous information, as well as being easier to correct mistaken entries. Mr. Beal encouraged continued engagement with the Southeast Region on eVTR. Gregory DiDomenico asked whether "did not fish" reports would be reinstated, and Mr. Gouveia replied that this was not currently planned, and that he could follow up offline.

3. Offshore Wind Update

Mr. Mike Pentony provided status updates on several offshore wind projects on behalf of GARFO. Mr. Andy Lipsky provide an overview of how NEFSC has been involved in the process, including supporting the regulatory process, addressing impacts of wind on federal surveys, and understanding interactions with NOAA trust resources.

4. NOAA Climate and Fisheries Initiative

Dr. Simpkins provide an update on the climate and fisheries initiative, which at this point is a budget initiative to establish a nationally integrated ocean modeling and decision support system. Potentially, regional teams could be formed. While it is not known how much funding will be available, NEFSC has some projects lined up, such as climate-informed living marine resource management. There are already multiple ongoing efforts that would be relevant, such as the Northeast Climate Integrative Modeling Project with GMRI, among others. At this point, it is unknown how much funding will be available, and whether it will be usable for existing project, or only new ones. Ms. Kerns raised that other regional bodies are also working on climate change, and whether this initiative could bring in those other groups. Dr. Simpkins replied that at this point, it isn't known how that will work, but the focus seems to be to engage all NOAA organizations. Ms. Jackie Odell asked whether all of the projects that Dr. Simpkins highlighted in his presentation were groundfish- related, and he indicated that he would provide her with a full list of projects.

5. Scenario Planning

Ms. Kiley Dancy provided an update on the East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning project. The NRCC supported adding up to three additional members (NMFS HQ, SERO, and SEFSC) to the core team, but not beyond, although it's possible that the SERO staff member would be more focused on logistics, and not necessarily on the core team itself. John Carmichael, SAFMC and a member of the Steering Committee, agreed with the idea of adding members from SERO and SEFSC. The NRCC discussed potential uses of remaining Nature Conservancy funds, including things like the meeting space, catering, or travel. Dr. Moore stated that if the amount of leftover funds was small, the core team could make the decision, but that the NRCC should be involved if the decision involved a large amount of funds. It is possible that NMFS HQ may have some available funds to contribute, and ASMFC could potentially administer those funds, although then they could not be able to be used to pay for federal travel.

The NRCC supported the core team's drafted objectives of "Why are we doing this work?" with the understanding that they would remain draft and could change following public scoping. Similarly, the NRCC provided no additional feedback and supported the core team's focal question ("How will climate change affect stock distribution, availability, and other aspects of fisheries over the course of the next 20 years? And what does this mean for effective future governance and management across multiple jurisdictions?")

Regarding the expected outcomes of the workshops, Mr. Nies wanted to know more information about the “policy recommendations for broader governance changes,” noting that Councils can’t lobby for legislative changes. Ms. Dancy said that this required more discussion, but would not be legislative recommendations. Mr. Carmichael asked whether the core team would be making these recommendations, or if they would be outcomes of the workshops. Ms. Dancy said that they would be developed as a result of the second workshop, and would be provided to the NRCC. Mr. Nies asked how decisions would be made as a result of workshops, given the potentially wide range of participants, and Mr. Beal raised that while we would not want to limit ourselves to certain outcomes, but it was also possible that if there were a large number and range of recommendations, which not all Councils might support. Mr. Nies reiterative the need for general counsel guidance to ensure that the outcomes of the workshops did not cross the line into lobbying.

Regarding the timeline, there was general agreement, although several noted that it was ambitious. There was some discussion of the tradeoffs of having virtual vs in person meetings. Additionally, the NRCC generally agreed that the core team should have lots of flexibility in decision making, although it was assumed that staff members would coordinate with their respective leadership, rather than questions coming back to the NRC as a whole. Some exceptions, such as decisions about spending large sums of money, were noted.

6. Other Business

Mr. Nies brought up the issue of assessment backup approaches (formerly known as Plan B assessments) needing to provide scientific advice, rather than just quota advice. Mr. Nies also asked that a future meeting discuss an analytic approach for herring if the state were to stop sampling. Pat Keliher stated that there was currently no plan to stop sampling, and Mr. Beal indicated that it may be possible to extending ACCSP funding for maintenance projects such as herring sampling for another year.

Dr. Simpkins mentioned that the Northeastern History Science Center’s Science Center for Marine Fisheries has several projects regarding clam stocks, one about climate change and cross boundary management. He suggested that this might be something that would be worth participation from the NRCC.

Next Meeting

The Fall 2021 NRCC meeting is scheduled for November 16-17, 2021. NEFSC is chairing.

Update: The Fall meeting will be held virtually.

Note: SAFE Reports had been on the Fall 2020 Action Items, but was not ready for discussion at the Spring 2021 meeting. Mr. Nies asked following the meeting that the item be ready to discuss at the Fall 2021 meeting (**Action Item #1**).