



New England Fishery Management Council

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Daniel Salerno, Chair | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 21, 2025
TO: Cate O'Keefe, Ph.D., Executive Director
FROM: Scientific and Statistical Committee Social Sciences Subcommittee
SUBJECT: Response to Terms of Reference for developing the purpose, objectives and workplan of the Subcommittee and follow-up input on future State of the Ecosystem Reports

The Social Sciences Subcommittee of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC-SSS) held a meeting on November 12, 2025, via webinar to: 1) provide recommendations on how to gather and report on fishery performance information from Advisory Panels; the content of fishery performance information that is provided to the SSC when developing recommendations for specifications; and how best to report on fisheries performance that efficiently meets multiple needs for information.; and 2) provide input for planning a workshop in early 2026 on enhancing use of fisheries-dependent data for socioeconomic considerations in management. The SSS also discussed updates to its workplan.

SSC Subcommittee members: Attending the meeting were Dr. Hiro Uchida (SSC and SSS Chair), Dr. Anna Birkenbach (SSC), Dr. Kevin St. Martin (SSC); and Dr. Rachel Feeney (NEFMC staff coordinator). This report was augmented and reviewed subsequently by Dr. Tarsilla Seara (NEFSC/SSB) and Dr. Mateja Nenadovic (SSC).

Documents considered for the meeting are available at:
<https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/nov-12-2025-ssc-social-sciences-subcommittee-meeting>.

FISHERY PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Terms of Reference

- A. Consider: 1) the range of fishery performance information products available to the Council, including Risk Policy Matrices, monitoring reports, Council action documents, and information provided by Advisory Panels, and 2) staff updates on work to generate information products in a more efficient and consistent manner that meets a range of needs.

- B. Provide recommendations on 1) how to gather and report on fishery performance information from Advisory Panels; 2) the content of fishery performance information that is provided to the SSC when developing recommendations for specifications; and 3) how best to report on fisheries performance that efficiently meets multiple needs for information.

General Comments

The SSS received an overview [presentation](#) from Council staff on the range of fishery performance information products generated by the Council, including Risk Policy Matrices, monitoring reports, Council action documents, Plan Development Team memos provided to the SSC, and information provided by Advisory Panels. Staff commented on current work to generate fishery information in a more efficient and consistent manner that meets a range of needs. It was noted that SSC members have provided recommendations for improved fishery performance reporting at a few points in the past, including an SSC subpanel review in 2021 of a few Council action documents. The SSS noted a need for providing more information earlier in the decision process, such as for SSC meetings. There are current opportunities to make substantial progress with enhanced interest by the Council in consistent and efficient reporting and advancements in automation technology to assist with data query and report generation.

Specific Responses to Terms of Reference B

TOR B1. Provide recommendations on how to gather and report on fishery performance information from Advisory Panels.

Staff described how Advisory Panels (AP) have periodically been asked to discuss fishery performance for the general edifications of Council members, staff, and the public. These discussions have most often occurred during the first AP meeting in a calendar year as reported on via a meeting summary document, though the input has sometimes been added to a report on fishery performance. The specific questions have varied across APs and over time, and the input has not regularly been provided to the SSC when making catch limit recommendations. Staff provided the [range of questions](#) recently asked of the APs and encouraged the SSS to comment on the collection of fishery performance input from APs and what input would be most helpful for the SSC to consistently receive.

The SSS agreed that it would be helpful to have input from APs on fishery performance, especially when the SSC is making recommendations for specifications. Particularly for a stock that is underutilized, it can be challenging for the SSC to understand the factors that influence catch. The SSC considers specifications on a stock-by-stock basis despite fisheries occurring in a complex system. This can create a silo effect on information considered. For example, while having the average ex-vessel price of a species is helpful, it is difficult to interpret without having the prices of other species and other relevant contextual information. Information on how fisheries intersect and are constrained by each other (e.g., species A being a constraining stock for species/fishery B) would be particularly informative.

Considering the questions previously asked of NEFMC advisors, as well as questions that the MAFMC advisors have been asked consistently for several years, the SSS recommends that a short list of general, open-ended questions be asked of all FMP APs annually. Open-ended but

structured questions allow for advisors to tell the Councils what is important to them, in a manner that allows for comparison across FMPs of the NEFMC and MAFMC and across time.

Specifically, the SSS recommends the following questions:

1. What factors have influenced recent catch (markets/economy, environment, regulations, other factors)?
2. Are the current fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved?
3. What would you recommend as research priorities?
4. What else is important for the Council to know?

During years when specifications are being set, the SSS recommends additional information be provided by APs to the SSC that would help contextualize the catch setting for a particular stock. The following questions are recommended, though some may not be relevant to all FMPs:

1. Expected aggregate impacts of different catch advice levels on net revenues (net of quota lease prices, where applicable, as detailed cost data are often not readily available).
 - Portfolio analysis, including how ex-vessel fish prices, quota lease prices, and allowable catch in one fishery affect utilization in other fisheries.
 - Behavioral motivations/relevant determinants of choice from industry perspective and key relationships with other stocks/species.
2. Distribution of expected fishery-wide revenue changes across components of the fleet, particularly any disproportionately distributed effects.
 - Spatial/geographic footprint of the fishery, both at sea and on land, including communities that may be differentially affected by changing fishery conditions.
 - Insights on employment, ability to have crew, how it varies geographically.
3. Longer-term trends to contextualize the fishery beyond the 1-3 year tactical projection window.
 - Perspectives on the future of the fishery:
 - Is it growing in volume/participation, or are participants shifting to other stocks?
 - Is it trending toward certain gear types or other components?
 - Will there be no one to fish it in 5 years?
 - Trends in port infrastructure (e.g., processing capacity for particular species, vessel maintenance).

During public comment, it was noted that membership on APs does not necessarily reflect the full diversity of fishery participants. The SSS suggests that any reporting from APs describe where there may be gaps in representation. Additionally, other sources of industry-generated information (e.g., sector reports for multispecies) can be provided when available to complement information obtained from APs.

TOR B2. Provide recommendations on the content of fishery performance information that is provided to the SSC when developing recommendations for specifications.

SSS specifically considered the Risk Policy Matrices that were provided to the SSC in 2025, and recommended that, in addition, a one- or two-page fishery overview –drawing on a range of data sources including AP input on fishery performance– be included for future SSC meetings. The SSS felt that the [cover page](#) of information provided in the groundfish matrix for the October 21-22 SSC meeting was helpful and like what the SSS is recommending with some refinement. The SSS offered to iterate with Council staff in reviewing and improving fishery overview documents.

The SSS developed ideas for refining the overviews. In addition to the headings for commercial and recreational fishery characterization, a heading for community characterization could include helpful information about how changes in a fishery are related to changes in communities and how those changes vary geographically. A fourth heading titled “Flashpoints for Consideration” would be useful to note key issues to which the SSC (and the Council) should be alert. While the data within each fishery overview may vary, the SSS recommended including:

- Price data for close substitutes in the market (e.g., the imported equivalent).
- Summaries of and links to [Commercial Fishing Performance Measures](#) annually produced by SSB for all FMPs in the NE region.
- Fishery- or fleet-level social indicators (e.g., Fishery Engagement Indicator and employment) and environmental risk indicators (e.g., Community Environmental Variability Risk Indicators, see [Seara et al. 2022](#)), currently produced by SSB at the community level but feasible to calculate at the FMP/fleet level.
- Ideally, some measures of employment in the fishing industry.

TOR B3. Provide recommendations on how best to report on fisheries performance that efficiently meets multiple needs for information.

Recognizing that efforts towards improved fishery reporting may be hampered by available resources, the SSS recommended that initial products should be concise summaries produced consistently for all fisheries, rather than investing resources in providing long reports for a few fisheries at the expense of consistency. Focusing on a core set of indicators to report and using automation tools to make data query more efficient would ensure resiliency to changes in resources available to do performance reporting. Methods of qualitative data analysis can be used to efficiently summarize and generate visualizations and conceptual models that can be used to interpret and discuss data obtained from APs.

WORKSHOP PLANNING

The SSS discussed plans for a workshop in early 2026 being organized jointly by Birkenbach, Nenovic, St. Martin, and Uchida and supported by CINAR (Cooperative Institute for North Atlantic Region). This workshop will be similar to the CINAR Workshop held in May 2024,¹ and

¹ Reported on at the October 9, 2024 SSC meeting. Final report available [here](#).

is referred to in this document as CINAR Workshop 2. The focus of the follow-up workshop is on the use, or lack thereof, of industry/fishery data and information and knowledge in the decision-making process. The workshop will identify the barriers for better utilization of this information in management actions – and propose recommendations on how to overcome them. As with the first CINAR Workshop, an inventory is being made (by staff at Rutgers University) of data/information/knowledge available that is relevant for meeting the goals of the workshop.

The workshop is tentatively scheduled for Jan 22-23 (backup Jan 15-16), 2026, starting from Thursday afternoon and full day on Friday. It will be held at the University of Rhode Island campus in RI. Next steps include reaching out to key participants (e.g., industry groups, sector managers, researchers, NOAA and NEFMC staff) about availability in order to finalize the workshop dates, as well as developing a detailed agenda and complete list of invitees.

UPDATES TO SSS WORKPLAN

The SSS considered the full range of actions developed in the SSS workplan and discussed updates in light of uncertainties related to the level of resources available and when the current federal shutdown would conclude. A summary of updates is included in Table 1.

Table 1. SSS workplan and updates as of Nov 12, 2025

Actions	Approaches	Timing	SSS Leads	Updates
Incorporate social science in stock assessments	Invite assessment scientists to discuss how to include social science information including LEK	January 2026	Uchida	Originally scheduled for the first SSS meeting in 2026 but now reconsidering due cancelled meeting with social scientist PDT members (see below).
	Support improvements to ESP development within research track assessments	Research track assessments currently on-hold	Seara	No actions taken; research track assessments paused.
Meet needs for Council actions	Review Council annual work priorities to strategize what information would be informative	January 2026 and annually thereafter	Feeney	On track; will be included in the first SSS meeting in 2026.
	Invite social science PDT members to discuss what social and economic issues they are helping address, where information is used and how, and any barriers; support improved analyses	September 2025; late spring 2026 and periodically thereafter	Feeney Uchida	It was planned for the 10/28/2025 SSS meeting but was cancelled due to the government shutdown. The next step is being considered.
	Support the Council's work in implementing the revised Risk Policy to improve ABC setting in the face of biological uncertainty		St. Martin	St. Martin and Uchida attended the RPWG meeting on 11/14/25; may include this in the CINAR Workshop 2 agenda. Full SSC will discuss in early 2026; perhaps the SSS as well.
	Finalize CINAR Phase 1 (May 2024) report	Late August 2025	St. Martin Uchida Birkenbach	Completed.

Actions	Approaches	Timing	SSS Leads	Updates
Meet needs for Council actions (cont.)	Using CINAR Phase 1 list of data products, find uptake barriers; identify on-ramps and connections, update list	September 2025 and onward	Feeney	List on SSS Google drive, informing analysts.
	Identify opportunities for SSB data products	Summer 2025 and onward	Seara	Ongoing; discussing how to collaborate with the Council on joint reporting and use of SSB products.
	Clarify NOAA data access agreements to identify opportunities that facilitate collaboration with external partners	Summer 2025	Seara	Internal conversations in progress; access agreements like to require formal agreements.
	Provide data to SOE team for potential uptake as indicators; continue feedback for future SOE reports	Sept. 2025, late spring 2026, and onward	St. Martin	On track.
Improve the use of industry-generated information, including Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK)	Advise on content/template of a fishery performance document that can be brought to the NEFMC SSC, including Advisory Panel input and information from industry-generated documents, e.g., groundfish sector manager reports	Summer/fall 2025	Seara Uchida	Stalled due to government shutdown; will resume with information provided at the SSS 11/12/2025 meeting.
	Develop CINAR Phase 2 workshop on industry's data sources; seek extension of funds	Fall 2025	St. Martin	Current CINAR grant expires 12/31/2025. Funds to be used to inventory industry data (assistant at Rutgers to be hired). CINAR funding workshop separately; need to submit a budget for approval. Workshop agenda being developed and list of stakeholders to be invited.