Research Steering Committee

Report of January 17 meeting

Dr. Rachel Feeney, staff

Council meeting
Jan. 30, 2018

New England
Fishery Management Council

Overview

RSC's tasks:

1. Recommend improvements to the Council's research priority setting process.
2. Receive updates on NEFSC/Northeast Cooperative Research Program activities.
3. Conduct management review of finished research projects.

Today's task:

Direct the research priority setting process.

1. Council research priorities

MSA mandate:

"Section 302 (h) Each Council shall develop, in conjunction with the scientific and statistical committee, multi-year research priorities for fisheries, fishery interactions, habitats, and other areas of research that are necessary for management purposes that shall –

A. establish priorities for 5-year periods;

B. be updated as necessary; and

C. be submitted to the Secretary and the regional science centers of the National Marine Fisheries Service for their consideration in developing research priorities and budgets for the region of the Council."

1. Council research priorities

- At March and July 2017 meetings, RSC:
  - Reviewed the draft 2017-2021 priorities,
  - Wished for prioritization within the list and description, rationale, and status of each item.
  - Tasked staff to look into how other Councils develop research priorities to see what lessons may be learned.
- At January meeting, RSC:
  - Considered other Councils' processes and staff input.
  - Made recommendations for improvements, focusing on product vs process.

1. Council research priorities

- Councils vary greatly in the amount of effort dedicated to creating/updating research priorities.
  - Most Councils: 9-82 page documents with needs ranked within broad areas, updated every 5 years.
  - NPFMC: spreadsheet and database, updated annually.
- Common themes:
  - There has been little NMFS feedback on next steps for research priorities submitted.
  - Better information about the end use of priority lists would help determine the degree of effort that should be devoted to the task.

1. Council research priorities

North Pacific's spreadsheet and database:

Research ID	Title	Description	Council Priority	Research Status
144	District-wide survey for demersal shelf rockfish in Southeast Alaska	Conduct a district-wide survey for demersal shelf rockfish in Southeast Alaska on a biennial or triennial basis. Survey information is becoming extremely dated.	Critical Ongoing Monitoring	No action
145	Continuation of State and Federal annual and biennial surveys	Continuation of State and Federal annual and biennial surveys in the GOA, AI, and EBS, including crab pot surveys, is a critical aspect of fishery management off Alaska. It is important to give priority to these surveys, in light of recent federal budgets in which funding may not be sufficient to conduct these surveys. Loss of funding for days at sea for NOAA ships jeopardizes these programs. Budgetary concerns have resulted in cuts to not only days at sea, which increases uncertainty, but also sampling the deepest strata, which threatens the value of trawl surveys as a synoptic ecological survey. These surveys provide baseline distribution, abundance, and life history data that form the foundation for stock	Critical Ongoing Monitoring	Underway

Query List | Reports

Research Priorities Query and Records List

Export

Plan Teams
- Joint Groundfish PT
- Crab PT
- Scallop PT

Council Actions

Ecosystem Area

Council Priority

SSC Priority

Research Status

10 records per page

Search:

ID	Title	Council Priority	SSC Priority	Research Status	Ecosystem Area	Related Council Action
171	Acquire basic life history information (e.g., natural mortality, growth, size at maturity) for data-poor stocks	Urgent	Urgent	Partially underway	Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands	Harvest specifications
172	Develop and validate aging methods for crabs.	Urgent	Urgent	Underway	Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands	Harvest specifications
173	Expand studies to identify stock and management boundaries	Urgent	Urgent	Partially underway	Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands	Harvest specifications

1. Council research priorities

NEFMC staff input:

- Several existing processes create lists of research needs (assessments, RSA, EISs, 5-year). A regularly updated master list may help track needs and reduce duplicative processes.
- Including rationale would improve communication and keep the list focused on research questions.
- *Operations Handbook* states that the RSC's purpose is, in part, to annually identify and prioritize research needs. This is not happening.
- Should have more concerted efforts to seek feedback on:
  - The end use of the lists (see Nies Jan. 3 letter to NMFS).
  - If and how research needs are being met.
- Continue to submit every 5 years, but a living spreadsheet or database could track needs in the interim.

1. Council research priorities

RSC Consensus Recommendations:

Process: The PDTs should continue to have the lead in developing and updating research needs. RSC review should continue to be a step in updating the list. The RSC should be more involved in tracking if and how needs are being met.

Format: Use a spreadsheet rather than a Word document. However, a searchable database would be ideal.

Content for each priority should include: A description/ rationale, priority code, what other priority lists it is included on (e.g., assessment, RSA), all categories that the topic addresses (e.g., species, broad category), research status (e.g., not begun, underway, completed).

1. Council research priorities

RSC Consensus Recommendations (cont.):

Coding: Rather than "low/medium/high," uses codes such as, "near-term," "critical," "long-term/strategic," "urgent/immediate," and "value-oriented".

What to include: Keep the list focused on the Council's needs. Once a project is completed, it should not be removed, but the research status updated and the entry amended to note/link where information may be accessed.

Outreach: There should be more concerted outreach to national research funding programs, and a suggestion made that they should require proposals to indicate if and how the research would meet an identified Council priority or reward proposals that address Council priorities.

2. NEFSC/NCRP

Program updates by Dr. Hoey:

Integrating cooperative research across the NEFSC:

- Cross-division working groups created to better use resources and strengths, identify data gaps, and integrate cooperative research to improve assessments (mackerel, fluke).
- "Speed talks" series enhanced NEFSC-wide collaboration.
- Participated in the recent port meetings on the groundfish assessment updates.

Survey trawl catchability studies:

- A series of survey catchability studies since 2009 (rock hopper vs. chain sweep, paired vessels).
- Research planning with Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel.

2. NEFSC/NCRP

Longline survey:

- 2018 will be the 5th year of the longline survey.
- Improving data on species that may not be captured in the trawl survey or have limited data (cusk, halibut, wolffish).
- Ongoing work on bait plumes.
- Starting to use data in assessments (cusk, thorny skate).

Study Fleet:

- The Study Fleet reporting software (FLDRS) is being used at the trip and sub-trip levels, constituting 83% of all eVTRs submitted (120 vessels).
- GMRI working on if the trip reporting tool can be used on fixed gear.
- Cornell Working on automating portside data transmission and including more whiting vessels.
- NCRP and Observer Program are seeing how the data align to understand the software's utility as an electronic report tool.

3. Management Reviews

Project #1: "Seasonal Scallop Bycatch Survey"

- *Project leader*: Coonamessett Farm Foundation
- *Funding*: Scallop RSA since 2011.
- *Goals*: quantify groundfish bycatch vs scallop yield, gear research, scallop discards and meat quality, biological sampling.
- Through 2014, survey stations in CAI and CAII scallop access areas, then moved to northern GB.
- RSC had reviewed in 2012 and 2015.
- Scallop PDT has used the data (e.g. flatfish AMs), but asked for RSC input on its utility as a time series.

3. Management Reviews

Project #1: "Seasonal Scallop Bycatch Survey"

RSC Consensus Statement:

"The RSC recommends that the reports and data from the *Seasonal Scallop Bycatch Survey* should continue to be used in management. If the project continues, it would be valuable to maintain the principles of a time series (i.e., compatibility year to year). Research on scallop bycatch is important and should continue as a high priority."

3. Management Reviews

Project #2: "River Herring Bycatch Avoidance"

- *Project leader*: SMAST/MADMF
- *Funding*: Herring RSA in 2014.
- *Goals*: improve RH catch estimates, reduce bycatch through communication network, test net sensors to link environmental conditions to bycatch events.
- Herring PDT and NMFS have used the data (e.g. setting bycatch caps, exploring catch monitoring).
- PDT asked RSC for input on additional uses.

3. Management Reviews

Project #2: "River Herring Bycatch Avoidance"

RSC Consensus Statement:

"The RSC recommends that the reports and data from the *River Herring Bycatch Avoidance* project should continue to be used in management. This project has produced high quality work; the bycatch avoidance program has reduced bycatch and should continue. This work, including all its publications, would be very helpful for developing the white paper on considering river herring and shad as stocks in the Atlantic herring fishery."

3. Management Reviews

Project #3: "Effects of Fishing on Herring Aggregations"

- *Project leader*: GMRI/NEFSC/UNH
- *Funding*: Herring RSA in 2008 (71% of budget funded).
- *Original goal*: define localized depletion of herring and develop hydroacoustic techniques to estimate stock size and localized depletion.
- *Scaled-back project*: developed acoustic methods to study impact of fishing on herring aggregations.
- Localized depletion questions remain unanswered (Amendment 8, 2018-2020 Herring RSA priority).
- Herring PDT asked RSC for input on if this project could inform future research.

3. Management Reviews

Project #3: "Effects of Fishing on Herring Aggregations"

RSC Consensus Statement:

"The RSC recommends that, due to low sample size, the results of the *Effects of Fishing on Herring Aggregations* project should not be directly used in management. However, valuable lessons have been learned from this study. Acoustic tools could be important for future studies of vessel effects and localized depletion, and used in conjunction with catch data to discriminate herring species."