

2023 SPRING NRCC MEETING SUMMARY

Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office – 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester MA
May 9-10, 2023

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)

Spud Woodward, Chair, Day 1

Joe Cimino, Vice-Chair

Bob Beal, Executive Director, Day 1

Toni Kerns, Interstate Fishery Management Program Director

Patrick Campfield, Fisheries Science Program Director

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC)

Mike Luisi, Chair

Wes Townsend, Vice-Chair

Dr. Chris Moore, Executive Director

New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC)

Eric Reid, Chair

Rick Bellavance, Vice-Chair

Tom Nies, Executive Director

Chris Kellogg, Deputy Director

Dr. Lisa Kerr, 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, Day 2

Kristan Blackhart, Acting Chief, Population Dynamics Branch

NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO)

Mike Pentony, Regional Administrator

Dr. Jay Hermsen, Acting Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries

Dave Gouveia, Assistant Regional Administrator for Analysis and Program Support

Liz Sullivan, Sustainable Fisheries Division (NRCC staff support)

Laura Hansen, Sustainable Fisheries Division (NRCC staff support)

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC)

John Carmichael, Executive Director, Day 1

Guest Presenters

Maria Fenton, GARFO Sustainable Fisheries Division, Day 1

Dr. Katherine Papacostas, NOAA Office of Science and Technology, Day 1

Andy Lipsky, NEFSC, Day 1

Michelle Bachman, NEFMC, Day 1

Kiley Dancy, MAFMC, Day 1

Travis Ford, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Day 1

Ryan Silva, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Day 1

Moira Kelly, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Day 1
Jonathan Star, Scenario Insight, Day 1

Additional Attendees

Jose Montanez, MAFMC staff, Day 1
Hannah Hart, MAFMC staff, Day 1
Julia Beaty, MAFMC staff, Day 1
Libby Etrie, NEFMC
Janice Plante, NEFMC staff
Dr. Jamie Cournane, NEFMC staff
Angela Forristall, NEFMC staff,
Jonathon Peros, NEFMC staff, Day 1
Rachel Feeney, NEFMC staff, Day 1
Robin Frede, NEFMC staff, Day 2
David MacCarron, NEFMC staff, Day 2
Paul Nitschke, NEFSC, Day 2
Cynthia Ferrio, GARFO, Day 1
Marianne Randall, GARFO, Day 1
Laura Deighan, GARFO, Day 2
Emily Keiley, GARFO, Day 2
Mark Grant, GARFO, Day 2
David Bard, NMFS Office of Science and Technology
Wendy Morrison, NMFS Headquarters Day 1
Karla Gore, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, Day 1
Roger Pugliese, SAFMC staff, Day 1
Trish Murphey, SAFMC staff, Day 1
Geoff White, ACCSP, Day 2

Public Attendees

Jackie Odell, Northeast Seafood Coalition
Katie Almeida, The Town Dock, Day 1
Chris McGuire, The Nature Conservancy, Day 1
Kate Wilke, The Nature Conservancy, Day 1
Pamela Gromin, Wild Oceans, Day 1
Hank Soule, Sector 1 Manager, Day 2

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

– Day 1 –

1. Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Reports

Ms. Maria Fenton, Sustainable Fisheries Division (SFD) at GARFO, provided an update of the SAFE report process. Councils will house SAFE report materials for managed species on their respective websites, and GARFO will provide a link to those resources on its fishery

management plan (FMP) webpages. Ms. Fenton explained that GARFO and Council staff have been testing out the new process using Atlantic herring as an example. After the conclusion of a recent fishery specifications action, herring SAFE report documents were assembled and provided to Council staff for posting. This step is almost complete. Once the resources are organized online, Ms. Fenton will add text to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan webpage defining SAFE reports and linking to the resources on the Council's website. This herring example will be shared with GARFO staff to illustrate the new process, and SAFE reports for other fisheries will be uploaded as opportunities arise.

Mr. Nies noted that NMFS and the Councils should be sure to use similar language on their respective websites when describing SAFE reports. Ms. Fenton said she would share GARFO's draft text and work with Council staff to ensure consistency (**Action Item #1**).

2. Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) catch data

Dr. Katherine Papacostas, NMFS Office of Science and Technology (S&T), provided an overview of the precision standard, which was originally intended to mask highly imprecise estimates with a percent standard error above 50 in order to reduce potential misinterpretation of data to best inform sustainable fisheries management. Currently, the masking of these estimates has been delayed to allow for more time to work with data users to prepare for the transition. While all point estimates are still available, there are also data quality flags that have been added to the Query Tool and estimate dataset, to indicate whether the estimate meets the precision standard.

Mr. Rick Bellavance asked whether the general public is considered a data user and therefore included in the outreach. Dr. Papacostas explained that S&T is currently focused on working with analysts to collaboratively develop guidance and data use procedures for handling highly imprecise estimates in assessments, but that it will be important to make sure the public is aware and understand the goals of the precision standard. Mr. Bellavance also asked about the MRIP certification process in light of this work, and Dr. Papacostas explained that certification involves a peer review of survey designs or statistical estimation methods, but that any assessment procedures would fall outside the scope of MRIP. Mr. Mike Luisi asked if there had been any consideration of conducting a retrospective to see if any results of past analysis would change given the new precision standard, and Dr. Papacostas said she thought that was a good idea and would bring it up during MRIP's next meeting with the assessment analysts. Ms. Toni Kerns asked whether state data users would be involved in the process and suggested that they (either directly or through ASMFC) be included in meetings with the regional science centers. Mr. Pat Campfield confirmed that analysts would still be allowed to make custom data requests. Mr. Joe Cimino asked how this might affect regulations for upcoming fishing years, and Mr. Mike Pentony pointed out that, while at the coast-wide level, the percent standard errors (PSEs) are less than 10, if you start delving into management implications at the state level, data start getting flagged as less precise. Mr. Pentony concluded that there are still a number of questions on the management side, and it will be important to evaluate success and to get an indication of the next steps.

3. Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ)

Mr. Pentony provided an overview of NOAA Fisheries' EEJ goals, which are to 1) prioritize identification, equitable treatment, and meaningful involvement of underserved communities; 2) provide equitable delivery of services; and 3) prioritize EEJ in our mandated and mission work with demonstrable progress. The EEJ strategy received comments from 384 individuals and 154 organizations and there was a great deal of public interest in this strategy, with most people supporting it. The next step is to work with regions and program offices to develop implementation plans that are tailored to the needs of the underserved communities they serve.

Mr. Eric Reid asked what the Councils' role is, and Mr. Pentony replied that the regional fisheries management councils will be one of NMFS's partners. Dr. Chris Moore added that some of the Councils struggle with how to apply EEJ in their mission, and that there seem to be several groups (Headquarters EEJ, Council Coordination Committee (CCC) EEJ working group, plus the group that will work on the regional EEJ plan) working on this topic. He asked whether there had been any conversations about whether the President's recent Executive Order (E.O. 14096, Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All) would affect this strategy. Mr. Pentony replied that CCC should be discussing the implications of the E.O. He also agreed that it can be difficult to know what can be done at the regional level, and that other regions have different communities that they are trying to reach. Mr. Pentony provided a few examples, such as providing translation services, learning to communicate better with communities on issues, including those beyond fisheries (e.g., habitat and protected resources), and helping underserved communities access grant programs. As part of the engagement strategy, underserved communities will be identified.

4. Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program

Mr. Ryan Silva provided an update on the RSA program. Given staffing changes at NEFSC, there was an opportunity to think about how the program is structured, and the administrative side of RSA has been shifted to SFD at GARFO. There will be a federal program officer (FPO), and Mr. Pentony will now be the selecting official, rather than Dr. Jon Hare. However, the process of administering the RSA program will continue, and GARFO staff will work with NEFSC to get technical expertise and guidance. SFD will have a new branch, to more effectively support the RSA program, and it will allow better coordination between grant administration and permitting administration.

Mr. Nies asked if there is a comprehensive RSA data base that is managed by GARFO, and Mr. Silva stated that it is in progress. A database had existed for the research reports, but that came offline about a year ago and it needs to be rebuilt. One of the challenges is 508 compliance, and they will need to either bring reports into compliance or find an alternative. Right now, reports are available by request to Council staff, which Mr. Silva acknowledged is not ideal. Dr. Moore asked, if someone is interested in cooperative research, whether they should contact NEFSC or GARFO. Mr. Pentony explained that Mr. Silva has been the cooperative research lead at GARFO for many years, and that the new branch is not specific to RSA, it will include all elements of cooperative research that fall under GARFO's purview. Dr. Hare added that there will be continued coordination between NEFSC and GARFO, just like how SFD and NEFSC's Population Dynamics Branch interact.

5. Offshore Wind

Mr. Pentony provided an update on GARFO's offshore wind activities, which included providing comments in response to the notice of availability (NOA) of the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for 5 projects, 1 recent essential fish habitat (EFH) consultation, 3 consultations initiated, 4 additional projects expected to initiate this spring or summer, and 1 more this fall. There was a Gulf of Maine task force meeting the same week as the NRCC meeting, and the publication of a Call for Information solicitation is anticipated soon. The final Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management (BOEM) guidance is expected soon, and developers are increasingly resisting compensating fisheries during project operations.

Mr. Andy Lipsky provided a presentation on the status of the Northeast Survey Mitigation Program. Among the many offshore wind needs, there is a need to mitigate the impacts of wind energy development on fisheries surveys. NOAA Fisheries and BOEM have developed a Federal Survey Mitigation Strategy, which contains 5 goals, 16 objectives, and 43 actions. One of the main goals is to collaboratively plan and implement NOAA Fisheries survey mitigation with partners, stakeholders, and other ocean-users, and planning groups are currently developing draft survey-specific mitigation plans, with time for review and input expected in fall 2023. Mr. Lipsky asked the NRCC who it would like to contribute or provide input into the draft program and relevant survey mitigation plans.

Mr. Nies questioned what the role of the NRCC was, vs that of the Councils, pointing out that there is already the National Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP), and suggested that this question should be directed to the Councils rather than NRCC. Dr. Hare agreed that NTAP should play a big role, but that would be for NTAP to decide. He added that this topic could be addressed through the Council process, similar to the scallop working group. Dr. Moore agreed with Mr. Nies, that the Councils should be closely involved, but that it was also good to have a regional approach. Dr. Moore did not support the idea of forming a new group, but would rather take advantage of existing groups. He also suggested that SSC involvement would be helpful. Mr. Campfield asked whether there had been peer reviews of alternative survey approaches, and whether there is anything to be learned from work the Europeans are doing. Dr. Hare explained that there is a working group through the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) that deals with fisheries and offshore wind. Mr. Lipsky added that surprisingly, the U.S. is ahead of the Europeans on this topic, and that a methods paper from the ICES working group should be published soon. Dr. Hare also stated that because each survey is different, the mitigation is likely different, and therefore the intent is to peer review, and then work out the details when a survey needs to be changed.

Dr. Lisa Kerr offered that it would be good to wrap this topic into other issues, such as spatial loss and temporal loss, especially in light of climate change and availability of surveys to catch stocks. Dr. Hare agreed, stating that if we fix surveys for wind, we may need to change it again given climate change. Dr. Kerr added that it would be helpful to have high level guidance, best practices, and representatives from the survey teams participating. Mr. Lipsky put in that this would be an adaptive process, and trying to think holistically.

Mr. Cimino asked if, given the potential for new data streams from monitoring plans, whether there would be some standardization. Dr. Hare said that there has been previous attempts to do this, but they were unsuccessful. During this latest approval process, they are developing a new strategy, and BOEM and NMFS have agreed to standardize the fishery monitoring plans. Mr. Reid added that there has been no incentive to the developers to standardize the fishery monitoring plans, but that even just having the gear standardized would help.

Dr. Moore asked if there was potential for cooperative research involvement, or the study fleet. Dr. Hare stated that one mitigation plan includes using study fleet, and that vessels could potentially report standardized locations, rather just reporting where the catch fish. The development of a recreational study fleet is another option, as is hook and line. Mr. Bellavance asked whether the surveys can evolve over time, given the need for consistency in surveys, and Dr. Hare stated that ideally, we would need to make sure we are calibrating, but agreed that time series are very important to surveys. Mr. Bob Beal added that these changes are all coming in the climate of limited federal budget, which adds additional complications.

Mr. Pentony added that there are some issues with endangered species act (ESA) takes, and that new consultations could be necessary. There had been a plan to have fishermen collect data while fishing, without needing an exempted fishing permit (EFP) but then the wind company backed out of doing the work, and therefore the data was not collected. Mr. Reid added that it can be difficult to get a vessel certified to do the work for a wind company, and there is no standardized certification.

6. Scenario Planning

Mr. Jonathan Star provided an overview of the East Coast Climate Scenario Planning Summit, which was held in February 2023 in Arlington, VA. It was the capstone of several years of scenario planning and was attended by over 50 managers. Ms. Kiley Dancy presented an introduction to the action plan. The purpose of the action plan is to make sure that there are actionable items that come out of the summit and allow for prioritization, with the intent that the action plan is a living document that is regularly reviewed. She added that the drafted action plan likely needed additional language to make it clear what the document is, and is not, doing. Ms. Kerns, Ms. Dancy, Ms. Michelle Bachman, and Mr. Travis Ford then walked through four sections of the document, which included general process recommendations and three themes: 1) Cross jurisdictional governance, 2) managing under uncertainty, and 3) data sources and partnerships.

The NRCC had some discussion regarding the nature of the document. Mr. John Carmichael expressed concern over the concept of it being a “living document” as such documents often stop getting updates over time. He also flagged the need to involve the NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO) and Science Center (SEFSC). Mr. Nies pointed out that the action plan refers to “potential actions”, but the report uses the term “core team recommendations,” and suggested that the document should be broader than a core team document. He also raised the concern that if the Councils are not approving the document, it is unclear how it will be used. Dr. Moore suggested that the draft action plan be brought to the Councils, and the Councils would need to make the decision about how to proceed. Mr. Pentony suggested that there is a distinction

between taking the entire action plan to the Councils, where objection over a single item could torpedo the entire plan, vs. providing the Councils with the NRCC's recommendation to start with a particular item. He also clarified that the implication should not be that if a Council votes up the action plan, it does not mean that they agree with every item within the action plan. Generally, participants agreed that the NRCC should provide priorities for the Councils to start with. Dr. Moore suggested reframing the action plan as a source document, rather than living document, and Mr. Pentony expanded on this, that the action plan is really an action "index" or "menu". Mr. Reid suggested that any actions that require a change to the Magnuson Steven Act (MSA) should be removed, and after some discussion, it was agreed that such items would be left in the document but moved to the "parking lot," to maintain the record and have available if such changes ever become an option.

The NRCC then worked on prioritizing within each of the three themes. The conversation started by attempting to prioritize each bulleted action item within each of the topics within the first theme, but it became clear that this approach would be extremely time consuming. Instead, the NRCC moved to identify the priority level (high ("green"), low ("pink"), or parking lot) for each topic within the theme. The overall level (green, pink, or parking lot) assigned to each topic (e.g. D1) is indicated in bold. Bulleted action items that would require a change to MSA were automatically identified as such and moved to the parking lot (even if the overall topic was not).

Theme 3: Data Sources and Partnerships

D1. Expand study fleet, include recreational fisheries, and ensure data are used – green, although bullet 5 (regarding a plan to incorporate the recreational study fleet data to improve recreational estimates from MRIP) was moved to the parking lot. Several expressed concern over bullet 3 (developing shovel-ready cooperative research projects to be initiated if funding becomes available). Dr. Hare suggested expanding study fleet to "and associated projects." NEFSC will work on getting Councils and Commission staff access to commercial study fleet data (**Action Item #2**).

D2. Develop incentives for better reporting to help reduce uncertainty – parking lot, but acknowledge that bullet 3 (developing plan to monitor and enforce compliance to reporting requirements) is already occurring through permit renewals being withheld if vessel trip reports (VTRs) are not submitted.

D3. Standardize data collection to breakdown geographic barriers along the East Coast (both state and federal) – pink, with the statement that if the NEFSC and SEFSC develop a strategy for combining survey methodology (bullet 2), developing a National Survey Program (bullet 1) becomes a lot easier. NEFSC will report at the Fall 2023 NRCC meeting on the development and updates on the implementation of a National Survey Program (**Action Item #3**). Regarding data standards, Mr. Pentony stressed that it was important to distinguish between inconsistent data and differences in reporting requirements. GARFO will provide a summary of vessel and dealer reporting requirements for federal managed species throughout the Atlantic coast, including identification of consistencies and differences in reporting platforms (paper/electronic), data collected, and timing of report submissions, for the Fall 2023 NRCC meeting (**Action Item #4**).

D4. Use survey mitigation around offshore wind to transition to industry-based surveys or other survey platforms – green. Mr. Pentony noted that this only affected the Center(s).

D5. Modernize data management to facilitate better sharing of data and prepare for an influx of new data streams (e.g. offshore wind data) and foster new partnerships – parking lot. This was acknowledged to be important, but would take a long time.

D6. Develop a process between management and science organizations to prioritize data needs for climate-ready management (e.g. human dimensions data) – parking lot. Mr. Campfield mentioned a workshop held several years earlier about survey compatibility, and Ms. Kerns suggested that the workshop should be referenced in the appropriate bullet(s).

D7. Focus on AI/technology development to more rapidly get data into assessments – pink. Mr. Pentony stated that this is something being worked on, and there should be updates on progress, but that it is not high priority. Dr. Mike Simpkins added that while there are advantages to standardizing and automating across species, there are also costs of standardization in terms of accuracy and precision on a stock-by-stock basis.

D8. Improve the use of existing data – green.

Theme 2: Managing Under Increased Uncertainty

M1. Improve the use of risk policies to better account for current and future climate impacts on species (both negative and positive impacts) – pink. While the Councils could work on the action items within this topic individually, there could be opportunities for synergy and collaboration.

M2. Consider broader ecosystem-level contextual information within the management process to help meet management goals – green. The second bullet should be clarified and/or expanded on, which should inform the third bullet.

M3. Move toward alternative, robust management options rather than trying to account for all kinds of uncertainty within stock assessment models – parking lot. Dr. Kerr expressed concern that in the situation of a problematic model, there is no level of robustness that will help with multiple uncertainties. Mr. Nies added that generally “robust management measures” means “catch less,” and given the issues with surveys, it is likely there will continue to be a lot of uncertainty. This topic may need some re-framing.

M4. Better incorporate qualitative information including local ecological knowledge (LEK), traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and community vulnerability assessments to improve management in a changing climate – parking lot. Mr. Nies questioned, if climate change is man-made and novel, why we would think that traditional ecological approaches will help, but agreed that local ecological knowledge can help. He also raised concern with some of the community vulnerability studies, because while a species might not be vulnerable to climate change because it can move, the part that depends on that species *is* vulnerable, if the species moves away.

M5. Identify and establish best practices for increasing nimbleness/ responsiveness in management – pink. The criteria for the trigger and the response must be agreed to well ahead of it happening, so that no further action is required by a Council or Commission.

M6. Streamlining FMP documentation and rulemaking – green. Supplemental information reports (SIRs) should be added to the list of options under NEPA (in addition to programmatic environmental impact statements (PEISs) and categorical exclusions (CEs)).

M7. Include spatial considerations in management – parking lot. Some considerations discussed include making sure that a geographic shift in the stock is scientifically documented, rather than a perception, and whether this topic would apply to a stock that is expanding or contracting, vs. moving. Dr. Kerr raised that some of the work in this topic is being done in the new research track assessments.

M8. Create a more adaptable structure for fishing permits – pink. While this also came up under the topic of governance, it was included here because it was less about who was making the decisions. Mr. Reid stated the issue is not about access to permits, but the capital to purchase the permits, but Mr. Pentony explained that because of the restrictions on permit splitting (permit suites cannot be broken apart), a permit suite might be more expensive than the individual permit. Ms. Kelly added that the southeast is working on evaluating the compatibility between permit databases in the northeast and southeast, and Mr. Dave Gouveia said that GARFO is working on creating a registry of unique permits, leveraging the tools the northeast has to help improve the southeast permit system. While the overall topic was pink, it would be good to make progress on the first bullet.

Theme 1: Cross-Jurisdictional Governance

G1. Reevaluate Council committee structure, use, and decision making – green. There was significant discussion about how changing the committee structure would work, and whether having a committee with mixed representation from two councils and not allowing the Council to simply override the committee's motion would be effective or simply more time consuming. Mr. Reid suggested picking an FMP and conducting a pilot, but that it should be a simple FMP (i.e., a plan without a recreational component). Generally, members supported the bulleted action items, but several expressed concern about the discussion for this topic as written in the action menu.

G2. Evaluate mechanisms for cross-pollination of SSCs – pink, but it was acknowledged that SSCs already communicate with each other.

G3. Clarify and potentially expand the roles of liaisons between Councils – parking lot. It was raised whether Council liaisons are present to represent their own interests, or their Council's interests, and while the intent is the latter, it can bog down the process if the liaison cannot weigh in until they know how their Council feels about each topic.

G4. Consider allowing proxies for Council members – parking lot. This topic required a change to MSA.

G5. Re-evaluate and potentially revise Advisory Panel representation – green. This is something that is already done, but it was acknowledged that Councils already struggle to get and retain advisory panel members.

G6. Develop joint management agreements with aim of clarifying roles and increasing efficiency – green. It was agreed that it was good to document some of the procedures and agreements, but the second bullet was considered pink.

G7. Improve coordination across NOAA offices and regions – green.

General Process Recommendations

1. Form an East Coast Climate Leadership Group to help implement identified actions.

The NRCC **decided the group should be composed of 8 members: 3 Councils, Commission, 2 regional offices, 2 science centers, called the East Coast Climate Coordination Group (ECCCG).** The group would meet the day leading up to the NRCC meeting, but likely only once per year, initially the fall meeting. The representatives from each organization would be chosen by the organization (i.e., a Council would choose if it wanted to have its Executive Director as the representative). Mr. Pentony and Dr. Hare will contact the Regional Administrator and Science Center Director from the Southeast Region to request their participation in this group, provide a high-level summary of the scenario planning priorities, and confirm the meeting date with those two groups, as well as with the SAFMC (**Action Item #5**).

2. Form a Climate Innovation Group

The scenario planning core team would evolve into this group, and it may include other staff from the organizations who are members of the ECCCG.

3. Communication and engagement of scenario process outcomes.

Rather than have the core team/climate innovation group create a new (third) document, the action item menu will be revised to reflect the green/pink/parking lot priorities, before the end of June (**Action Item #6**). Any items that are MSA-related should be discussed with General Counsel.

– Day 2 –

7. Stock Assessments

At the beginning of Day 1, Mr. Nies asked for an update on the NEFSC spring bottom trawl survey. Dr. Hare stated that it had started on Monday (May 8) and the focus would be on Georges Bank, to provide information for the Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC). The survey will be expected to achieve less than the 75 percent of survey tows that had previously been planned, due to being limited to 12-hour operations for a single leg. NEFSC is engaging with NTAP regarding the need for contingency plans because the Bigelow is not able to work within offshore wind farms. Mr. Nies reiterated the need for an approach about how to deal with missing surveys, asking if there had been any efforts to standardize an approach, and Dr. Hare replied that there was not a single approach for all assessments. Dr. Kerr asked if there

had been any consideration of using the Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) surveys, and whether there would be resources to use a model-based approach. Dr. Hare replied that NOAA surveys are funded separately from the Science Center budget, so, when a survey is not conducted or fewer sea days are accomplished, this does not result in additional resources at NEFSC to fill that gap. He indicated interest in the model-based approach, but immediate resources were not available.

On Day 2, Dr. Simpkins began with a presentation regarding the assessment working group (AWG) recommendations for improving the sustainability of the assessment process, particularly the research track assessment process. However, several NRCC members expressed concern that they had not had a chance to review the AWG's report summarizing their recommendations, and needed additional time before they could weigh in on these recommendations. While a more full conversation will take place at an intersessional call, the NRCC did have some discussion. Dr. Moore expressed concern that the entire process has gotten too complex, especially in light of resource limitations. Dr. Simpkins responded that the goal has been to simplify the process and many of the details presented were intended to provide guard rails on the process to streamline and make the process more efficient. Mr. Reid raised concerns about the accountability of a RTWG to get their work done and not get held up by less cooperative members. Dr. Hare agreed that while some RTs have gone well, others have not. Some instances have been due to data access issues, which have been largely resolved. Other instances have been due to group dynamics, which is a tradeoff for making the RTWGs more inclusive, and they are considering whether establishing a code of conduct would be beneficial. Dr. Simpkins pointed out that the proposed oversight role of the Research Track Steering Committee (RTSC) is intended to provide some of that accountability. He also noted that processing and perfecting input data has been a major contributor to assessment delays, separate from data access and group dynamics issues. He pointed to the proposed process for setting clear priorities for each research track assessment, and monitoring progress toward those priorities, as a way to ensure proper investment in data processing rather than letting it dominate the whole research track assessment.

Dr. Simpkins provided a presentation on the RTSC and how it has evolved. The latest revision proposes additional oversight roles for the RTSC to facilitate effective and efficient RT assessments. The RTSC would monitor the progress of critical research before a RT assessment begins, set priorities for RT assessments and monitor RTWG progress. To simplify these oversight roles, the proposal is to assign an RTSC liaison to each RTWG. RTSC Liaisons would facilitate RTWG oversight, but the bulk of RTSC work would be conducted at biannual RTSC meetings. These RTSC meetings would be a great opportunity to get stakeholder engagement because of the timing and substance of those meetings with respect to the overall assessment process. At a management track (MT) assessment, new ideas or input from stakeholders can be "too late" for any meaningful action, and even at a RT meeting, the RTWG can only respond with new analyses - new research cannot be conducted right away. RTSC meetings, however, are at the very start of the RT assessment process, so there is opportunity to identify research priorities, carry out research, and have the results inform the eventual assessment. Ms. Kerns raised the concern that the RTSC is proposed to set priorities for RTWGs but the RTSC members, though nominated by NRCC members, may not be attuned to management priorities. Mr. Nies provided the example of the Georges Bank haddock assessment, which did not find an agreed upon way to set quotas for the eastern portion that is shared with Canada, and there ended

up being a lack of agreement between the U.S. and Canada. It was generally agreed that the RTSC chair should be consulting with the NRCC deputies regarding management priorities to ensure those are incorporated into the priorities for RTWGs.

NEFSC will send the AWG report to the NRCC for review, and draft proposed text changes to the Assessment Process Document that would incorporate the additional roles of the RTSC, including the process to incorporate management priorities; the NRCC will reconvene to discuss and agree on changes at an intersessional call (to be scheduled) (**Action Item #7**).

Dr. Simpkins highlighted staffing and workload challenges that have resulted from the assessment schedule, and particularly the unsustainable nature of the research track process (which the NRCC AWG strived to address in the proposed changes discussed above). He provided the update that NEFSC is working on hiring 4 assessment scientists, which should help with the mismatch between the assessment needs and staff resources. Regarding the schedule, Dr. Simpkins reviewed a suite of assessment schedule changes that had been approved in advance of the NRCC meeting. Due to in the extension of the Atlantic cod RT, the cod MT assessments will shift from 2023 to 2024, which allows reversing some earlier downstream changes to haddock assessment timing that had been considered to keep haddock and cod assessments on the same timeline. The winter flounder assessments will be shifted to odd years, and the windowpane assessments will be reverted back to their previous schedule. Finally, the black sea bass MT will shift to 2024 to accommodate the RT extension. Dr. Simpkins then proposed a suite of additional assessment schedule changes, including conducting the spiny dogfish MT in September 2023, extending the scallop RT to spring or summer 2025 to allow inclusion of geoSAMS, and canceling the Ensemble Modeling RT that was previously scheduled for 2025. He noted several challenges, including data delivery timing, staff workload conflicts between spiny dogfish assessment and scallop survey and analysis work, and conflicts between the Ensemble Modeling RT and the extended Scallop RT. Mr. Nies expressed concern about the scallop specifications overlapping with the MT if in fall 2025, and Dr. Simpkins offered that the MT could also be moved to spring 2026. Mr. Nies also expressed a desire to see a plan for how geoSAMS will be pursued or completed, and whether the review panel will be qualified to review geoSAMS. He also expressed concern about the assumptions going into the SAMS model, which has still not been reviewed.

The recommendations for shifting spiny dogfish MT to September 2023, the changes for the scallop RT and MT (spring/summer 2025, and spring 2026, respectively), and the adjustment of winter flounder RT to fall 2026 were accepted. There was consensus on canceling the ensemble modeling RT, with the understanding that even without the directed RT on the topic, ensemble modeling could be included in a future RT for a particular stock. Mr. Nies expressed frustration with the delay in the scallop RT until 2025, noting that there has not been an evaluation of the status of sea scallops for several years. Ultimately the scallop RT extension was supported with the caveat that the NEFSC will work with the RTWG chair and assessment lead to provide the NRCC with a work plan for completing the RT, focusing on research priorities identified collaboratively with regional partners including NEFMC. The work plan will include a detailed plan for geoSAMS development. In addition, SAMS assumptions/issues will be addressed. The NEFMC expressed concern over the proposal to delay the sea scallop MT assessment into 2026, and further discussion will be held on this issue (**Action Item #8**).

Mr. Nies pointed out the white hake assessment memos that were included in the background material. He and Dr. Simpkins both agreed that there were important considerations to discuss around those memos but that there was not sufficient time to discuss at this meeting. For the Fall 2023 NRCC meeting, there will be an agenda topic on how to address changing the stock assessment schedule upon request (**Action Item #9**).

8. Port Sampling

Mr. Gouveia provided an update on the status of the port sampling program, which has been subject to flat funding despite increasing program costs that has resulted in yearly reductions to the number of samples taken. To compensate for the increasing cost, NMFS has had to reduce samples, reaching a point where it is nearly unfeasible to sustain the program with the current funding level. In November 2022, Mr. Gouveia provided (via email) the NRCC with an evaluation of the cost needed to return to the optimum level of port sampling found in 2015. Since that time, no new funding has been provided from NMFS, but the MAFMC offered help to supplement the program. GARFO worked with MAFMC to secure a contract with the same vendor used by NMFS, essentially mirroring the contract held by GARFO. The sampling process and protocols followed are the same as NMFS, and the data are also provided to NEFSC using the same software and procedures. This new funding is expected to nearly triple the levels of current 2023 sampling. In addition to support provided by the MAFMC, Dr. Hare led a discussion with Massachusetts, which has expressed interest in collecting samples. Additional coordination needed and NMFS will be continuing discussions with Massachusetts over the next few weeks. Mr. Gouveia also noted that he has reached out to Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), to discuss the possibility of adapting their existing sampling program with their state partners to supplement port sampling in the future. ACCSP has expressed interest, but much more discussion and coordination is needed. Mr. Nies also shared that some members of the industry are interested in providing data, and Dr. Hare expressed a desire to have further conversations about how to leverage biological sampling with port sampling. Ms. Kerns added that the ASMFC had some conversations with the states about how they could help, but once the MAFMC volunteered to help, those conversations ended. NEFSC, ASMFC, and GARFO will reach out to state partners to start and/or revisit conversations about contributing to port sampling efforts (**Action Item #10**).

9. Fishery Dependent Data Initiative (FDDI) and Catch Accounting and Monitoring System (CAMS) Updates

Mr. Gouveia provide a status report on CAMS, which received a successful review by the Center for Independent Experts (CIE). He thanked the NRCC for the push to develop CAMS, and the unparalleled commitment, dedication, and cooperation between GARFO and NEFSC staff. The CIE panel concluded that CAMS can be implemented as the primary, comprehensive source for all US commercial catch (landings and discards) in the Greater Atlantic region for quota monitoring and stock assessment purposes. Development is nearly complete as a team of quota monitoring and stock assessment leads are examining discards for each stock and recommending final settings for CAMS. The team is also responding to the CIE's "immediate" recommendations, including the completion the CAMS documentation, implementation of a

Universal Trip Identifier (UTID), establishing a CAMS change control board, transition planning from old systems to CAMS, and development of user experience testing strategies focused on user needs, expectations, and product satisfaction. The team will also be working on the transition to CAMS for primary data users to ensure access to data, a user guide for end users, and workshops to train primary users. While production of area allocation tables (AA tables) that were used for assessments stopped in 2019, replicate AA landings tables have been created in CAMS for 2020-2023, but will not continue beyond 2023. Historic AA tables will remain available. Beginning with the fishing year beginning May 1, 2023, the Data Matching and Imputation System (DMIS) will no longer be used. DMIS will continue to be run until September (target date) to allow any data reconciliation issues associated with data up to April 30, 2023 to be addressed. Historic DMIS data will still be available. Mr. Gouveia shared NMFS transition plan for CAMS. Beginning late May or early June, NMFS will convene monthly CAMS Transition Meetings with primary points of contact from the Councils and ASMFC staff to ensure current access to data is available and routine updates on any database issues and transition to CAMS. The intent is to provide workshop-type sessions where NMFS staff would provide training and assist with individual problems that arise.

As part of the CAMS transition process, Mr. Gouveia noted that if there are staff access issues to databases, he would serve as the point of contact, and he will be responsible for triaging and sending users to the appropriate person to get necessary access. Mr. Nies, and other NRCC members, applauded the successful completion of CAMS. Mr. Nies flagged that staff has raised concerns about the availability of monitoring reports that are often run in the summer, and the need for a data dictionary, to ensure staff understands any changes to data fields. Dr. Moore asked if the South Atlantic is aware of CAMS (they are), and if they have anything similar (they do not).

Mr. Gouveia noted that CAMS is under the FDDI umbrella and as such, the positive CIE review is also a major milestone for the overarching FDDI project. He noted that with the completion of CAMS, they are now able to link datasets from their pre-trip data collection process through their fisheries data integration & analysis process. Although this is a major milestone, additional work is still ongoing. This includes the potential development of GARFO dealer reporting application program interface (API), UTID, federal permit registry (for all federal east coast permits), improved one stop reporting (OSR) capabilities, and further enhancements to CAMS.

Next Meeting

The Spring 2023 NRCC meeting is scheduled for **November 8-9, 2023**, in Gloucester MA. GARFO is chairing and hosting. The East Coast Climate Coordination Group will meet the preceding afternoon (**November 7, 2023**) in Gloucester MA.