

Core Team Recommendations for 2024 Coordinated Priorities from Scenario Planning Potential Action Menu

Draft for Climate Coordination Group Discussion, November 7, 2023

Core Team Notes on Funding

The Coordination Group should consider how Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding might be applied to some or all of these coordinated priorities, and how the Councils might bundle coordinated project proposals. The group could also consider where IRA funding might be useful to apply to new staff support for these projects, contracts to support individual projects, or whether existing staff resources are adequate to support some items.

The core team also notes that there is some funding leftover from the previous scenario planning grants that must be spent by June 2024 could potentially be used to support one of the priorities below. Given that IRA funding is not available to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, the core team recommends using this money on a project involving the Commission. Commission staff can provide additional details at the meeting.

Core Team Recommended Priorities for 2024

The core team's recommendations for coordinated 2024 priorities are described below. In addition to identifying priorities generally, it would be useful for the Coordination Group to have a preliminary discussion of specific mechanisms for accomplishing each item. For example, meetings that convene specific people to scope an issue, workshops with invited participants, other types of outreach and information gathering, etc. In addition, some discussion about who would take on the work for each priority would be useful (e.g., is a working group needed? Should the Climate Core Team or another staff level group be involved? Is one organization taking the lead on each action?).

- 1. High Priority Potential Action G1: Reevaluate Council committee structure, use, and decision making.** This action relates to reconsideration of committee structure, use, and decision making to address representation concerns related to changing species distributions. As described in more detail in the Potential Action Menu (page 7), Councils should reevaluate their committee representation, with a focus on FMPs where managed species have shifted or are highly vulnerable to climate change. Councils should also consider enhancing the role of committees in decision making and moving toward more alignment in the use of committees across Councils. The practical next step identified in the Action Menu is: "Conduct a leadership planning exercise to further explore options for committee-based decision-making, committee structure, and committee use, building on ideas discussed at the Summit."
- 2. Conduct evaluation of feasibility and costs/benefits for a recreational study fleet in the Greater Atlantic and/or Southeast regions** (High Priority Potential Action D1: Expand study fleet, include recreational fisheries, and ensure data are used). Currently, there is a pilot program being conducted in New England for a recreational for-hire study fleet. The pilot is limited to groundfish in New England, but could potentially be expanded

in the future to other areas and fisheries. The core team suggests that in 2024, information from the pilot program could be used to inform an evaluation of the feasibility, benefits, costs, objectives, and logistical needs for a potential expanded recreational study fleet.

3. Improving science support, especially related to changing species distributions.

- a. Review the August 2021 Atlantic Coast Science Coordination Workshop¹ outcomes and recommendations and use the issues raised to determine possible next steps. (This relates to **G4** as well as **D4**)
- b. Develop a clear relationship between NOAA's Climate Ecosystem Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) and this effort, to understand what staffing, expertise, and products may be available via CEFI to support these climate actions.
- c. Characterize science needs and challenges, including challenges associated with recent decreases in survey/port sampling capacity. This could be tied to some of the Data Sources and Partnerships potential actions, including **D2** (survey mitigation around offshore wind/transition to industry-based surveys or other platforms), **D3** (improve the use of existing data), and **D4** (standardize data collection to break down geographic barriers along the East Coast).
- d. Conduct evaluations and/or develop tools to describe and visualize past, current, and projected spatial distribution of managed resources to inform management (e.g., species distribution modeling, R-Shiny app, storyboards, interactive user-friendly mapping applications). This information would support **G1-G3**.

4. Conduct a characterization of the federal and state permit landscape along the East Coast, as a first step to addressing Medium Priority Potential Action **M5**: Create a more adaptable structure for fishing permits.

- a. NEFMC raised an evaluation of permit splitting across FMPs as a potential use of IRA funds, which fits in under **M5**.

5. High Priority Potential Action G3: Develop joint management agreements with the aim of clarifying roles and increasing efficiency.

- a. A high priority "next step" identified under this potential action included "Review joint FMPs and agreements between the MAFMC and Commission (summer flounder/scup/black sea bass/bluefish) to identify areas for improved efficacy and efficiency." This could include formally documenting existing processes.
- b. NEFMC was very interested in this, so we could consider including examples from NEFMC-MAFMC FMPs, or for species managed under both NEFMC and ASMFC. This might be a longer-term effort.

¹ safmc.net/documents/fc2_a4f_atlanticcoastsciencecoordinationworkshop_kellison-pdf/

Priorities/Summaries from Recent Council/Commission Discussions

A summary of each recent Council/Commission discussion of scenario planning related priorities is provided below. The table below provides an overview of support from each body for near-term priorities. This table, along with a tabulated summary of each organization's priorities, is available [at this link](#).

		ASMFC	NEFMC	MAFMC	SAFMC	Totals
G1	Reevaluate Council committee structure, use, and decision making			1	1	2
G2	Re-evaluate and potentially revise Advisory Panel representation			1	1	2
G3	Develop joint management agreements with aim of clarifying roles and increasing efficiency	1	1	1	1	4
G4	Improve coordination across NOAA offices and regions		1			1
G5	Evaluate mechanisms for cross-pollination of SSCs	1				1
M1	Identify ecosystem-level contextual information that can be considered within the management process to help incorporate climate information into decisions	1	1	1	1	4
M2	Streamlining FMP documentation and rulemaking		1	1	1	3
M4	Identify and establish best practices for increasing nimbleness and/or responsiveness in management.	1				1
D1	Expand the study fleet, include recreational fisheries, and ensure data are used.	1	1	1	1	4
D3	Improve the use of existing data.		1	1		2

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

The Commission has included support for scenario planning activities in its 2024 action plan. This includes providing support for the Climate Innovation Group to track information and changes relevant to East Coast fisheries, identify ideas that are worthy of consideration by the Coordination Group, and identify new possible actions to undertake in the Draft Action Plan. In addition, it has committed to participating in the East Coast Climate Coordination Group to track progress of the Draft Potential Action Plan. The following items from the Draft Action Plan have been included in the Commissions 2024 Action Plan:

- **G3.** Develop joint management agreement with MAFMC to clarify roles and increase efficiency on collaborative projects.
- **G5.** Evaluate mechanisms for cross-pollination of SSCs. The Commission is interested in improving its coordination and knowledge sharing among the Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs) and the Commission's scientific committees, particularly for species spanning multiple jurisdictions and jointly managed species.
- **M1.** Identify ecosystem-level contextual information that can be considered within the management process to help incorporate climate information into decisions. Under the Commission action plan, it has committed to collaborate with NOAA Fisheries Northeast and Southeast Fisheries Science Centers to include Commission interests in Ecosystem Status Reports/State of the Ecosystem Reports. This will take cooperation with the science centers for this action to be completed.
- **M4.** Identify and establish best practices for increasing nimbleness and/or responsiveness in management. The Commission will consider strategies for increasing responsiveness in management to climate change.
- **D1.** Expand the study fleet, include recreational fisheries, and ensure data are used. While the Commission does not have direct involvement in establishing study fleets, it is committed to supporting the Recreational Study Fleet Pilot Project by monitoring its progress, and responding to outcomes if needed.

New England Fishery Management Council

A general item on the New-England Council's list of potential 2024 work priorities is scenario planning implementation. The Council discussed the Action Menu in detail at their September meeting, focusing on high priority items. The Council recommended a subset of these items for the Executive Director to bring forward to the Climate Coordination Group in November as potential coordinated actions:

- **G3:** Develop joint management agreements with the aim of clarifying roles and increasing efficiency. The Council noted that elements of G1 and G2 would likely be addressed through work on G3, that G3 in some ways might be considered a precursor to G1 and G2. Progress on G1 and G2 might be faster. The Council discussed that the 'use' aspect of G1 is as important as the 'structure' aspect. G3 work could enable us to respond effectively to the NOAA policy directive on governance and shifting stocks.

- **G4:** Improve Coordination at NOAA offices and regions. NOAA staff felt that the likelihood of some substantive work on this issue is high. Stock assessment related coordination is an important element.
- **M1:** Identify ecosystem-level information to consider in management. This has important implications for improving stock assessments. Use of the State of the Ecosystem reports should be considered under this action, although the action plan doesn't mention them.
- **M2:** Streamline documentation and rulemaking. Limited discussion here; there was a note that NOAA HQ might be working on this.
- **D1:** Expand study fleet and ensure data are used. Getting fishermen to engage and see that their information is being used will be really valuable to our process overall. The Council wondered if Artificial Intelligence (D5) might fit in here as well.
- **D3:** Improve the use of existing data. Seemed like an obvious choice.

The Council discussed who would work on these items - staff noted that groups beyond the Climate Coordination and Innovation groups would likely be involved with some activities; but these groups would serve in a coordination and communication role.

They noted the relationship that should ideally exist between ecosystem information and our risk policy, which we are currently updating. The Council wondered whether, between the scenario planning initiative and the IRA funds, we seem to finally be at a point where we can make some meaningful progress in terms of incorporating climate and ecosystem considerations into management.

The Council discussed that D2 is already underway through other processes (including NTAP) and maybe we don't need to prioritize it here, although it is important.

Other climate-related priorities were discussed during a separate, initial discussion of 2024 work priorities. These potential priorities, which will be discussed and potentially approved at the December Council meeting, include:

- Write IRA funding proposals
- East Coast Climate Change Scenario Implementation (see above)
- Review and consider improvements for integrating environmental information into stock assessments
- Develop educational module for training about what constitutes climate resilient fisheries
- Evaluate potential changes in governance, permitting, and catch allocation aligned with redistribution of fishery resources
- Develop tools to visualize current and projected spatial distribution of resources to support management measures (e.g., R-Shiny app, storyboards, interactive user-friendly mapping applications)
- Permit splitting across FMPs
- New England regional training about EEJ and integration in Council actions as related to climate impacts on underserved communities

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

The Mid-Atlantic Council agreed to several priorities for 2024, including:

- **G1:** Reevaluate Council committee structure, use, and decision making (in coordination with other East Coast management organizations).
- **G2:** Reevaluate and potentially revise Advisory Panel representation. The Council will do this as part of their Advisory Panel reappointment process in early 2024, as the current member terms run through June 30, 2024.
- When revising the Mid-Atlantic Council's Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (**EAFM**) **risk assessment**, consider High Priority Action **M1**: Identify ecosystem-level contextual information that can be considered within the management process to help incorporate climate information into decisions. The Council will develop an updated risk assessment in 2024.
- Hire a contractor to conduct a program review of the Council's process of developing and implementing fisheries management regulations. This addresses one aspect of High Priority Potential Action **M2**: Streamlining FMP documentation and rulemaking. This contract has just been awarded.
- Integrate scenario planning themes and potential actions (where applicable) into the development of the Council's 2025-2029 **Strategic Plan and Research Priorities** documents. The Council will develop the next 5-year strategic plan and 5-year research priorities in 2024.

The Mid-Atlantic Council also supported the staff recommended longer-term priorities (i.e., priorities for the next few years but may not have the resources to address in 2024). These included 1) High Priority Potential Action **G3**: Develop joint management agreements with aim of clarifying roles and increasing efficiency, 2) Evaluate the potential benefits and needs for development of a recreational study fleet, to address High Priority Action **D3**: Expand study fleet, include recreational fisheries, and ensure data are used, and 3) Consider other approaches to integrating scenario planning outcomes into the existing, or a revised, **EAFM framework/initiatives**, and 4) consider development of a **guidance or policy document** to consider climate resilience in the Mid's management plans and other efforts.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

The South Atlantic Council provided the following input:

Theme 1: Governance

- **G1:** The proposed "leadership planning exercise" should be more fully described. Discussions of committee structure and any potential changes must accommodate thorough Council consideration.
- **G2:** The SAFMC regularly reviews AP structure and composition and has created seats for MAFMC and NEFMC representation.
- **G2:** All organizations may benefit from identifying ways to expand and diversify AP recruiting.

- **G3:** Consideration is needed for the governance overlap between the SAFMC and GMFMC and recognition that any changes impacting SAFMC operations could also impact GMFMC.
- **G3:** The SAFMC process has worked well and resulted in various governance arrangements with MAFMC, ASMFC, and GMFMC, each adapted to different circumstances.

Theme 2. Ecosystem data

- **M1, D3, D8:** Consider a South Atlantic workshop including SSC, NMFS, and state representatives, structured similar to a SEDAR data workshop, to identify ecosystem related data now available and new data that could be used for addressing climate issues and risks. Funding could be pursued through IRA grants.
- **M1:** The SEFSC reported that efforts are underway to support more frequent Ecosystem Status Reports, and four additional staff were hired to support climate related activities.
- **M2:** Council and SERO staff have begun evaluating approaches to streamlining management actions. Comparing procedures with other Councils and Regional Offices may help identify alternative approaches.

Theme 3. Data

- **M1:** Evaluate climate and ecosystem data needs through IPTs and identify potential management actions and FMP data specifications that could address data gaps.
- **D1:** Study fleets are consistent with the Council's ongoing efforts through its Citizen Science program to increase fishermen involvement in data collection.
- **D1:** Consider the rock shrimp fishery for a study fleet pilot.

Additional Topics for Consideration by the Council

- The Council is interested in pursuing improved nimbleness as described in topic **M4** and requests a future presentation on management triggers.
- Permits (**M5**) are an ongoing issue that will require action by NMFS to resolve.
- The Council is interested in pursuing alternative management options (**M7**) despite the lack of regional interest in the topic. IRA funding could be used to support work on developing alternative approaches such as dynamic reference points.
- **D4:** Standardizing data across regions to support shifting distributions is necessary. The Council requests a presentation from SEFSC on status and outcomes from the 2020 Atlantic Science Coordination Workshop.