



**New England Fishery Management Council**

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Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

**DATE:** June 21, 2022

**TO:** Tom Nies, Executive Director

**FROM:** Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)

**SUBJECT: Terms of Reference – (1) Draft 2022-2026 Council Research Priorities and Data Needs; (2) Draft 2022 Monkfish Fishery Performance Report; (3) Acceptable Biological Catch control rules for the Northeast Multispecies FMP; (4) Northeast Climate Action Plan**

The SSC met on June 7, 2022, via webinar to address the following terms of reference (TORs):

**Terms of Reference**

1. Draft 2022-2026 Council Research Priorities and Data Needs
  - Comment on the recommendations for revisions made to date by the FMP Committees.
  - Offer ideas for any further revisions, new priorities, or deletions of priorities to consider and provide rationale.
2. Draft 2022 Monkfish Fishery Performance Report
  - Comment on the utility of this report in understanding the monkfish fishery and interpreting fishery data.
  - Offer ideas for other data that should be included or questions that Advisory Panel members should address balancing clarity with concision.
  - Comment on how this report can help in making Acceptable Biological Catch recommendations and what revisions may improve its utility for that purpose.
3. Acceptable Biological Catch control rules for the Northeast Multispecies FMP
  - Update from Council staff
4. Northeast Regional Climate Action Plan
  - Comment on the clarity of the goals and activities in the Plan
  - Offer ways to strengthen the proposed Plan and activities
  - Comment on what additional goals and activities need to be addressed
  - Comment on the relative importance of the proposed activities and when they should be completed

To address these TORs, the SSC considered the following information:

1. Draft 2022-2026 Council Research Priorities and Data Needs
  - a. [Draft 2022-2026 Council Research Priorities and Data Needs, PDF version](#)
  - b. Draft 2022-2026 Council Research Priorities and Data Needs, Excel version
  - c. [Staff memo to SSC re 2021 SSC recommendations](#)
  - d. [Staff presentation](#)
2. Draft 2022 Monkfish Fishery Performance Report
  - a. [Draft 2022 Monkfish Fishery Performance Report](#)

- b. [Staff presentation](#)
- 3. Acceptable Biological Catch control rules for the Northeast Multispecies FMP
  - a. [Staff presentation on groundfish ABC control rules](#)
- 4. Northeast Regional Climate Action Plan
  - a. [Northeast Regional Climate Action Plan](#)
  - b. [Draft NEFMC comment letter](#)
  - c. [NOAA Fisheries presentation](#)

### **SSC Attendance**

Dr. Birkenbach, Mr. Carroll, Dr. Chen, Dr. Friedland, Dr. Jordaan, Dr. Kerr, Dr. McManus, Dr. Merrick, Dr. O’Keefe, Dr. Serchuk, Mr. Stockwell, Dr. Truesdell, Dr. Uchida, Dr. Wiedenmann, Dr. Williams

### **1. Draft 2022-2026 Council Research Priorities and Data Needs**

The SSC was provided a brief synopsis of the research priorities by Dr. Rachel Feeney, focusing on items that have changed since the last review of the priorities in 2021. Additionally, the SSC was provided with both a PDF and Excel version of the priorities for review prior to the meeting. The following is the feedback from the SSC on the Draft 2022-2026 Council Research Priorities and Data Needs:

- The SSC recognized continued improvements to the process for compiling and presenting 5-year research recommendations and commended Council staff for tracking progress on prior SSC recommendations, as well as including publication references and information about potential funding sources for specific research topics.
- The SSC suggested that the Council’s 5-year Research Priorities may be useful to inform the Research Track Assessment process and identify stock or thematic issues for prioritization.
- The SSC asked questions about how individual items in the list are tracked. Council staff noted that NOAA provided updates on progress to specific items in 2019 and may provide future updates on the broad status of research priorities. Staff highlighted that new additions to the list have been tracked since 2019.
- The SSC suggested consideration of adding priorities resulting from the Socioeconomic Sub-Panel Review of scallop and groundfish FMPs and human dimension recommendations from the State of the Ecosystem Report.
- The SSC generally agreed with the research priorities as listed and made specific recommendations for the following items:
  - Number 28: Add more actionable language to diagnose retrospective patterns, identify candidates that are causing retrospective patterns, assess impacts on assessments from missing survey data, and consider increased data resulting from higher monitoring in the groundfish fishery.
  - Number 44: Reference ongoing efforts by CCC and NMFS on this topic.
  - Number 82/83: Add publication references in the Notes section.
  - Number 107: Add a supplement priority to consider how the Council will set catch advice if there are substantial impacts on resource surveys due to wind farm development.
  - Number 114: Clarify the focus for reduction of harbor and gray seal bycatch.
- Following the SSC meeting, additional suggestions were provided through correspondence specific to herring and groundfish research priorities:
  - Number 1: There may be validity in establishing a hydroacoustic survey, especially if it could operate at different spatiotemporal scales/stratification than current surveys.

- Number 7: Add note that additional surveys are being evaluated through the Spiny Dogfish Research Track Assessment.
- Number 35: SSC concurs with deleting this priority and recommends that integration of new survey data into assessments be conducted through the stock assessment process.

## **2. Draft 2022 Monkfish Fishery Performance Report**

The SSC received a presentation on the Draft 2022 Monkfish Fishery Performance Report from Ms. Jenny Couture of Council staff. The presentation noted that this is the first fishery performance report developed by the NEFMC, modeled after the approach that the MAFMC has taken for several years, with the intent of helping the Monkfish Committee, SSC, and Councils understand the monkfish fishery and interpret fishery data. The goal of the presentation was to solicit comments and ideas from the SSC about the utility of the report, other data that should be included, and how the report can help in making ABC recommendations. The SSC expressed appreciation for the opportunity to review the report and commented that the information provided useful context for fishery-dependent data and socioeconomic variables that affect fishery performance.

The SSC offered the following comments and suggestions for consideration to include in the report:

- The SSC found the report to be generally useful to understand a range of variables affecting the monkfish fishery over time and how changes in the regulatory environment, markets, and fishing communities could be used to inform future fishery management actions.
- The SSC provided suggestions for enhanced and additional information to consider for inclusion in future reports, including:
  - Trends in price over time, both seasonally and annually;
  - Expanded information about fishing communities to elucidate fluctuations in landings by port and anticipate potential future changes;
  - Description of regulatory changes that have affected fishery performance;
  - Impact of protected species management measures on monkfish fishery effort;
  - Impacts on the fishery from the development of offshore wind;
  - Further consideration of the interactions between the skate and monkfish fisheries to inform future management decisions under constraining factors;
  - Expanded description of methods to calculate discards;
  - Additional information about markets and market influence to understand how and where monkfish products are being consumed and explain why price has declined;
  - Condensed tables and added maps and figures to highlight trends.

The SSC discussed how the report could help in making ABC recommendations and possible revisions or additions that could improve its utility for that purpose. The SSC noted that monkfish stocks are currently assessed using an empirical approach, and there is a high level of uncertainty about the state of the stocks relative to overfished and overfishing status due to the absence of status determination criteria. In this context, the SSC felt that the information included in the Monkfish Fishery Performance Report had utility to inform ABC recommendations. The report's descriptions of regulatory constraints and changing trends in prices and markets provided useful context about the mismatch between allocation levels and landings in recent years, especially in the Southern Management Area. The SSC noted that it may be difficult to extrapolate the utility of this type of report to other fisheries where stock status is defined and expressed reluctance to use this report as a model for all stocks, especially those where stock assessments provide required information to make ABC recommendations.

The group posed questions about the potential utility of expanding efforts to create similar reports for other fisheries. Staff noted that if the Council found general utility of Fishery Performance Reports that the effort could be expanded to other FMPs but highlighted practical considerations for additional work and staff resources. The SSC suggested discussions with other Councils and SSCs that have used Fishery Performance Reports to better understand how information is applied for ABC recommendations. The group also highlighted potential overlap with information provided through the Risk Policy Matrix and recommended clarifying the intended use of the Risk Policy Roadmap.

### **3. Acceptable Biological Catch control rules for the Northeast Multispecies FMP**

The SSC received an update on the status of the development of new ABC control rules for the groundfish fishery from Dr. Jamie Cournane. A sub-group of PDT and SSC members that was established to consider revisions to the ABC control rules will evaluate a range of options with input from the PDT and Groundfish Committee and present a summary white paper to the full PDT in August 2022. The SSC considered the sub-group's work plan and posed questions related to the timeline, expectations for SSC input, and types of analyses that will be conducted to support evaluations of control rule options. The subgroup plans to draw on previous analytical work as well as expert opinion in the consideration of adjustments to ABC control rules.

The SSC provided the following suggestions for consideration by the sub-group:

- Exploration of ABC control rules that are robust to dynamic reference points;
- Consideration of how ABC control rules will apply under changing environmental conditions and productivity regimes;
- Control rule options to be applied for stocks with and without analytic assessments;
- Control rule options for an ecosystem-based fishery management plan;
- Consideration of challenges associated with the current ABC control rules.

### **4. Northeast Regional Climate Action Plan**

The SSC was asked to review NOAA's Fisheries Northeast Regional Climate Action Plan which is currently under the public comment period. The SSC received an overview presentation by NEFSC scientist Vince Saba. The SSC appreciated the opportunity to ask questions and comment on the action plan.

The SSC offered the following comments and suggestions for consideration to include in the report:

- Increased attention should be paid to ensuring climate-fisheries research is being integrated into the assessment and management process. As such, consideration should be given to developing performance metrics of the success of the Plan which focus on the top three objectives of the National Climate Science Strategy - "Adaptive Management Processes, Robust Management Strategies, and Climate Informed Reference Points."
- Consideration of other relevant metrics of impact besides publication. For example, tracking how many management strategies are climate informed.
- There is a need to shift focus from research at large space and longer time scales to geographic and time scales relevant to management and industry.
- Increase communication on work undertaken through this plan with stakeholders, including fisheries managers.

- Strengthen documentation of the planned interactions with state agencies as this will be particularly important with shifting stock distributions and more efforts to integrate state surveys in stock assessment.
- Concern was expressed about the loss of habitat for certain life stages of fish. Suggestion for coordination to ensure this information is provided to the assessment and management process.
- Explore use of windfarm platforms or wind company monitoring surveys to continue collection of data in wind energy areas.
- Suggested inclusion of more on climate adaptation strategies in the region, including documentation of what adaptive strategies are already being employed and strategies that might be useful to support resilient fisheries in the future.