



## New England Fishery Management Council

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

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** April 1, 2026  
**TO:** Cate O'Keefe, Ph.D., Executive Director  
**FROM:** Scientific and Statistical Committee Social Sciences Subcommittee  
**SUBJECT:** Update on Subcommittee activities

The Social Sciences Subcommittee of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC/SSS) held a meeting on March 10, 2026, to advance the SSS workplan via two main discussions. First, The SSS considered the current range of data products generated by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center Social Sciences Branch (NEFSC/SSB) and plans for future projects and provided input on these products and pathways for use by the Council in management and to prevent any duplication of effort with Council staff. Second, the SSS considered the Council's work priorities for 2026 and discussed with Plan Development Team members what social and economic work is anticipated to support these priorities, what information is needed to support the work, any barriers to conducting the work, and ideas on how to overcome those barriers. The SSS also provided input for planning a workshop in late March on enhancing use of fisheries-dependent data for social and economic considerations in management and discussed updates to the SSS workplan.

Attending the meeting were SSS members: Dr. Hiro Uchida (SSC, SSS Chair), Dr. Anna Birkenbach (SSC), Dr. Rachel Feeney (NEFMC staff coordinator), Dr. Mateja Nenadovic (SSC), Dr. Kevin St. Martin (SSC), and Dr. Tarsila Seara (SSB). Several staff members of the SSB and Council attended to present and support discussion. In addition, about 20 members of the public attended.

Documents considered for the meeting are available at:

<https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/mar-10-2026-ssc-social-sciences-subpanel-webinar>

#### ***NEFSC SOCIAL SCIENCES BRANCH DATA PRODUCTS***

The SSS received an overview presentation from the SSB on the range of social and economic data products (indicators, metrics, models) produced by the Branch. After questions, the SSS discussed how these products are being used, ways to improve or their utility in management, and opportunities for new uses of the information.

**Commercial Fishing Vessel Crew Survey and [Visualization Tool](#).** This is a survey of individuals who work as crew on commercial fishing vessels operating in New England and the

Mid-Atlantic. The survey was first administered in 2012, and the fourth wave is being implemented in Spring 2026. The survey provides social data (e.g., primary port, demographics, health insurance status, and job satisfaction) for understanding fisheries and community impacts to meet National Standard 8 requirements. The early iterations of the survey were long, but in 2018, the survey was shortened to about 10 minutes. It was noted that the survey was originally intended to capture trends across all fisheries, but since survey respondents largely have participated in the groundfish, scallop, and lobster fisheries, survey data have been used more for those management plans. The SSS recommended that the visualization tool allow for querying data by FMP and that the “Other FMP” category have more description to understand what other fisheries are captured by the survey data.

**Greater Atlantic Region Commercial Fishing Business Cost Survey and [Visualization Tool](#).**

This is a survey of vessel owners in New England and the Mid-Atlantic. The survey was first administered in 2011 and has been implemented four times, with a fifth planned for 2027. The survey provides economic data on fixed costs (e.g., vessel insurance and maintenance, gear, mooring fees) for estimating returns metrics such as profits. A limiting factor is the willingness of vessel owners to participate in the survey; low response rates have hindered analyses.

**Recreational Fishing Economic Surveys.** These are surveys to collect data from anglers used in recreational demand models for specific species: fluke, scup, black sea bass; Gulf of Maine cod and haddock; and striped bass. The first survey administered was for cod and haddock in 2009. The survey is for private anglers and for-hire permit holders.

**Commercial Fishing Port Activity.** This is an annual index of fishing activity in each port using data on the number of dealers and fishing permits, and the weight and revenue, similar to the fishing engagement indicator that had been produced but allows for clearer comparisons across ports and time. The SSS notes that this index allows for the foregrounding of information about the range of ports involved in a fishery, not just the top few ports.

**Environmental Variability Risk [Indicators](#).** Indicators of community and fleet impacts from environmental variability have been developed for East Coast ports and allows for analysis of the spatial and temporal trends in environmental variability risk. A visualization tool is under development.

**Commercial Fishing Performance Measures and [Visualization Tool](#).** The web portal shows social and economic data for all fisheries managed by the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils. A key feature is that for each FMP, data from just trips with over 50% of landings from that FMP are included in the data provided. The original rationale for this approach was to ensure that data from a single trip was not classified into more than one FMP. The SSS noted that a downside of the data classification approach is that the data shown do not encompass the data for the entire FMP. This limits the utility for the Councils which need to use characterizations of the entire fishery (and any relevant components). It was recommended that data for the entire fishery be displayed, in addition to the subset. If the portal could be used to characterize the entire fishery, the PDT time could be spent elsewhere.

**Vessel Profit [Snapshots](#).** These snapshots using just 2022 data use the Commercial Fishing Business Cost Survey data to calculate cost distributions, operating and total profits, and profit margins.

**Economic trip cost model.** This model uses observer data on trip costs to estimate fleet-wide trip costs for estimating net-returns.

**Quota change model.** This model is used to estimate the economic impacts of groundfish quota setting for the commercial groundfish sector fishery.

**Recreational demand model and decision support tool.** This model is used when setting recreational bag, size, and seasonal limits for groundfish (since 2013) and summer flounder, scup, black sea bass (since 2022) fisheries.

**SSB Metrics [Catalog](#).** This webpage is under development and provides an overview of all metrics generated by the SSB, including units of measurement, time series, product information, methods, output data, etc.

### Discussion

The SSS had several discussions that were common across all SSB products. The SSS noted that the metrics catalog will help with understanding how the SSB products overlap and can be integrated, as tools were created at different times and to fulfill different needs. The catalog could also be used to identify how the data products link to needs of the Councils.

Data confidentiality needs to be ensured (i.e., the “rule of three”) with each public report or visualization tool showing fishery data. There are fewer data confidentiality concerns when data are combined into an index rather than reporting specific values, such as with the Commercial Fishing Port Activity indices. Sparse survey responses can impact what information can be made public, as with the vessel cost survey in 2015.

The SSS noted that the SSB has been engaging in the development of metrics used for the Council’s Risk Policy implementation. The Council is working to use metrics available across all fisheries and methods may evolve as products do.

During its November meeting, the SSS identified specific economic and social information that would be helpful for SSC members to have when making recommendations for specifications. The SSS noted that having the context of a fishery is very helpful, particularly how economic impacts are distributed, and encouraged having socioeconomic context briefs presented. Council staff are working to identify improvements in delivering information to the Council, and partnership with SSB could help. SSC members on the SSS requested that the expected revenue of options brought to the SSC be included. In SSC reports, SSS members could help identify key concerns about potential socioeconomic impacts. SSB staff noted that an ongoing development of ESP (ecosystem and socioeconomic profile) report card can be used as a departure point of this information brief (“blue sheet”). There was also a discussion on whether to make such an official Council/SSC meeting document, with some voicing in favor.

The SSS summarized its recommendations to the SSB:

- In shorter term:
  - Follow up with the Risk Policy Working Group to identify what data products could inform scoring exercises.
  - Consider repackaging information at the FMP level, including reconsidering the 50% rule in Commercial Fishing Performance Measures.

- Ensure that indicators comprehensively capture fishery-related activities across the widest possible range of fishing communities, including small and/or fisheries-dependent communities, and, where possible, track changes over time.
- Develop document(s) for meetings with SSB products (in collaboration with Council staff).
- In mid to longer term:
  - Develop analyses to help understand the ripple effects (“knock-on consequences”) of management actions and the connectedness of entities (e.g., FMP/species, ports, gear types, etc.).

### ***SOCIAL SCIENCE WORK ANTICIPATED FOR 2026***

Staff of the Council and the SSB who provide social science support on Plan Development Teams presented the range of work priorities for 2026 related to each FMP, focusing on those in which social science work is expected to occur. For each, staff identified the information needs, potential barriers and ideas for ways to overcome barriers. The SSS Chair reminded the group of prior efforts to identify barriers, approaches to address barriers and progress towards that. The SSS then had a solution-oriented discussion on the barriers and actionable steps to overcome them. A few ideas are noted here.

- Automation tools can help produce data products and reports to address staff shortages.
- Increase coordination across PDTs where a tool could be more broadly used.
- Holding voluntary comment periods on a topic could help gain information to avoid extensive delays with approvals needed under the Paperwork Reduction Act.
- Issue requests for proposals to contract specific social and economic analyses where there may be insufficient staff resources.
- Use the Council’s new strategic plan to identify information needs further into the future to help plan for addressing needs (e.g., when periodic program reviews are anticipated).

An SSB staff member presented results of a NOAA social scientist survey (excl. economists) on the barriers to using social sciences in fisheries management, including: general (negative) perception of social sciences, need clearer management onramps and turning data into action.

### ***CINAR WORKSHOP PLANNING***

The SSS discussed plans for a workshop on March 23-24, 2026 held at the University of Rhode Island, being organized jointly by SSS members and supported by CINAR (Cooperative Institute for North Atlantic Region). This workshop will be like the CINAR Workshop held in May 2024,<sup>1</sup> and is referred to as the CINAR Workshop 2. The focus of the 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 use of this information in management – 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 workshop goals. Next steps include finalizing the agenda and participant list.

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

**UPDATES TO SSS WORKPLAN**

The SSS considered the full range of actions developed in the SSS workplan and developed the updates included in Table 1.

**Table 1. Updated SSS workplan**

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Approaches</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>SSS Leads</b>	<b>Updates</b>
Incorporate social science in stock assessments	Identify potential approaches for how to include social science information including LEK in assessments	TBD	Uchida	Topic discussed at CINAR2 workshop; developing next steps.
	Support improvements to Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profile (ESP) development within research track assessments	TBD	Seara	Research track assessments paused. Seara discussing with NEFSC/EDAB leadership, ESP development ongoing but at slower pace.
Meet needs for Council actions	Review Council annual work priorities to strategize what information would be informative	Early 2026 and annually thereafter	Feeney	On track; included in the 3/10 SSS meeting.
	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	Early 2026 mtg and periodically thereafter	Feeney, Uchida	On track; included in the 3/10 SSS meeting.
	Support the Council’s work in implementing the revised Risk Policy to improve ABC setting in the face of biological uncertainty	2025-2026, ongoing	St. Martin	St. Martin on RPWG, Uchida attended the RPWG meeting 11/25. SSB and WG collaborating. SSS could review matrix in 2026.
	Finalize CINAR Phase 1 (May 2024) report	Late August 2025	St. Martin Uchida Birkenbach	<a href="#">Completed.</a>

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Approaches</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>SSS Leads</b>	<b>Updates</b>
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	Nenadovic, Feeney	List on SSS Google drive, informing analysts, updating list.
	Identify opportunities for SSB data products	Summer 2025 and onward; 3/26 mtg	Seara	On track; included in the 3/26 SSS meeting. Discussing how to collaborate with the Council on joint reporting and use of SSB products; SSS could discuss again in 2026.
	Clarify NOAA data access agreements to identify opportunities that facilitate collaboration with external partners	Summer/Fall 2025	Seara	Internal conversations in progress; access agreements likely to require formal agreements; access for SSC members under development.
	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	Sent data in February (communities-at-sea approach developed at Rutgers) for New England SOE (will also send data relevant to MA SOE). Ongoing communication with Joe Caracapa.
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; update at early 2026 mtg	Seara, Uchida	Discussed at 11/25 and 3/10 SSS meetings and CINAR2. Could discuss again in 2026.
	Hold CINAR Phase 2 workshop on industry's data sources	March 2026	St. Martin, Nenadovic	Workshop held March 23-24, 2026; developing final report.