

Spring 2015 Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC) Meeting Summary
May 27-28, 2015
Westin Georgetown, Washington D.C

Attendees, by group affiliation:

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC):

Bob Beal, Executive Director
Toni Kerns, Interstate Fisheries Management Program Director
Pat Campfield, Fisheries Science Program Director

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC):

Rick Robins, Chairman
Dr. Lee Anderson, Vice-chairman
Dr. John Boreman, Chair, Scientific and Statistical Committee
Chris Moore, Executive Director
Rich Seagraves, Senior Scientist

New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC):

Terry Stockwell, Chairman
Dr. John Quinn, Vice-chairman
Tom Nies, Executive Director
Chris Kellogg, Deputy Director

NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)

Dr. Bill Karp, Science and Research Director
Dr. Russell Brown, Deputy Director
Dr. Susan Gardner, NEFSC Chief of Staff
Dr. Jim Weinberg, Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW) Chairman
Dr. Paul Rago, Chief, Population Dynamics Branch
Dr. Michael Simpkins, Chief, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division
Dr. John Hare, Acting Chief, Ecosystem Processes Division

Dr. Rick Methot, NOAA Science Advisor for Stock Assessments

NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO)

John Bullard, Regional Administrator
Mike Pentony, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries
Gene Martin, General Counsel Northeast Section Chief
Emily Gilbert, Sustainable Fisheries Division (*NRCC staff support*)
Carly Bari, Sustainable Fisheries Division (*NRCC staff support*)

Public Attendees:

Jackie Odell and Glenn Delaney, Northeast Seafood Coalition

- Day 1 -

1. Stock Assessment Priority Setting: Scheduling and Specific Assessment Topics
a. Stock assessment efficiency initiative, including presentation on Alaska approach and update on standardization initiative.

Dr. Paul Rago gave an overview of the stock assessment efficiency initiative, where the NEFSC is attempting to improve the stock assessment process in terms of quality, efficiency, and consistency of the assessment review process, as well as increase the pool of assessment talent and better distribute workloads. He discussed what has been accomplished since 2011 and what has been postponed in order to allow for inclusion of new research. Dr. Rago also presented a summary of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's (NPFMC) Plan Team and their Science and Statistical Committee (SSC) process. The plan teams are not the same as our PDTs and FMATs, they are primarily viewed as a review body and members work closely with assessment authors to come up with prime recommendations that go before the SSC. There was further discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the Alaska Fishery Science Center and the NPFMC process. Ultimately, the NEFSC is interested in streamlining this region's assessment and catch specifications review process by potentially adopting some of the processes used for Alaska. The NEFSC is interested in working with NRCC partners to implement changes to address some of their goals (e.g., improve the regional assessment review and catch specifications processes, increase the frequency of stock assessments, formalize rule for timing/responsibilities/standardization, etc.) and plans to distribute a white paper as a discussion starter in the next few weeks. The NEFSC also discussed hosting a workshop this summer to further flesh out details on this initiative. Dr. Bill Karp intends to work with each NRCC partner to go through this process and generate a draft in advance of that meeting.

Dr. Jim Weinberg also presented a draft template for assessment update reports. The NEFSC is planning on using this template in September for all groundfish stocks. The written report will basically have 20 chapters, one for each stock. There was concern that the report would be too generic and thus not include species-specific data needs, but there was general agreement that this standardized format is a step in the right direction. Dr. Weinberg commented that if NEFSC staff knows of special requests in advance, they can be incorporated in the assessment reports. In addition, each assessment would have a special comments section where the lead scientist could provide information specific to each assessment. There was also discussion of the database that will hold assessment information and be available to fishery managers and the public during and after the peer review. The database will have a web interface that allows the entire dataset to be downloaded, if need be. The NRCC agreed to move forward with this approach for groundfish this fall, but Mr. Nies wants to be sure that the NEFMC SSC is consulted because they may have some additional comments. Mr. Nies also expressed concern that the database would not be available during SSC meetings, given the uncertain internet access at some hotels. As a result, the burden of preparing data tables would shift from assessment scientists to Plan Development Teams.

b. Update on Assessment Prioritization

Dr. Rick Methot provided an overview of the national assessment prioritization process. The plan is to release a document this summer to establish a starting point and holding regional workshops in late summer. Dr. Methot discussed the need for prioritization (trying to rectify over-benchmarking of some stocks while other stocks are not being assessed enough), the process for prioritizing, and the goal for this national initiative (a prioritized portfolio of right-sized assessments for each stock). Dr. Methot also offered an overview of major changes since 2014 and outlined needed steps in each region moving forward (i.e., hosting regional workshops). Following the presentation, there was a general discussion regarding how this prioritization process would fit into the NRCC assessment scheduling process. Dr. Methot stated that this prioritization is a national mandate for all regions (e.g., it comes up with budget discussions and MSA reauthorization discussions) so the goal is for it to complement the NRCC process, rather than override it. However, there are congressional demands to establish this kind of objective process and the NRCC will be expected to document scheduling adjustments it makes after results of the prioritization calculations are made.. There were also concerns with how this approach would mesh with the management cycle. Dr. Methot responded that this process can work with the management cycle, and would not force a stock to get assessed immediately if a short delay would bring that assessment into better alignment with the management cycle. The NRCC efforts to move towards greater use of operational update assessments also will help get timely assessments done in good alignment with management cycles. Dr. Anderson commented that the prioritization scoring method was rational but also that it was arbitrary. Mr. Nies and Mr. Stockwell questioned whether the prioritization process would meet the needs of the Councils in the Northeast.

c. Update on Black Sea Bass Assessment

The NRCC discussed concerns about the timing of the black sea bass benchmark assessment, as well as questions on who will do it and review it. The ASMFC wanted this reviewed in July 2016 by the ASMFC process. The MAFMC wanted this reviewed in the SARC (SARC 62; Nov/DEC 2016). Ms. Kerns mentioned that the ASMFC, in conjunction with the MAFMC and its SSC are moving forward with a data workshop in the first week of July (June 29-July 2) in preparation for the SARC. The Commission wants to make sure there is plenty of time for people to review and do as many models/adjustments as possible and are concerned that if they followed regular SARC process they wouldn't have enough time to do all of this, so they are getting ahead of it. Dr. Rago offered his support of this data processing workshop. A major challenge for this assessment relates to data processing and if interested parties are to accomplish the management objective (spatially distributed regulatory process, whether its inshore/offshore or north/south), it is going to be a big process and a lot of data reduction needs to be done to properly synthesize this information.

Ultimately, the NRCC decided to schedule the assessment for Nov/Dec of 2016. Interim specifications for fishing year 2017 will be needed under this timeline (this would have occurred if the assessment occurred earlier in the summer as well). Depending on the results of the assessment, the specifications may need to be adjusted mid-year.

Mr. Beal was also concerned about the make-up of the peer review panel and wants to make sure peer reviewers are familiar with the life history of the species. The NRCC discussed how it is

difficult to have much input on who will be on the panel. Although there is some level of control in terms of who chairs the SARC, too much SSC involvement in the assessment could cause a conflict of interest at later stages when the SSC develops an ABC recommendation.

d. ACCSP data issue

At the center of this discussion was a recent letter sent from the NEFSC to the ACCSP. The letter focused on data availability issues that resulted in NEFSC staff needing to make ad hoc solutions for estimating total catch for bluefish and scup, which will have some impact on the upcoming assessments for these species. As a result, the letter concludes that the NEFSC can no longer commit to completing SARCs during the month of June. Mike Cahall from the ACCSP joined in on discussions and reviewed the spring data load process, including a breakdown of all of the various datasets needed. Mr. Cahall emphasized his view that they missed the data load deadline this year because of a miscommunication. He mentioned that as we move more and more into the electronic realm and data envisioning work, data will get into system, be audited, and be available more quickly. For selected species, Mr. Cahall mentioned that the ACCSP could support an accelerated time schedule, but the ACCSP and NEFSC need to work on improved communication to make sure that the data is getting to the right people. The NEFSC pointed out that data from all species are needed to do discard estimation, rather than just the single species selected for stock assessment. The NEFSC also clarified the need to receive all prior-year catch data in order to properly estimate discard mortality for stocks scheduled for assessment. Furthermore, it was mutually understood that substantive process improvements must be made before this could be accomplished early enough to allow scheduling of stock assessments in June. Even though work is proceeding to resolve this problem, it is expected to take 2-3 years. In wrapping up the discussion, Dr. Karp concluded that the NEFSC can no longer assume that the data will be available in time for June SARCs, implying that future SARCs need to be held later in the year than June.

Given that availability of data is compressing the time available for assessments, Mr. Nies asked what the target data delivery date was for the ongoing Fishery Dependent Data project. Dr. Brown explained that no specific date was identified; the goal is to improve the efficiency of the data collection system.

e. Assessment Schedule

This discussion went fairly quickly. The NEFSC presented their updated assessment schedule proposal for 2016 and 2017, which made dates more accurate and reflected scheduled activities. Changes from the last NRCC meeting included:

- Slight adjustment of the cumulative discard methodology review from Jan/Feb 2016, to March 2016;
- Identification of the black sea bass assessment as part of SARC 61 (mid-July 2016);
- Moved the multispecies groundfish model to the first half of 2017 (SARC 63);
- Added an MRIP transition and a groundfish operational assessment for all 20 stocks to the second half of 2017; and
- Included a scup data update for 2015, as well as black sea bass, ocean quahog, and scup data updates for 2017.

After discussions with the NRCC, the schedule was further modified, as follows:

- The black sea bass assessment was moved to the second half of 2016 (Nov/Dec, SARC 62);
- Monkfish was moved earlier to the 1st half of 2016 (SARC 61);
- The assessments for ocean quahog and red hake were moved from SARC 61 to SARC 63 (1st half of 2017); and
- A data update for ocean quahog was added for 2016.

In addition, there were discussions about doing a skate assessment, but because the NEFMC is working on 2016 and 2017 specifications now, there is some flexibility on when to do that assessment. This issue will need to be revisited, with a decision on whether to update the assessments or pursue another option that will allow the review of reference points.

f. Cumulative Discard Methodology Review

The NRCC wanted to know more about NMFS's discard methodology review. This review is being conducted by NEFSC staff and staff from GARFO's Analysis and Program Support Division. Dr. Rago discussed how this review started with a review of butterfish to see if we could get improved estimates of butterfish discards by exploiting the seasonality of the fishery rather than cumulative methodology. This expanded to a larger risk analysis because the bigger issue was not temporal stratification, but rather the real-time and data availability issues. For quota monitoring, it is extremely important to have accurate data to prevent prematurely closing fisheries or exceeding quotas. There is a need for a data set that allows us to incorporate uncertainty of estimates as well as real-time data.

Since this work began, there is confusion within the public over what this review will accomplish and how extensive it will be. Mr. Nies asked if this analysis was looking at how we train and select observers, or involved a review of scientific protocols on board vessels. Dr. Rago clarified that these topics are not under the scope of this work.

The success of this peer review, and preparation for it, will require a significant and continued investment from both GARFO and the NEFSC. TORs are in development, but not finalized. Once drafted later this month, the TORs will be passed through the NRCC (See Action Item #1).

g. MRIP Transition Discussion

The NEFSC briefed the NRCC on plans for incorporating MRIP information into future assessments. The transition to MRIP has shown that recreational catches are on an order of three to six times higher than currently estimated. This will change the nature of stock assessment models. The NEFSC plans on updating models for a number of species (i.e., bluefish, scup, fluke, Gulf of Maine cod) as a prototype to demonstrate what assessments would look like if catches were modified according to a couple of scenarios: 1) Assuming that the bias between contemporary rate and the new rate from mail surveys is constant over time and 2) assuming the bias is a more recent phenomena which is related to use of cellphones (i.e., gatekeeping effect) which has adjusted the time series. Once this is completed (later in 2015), assumptions will be refined and applied to a number of stocks to see what will result. This isn't designed to be used for management purposes, but rather to give an idea of what future assessments may look like. Through 2016 and 2017 there will be a full side-by-side comparison with two types of sampling

protocols for measuring fishing effort, but until then scientists and statisticians need to figure out what is an appropriate and consistent measure of effort bias over time and apply that common standard across all stocks. It is unknown at this time whether these updates could be addressed all at once, or if this change will require a full set of benchmarks for all affected stocks. NOAA does not plan to use the new data in stock assessments or management decisions until 2018.

h. Update on Fall 2015 Operational Groundfish Assessment

Members of the NRCC wanted an update from the NESFC regarding the upcoming operational assessment. Dr. Rago emphasized that these assessments, which would cover all groundfish stocks, are updates on the previous assessment, not benchmarks. NRCC members encouraged the NESFC to communicate this to the public, because rumors abound that this is more than just an update. Dr. Rago reported that the assessment would be in Woods Hole. There will be an assessment oversight panel that was tentatively scheduled for July 22, 2015, (also in Woods Hole) to discuss anticipated problems, signals that might be relevant, a description of Plan B should the model not be usable, and what would constitute sufficient basis for setting ACLs in the interim. The NRCC discussed that this is the same date as a MAFMC SSC meeting, so some interested parties won't be able to attend. As a result, the July 22nd date may change to allow for more attendees.

There was a discussion about the TORs and how they are devised. Dr. Rago mentioned that the TORs would be available July 1st and they would mirror what was used for pollock and Georges Bank winter flounder. Reference points are updated, but not the basis for those reference points.

Decisions on who will be on the working group for the actual assessment have not yet been made. Dr. Rago commented that they will be peer-reviewers, and they will be selected by the Council. SSC members will likely be solicited to serve.

There was also confusion on whether these assessments will involve new information or not, and what level of new information would be included. Dr. Karp suggested that this meeting would be a good time to discuss what will and will not be considered in the assessment. On the second day of the NRCC meeting, Dr. Rago compiled a list of guidance on admissible changes for operational assessment in terms of treatment and use of data, which the NRCC reviewed and adjusted. See Attachment 2 of this summary for this list. Dr. Rago confirmed that the Mid-Atlantic assessment updates are a different format and those would continue unchanged regardless of the decisions made today. Ultimately, this topic ended in Action Item #5, which assigned the NEFSC to draft a letter with these guidelines on behalf of the NRCC and distribute to the NEFMC SSC for review.

2. SSC Liaison Discussion

This function was the responsibility of Dr. Fred Serchuk, who has now retired. Both the MAFMC and NEFMC discussed interest in having a new person in the liaison role as soon as possible and the NEFMC recognized the importance of maintaining this function. However, there are currently no plans to fill the vacancy created by Dr. Serchuk's retirement so the Center will continue to look for alternative solutions. There was some discussion about how it would be helpful to have this role more clearly defined.

3. NEFSC's Strategic Plan Update

Dr. Karp briefly provided an update on the NEFSC's Strategic Plan. The final draft of the plan will be reviewed by the Councils this fall.

4. NRCC SAFE Report Working Group Follow-Up Discussion

Dr. Weinberg provided a status update of the NRCC SAFE Report working group (WG). The group had produced a report with various options of how to handle SAFE reports that was presented to the NRCC at its October 2014 meeting. Since that time, the WG had determined that the preferred option (Option 3) would likely produce more work than originally anticipated and the NRCC concluded at its previous meeting that this might not be the best choice. This option would have resulted in a GARFO analyst developing a stand-alone report using text from source documents. After further review, the WG determined that this would be a substantial amount of new writing that would only have been worth it if it replaced the affected environment section of our NEPA documents, but there is no guarantee that this would be possible. As a result of this discussion, the NRCC opted at this meeting to adopt Option 2, which would still produce the set of reports that are currently written, but with the addition of brief content descriptions (2-3 sentences) that would be posted adjacent to the full reports in a centralized location. This discussion led to Action Item #6 (GARFO will develop an implementation plan and provide this plan to the NRCC at its fall 2015 meeting).

- Day 2 -

5. Update on progress of reconstituting Trawl Survey Advisory Panel

Dr. Karp reviewed the proposed charter for the Trawl Advisory Panel (AP), which would bring commercial fishing, fisheries science, and fisheries management professionals together to identify concerns about regional research survey performance and data, and to address such concerns as a group. The proposed charter lists potential projects and outlines how this AP would be structured, membership composition, panel leadership, and organizational support, etc. Dr. Karp expressed interest in finalizing this charter at the upcoming NEFMC and MAFMC meetings and was looking for NRCC feedback.

Members of the NRCC offered a few suggestions, including the idea of establishing what constitutes a quorum (including regional representation considerations), outlining how decisions will be made (i.e., consensus, vote, etc), and considering the lifespan of the AP. In addition, there were suggestions that the proposal spell out who this group ultimately reports to and manage expectations somehow regarding NMFS's commitment to addressing the AP's recommendations. Dr. Karp agreed that the proposal should explain that the AP will make recommendations to the Councils, and the Councils will make recommendations to the Agency based on the AP's input. Mr. Moore had concerns about Section 8 of the proposal, which outlined a panel organizational support that relied heavily on MAFMC resources. Mr. Beal commented that the ASMFC should also be involved in the panel and all agreed.

6. Report of the NEFSC Climate Ecosystem, Habitat and Assessment Steering Group

During this discussion, Dr. Hare gave an overview of the history and recent activities of the Climate Ecosystem, Habitat, and Assessment Steering Group (CEHASG). In 2013, when the

group was a working group, they came up with a list of ecosystem principles, which present significant challenges to how stock assessments are conducted and fisheries are managed. The original working group developed a mid-term report in September 2013 that described the various assessment processes, conducted a gap analysis of these processes versus the ecosystem principles, and developed recommendations for a path forward. One of these recommendations was to create CEHASG as a long-term steering group. The goal of this group is to provide structure and direction to NEFSC efforts pertaining to climate, ecosystem, and habitat research, and the integration and inclusion of this research into the assessments of living marine resources. More broadly, the group will provide guidance on the development and application of Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM) in the Greater Atlantic Region. Membership includes division chiefs, program leads, and a selection of other NEFSC staff. Recent activities of CEHASG include reviewing development of EBFM plans with both Councils, developing draft process for including ecosystem, climate, and habitat factors into stock assessments, and reviewing various benchmark and update assessments (i.e., Atlantic cod and Atlantic mackerel). Dr. Hare focused the rest of his presentation on the challenges of moving forward with EBFM under our current assessment process and how to sync the work of CEHASG with other NEFSC initiatives.

The NRCC discussed that it would be beneficial for Dr. Hare to report out on CEHASG activities to the NRCC. If there is an annual report produced by this group, that report could also be presented to the Councils.

7. Discussion of efforts to coordinate with Councils and Commission plans for EBFM/EAFM

The MAFMC and NEFMC briefly discussed their efforts in addressing ecosystem-based fisheries management. Both Councils are early in their developmental stages and will continue to need support from the NEFSC in their efforts. The NEFSC commented that it will be more difficult to be responsive to their needs if they move in different directions. Councils discussed that there will likely be commonalities in their approaches and there will be more dialogue as development continues.

8. Cod Stock Structure Discussion

During this discussion, the NRCC reviewed the 2012 proposed work plan for cod stock structure, which outlined a three-phase process for the re-evaluation or, and possible revisions to, the spatial basis for assessment and management of cod. Work stopped on this topic a few years ago due to other emerging priorities, but the NEFMC is interested in continuing this initiative. Mr. Nies suggested that NEFMC work with NEFSC to review the current document to see if it still provides a roadmap. Discussions also revolved around how to include our partners in Canada. The NRCC created Action Item #2 to continue to address this topic. Mr. Bullard and Dr. Karp intend to speak to DFO, and the NEFMC and NEFSC will work on implementing the three-phase plan contained in the draft stock structure document, entitled “**A Proposed Process for the Evaluation of the Stock Structure of Atlantic Cod in NAFO Divisions 4X, 5YZ, and 6ABCD.**”

9. Bycatch Monitoring Topics

a. Marine Mammal Bycatch

First, there was a brief discussion of the work of the Science Center for Marine Fisheries (SCeMFis). This is a consortium of industry members that fund scientific projects with goal of reducing uncertainty in scientific assessments or research. Projects have focused on clam survey, design and construction of new clam dredge used for surveying efforts. Other projects have focused on developing an industry advisory team to participate in assessments for mid-Atlantic species to provide expertise to reduce uncertainties. There is also an independent advisory team related to marine mammal assessments focused on reducing uncertainties in these assessments relevant to bycatch. This team may interact with Councils moving forward so this is an informational update to make the NRCC aware that this group is in existence.

b. Lobster/cod bycatch issues

Next the NRCC discussed lobster bycatch issues. Mr. Nies discussed that there was some concern raised last fall that there was unaccounted cod catch in lobster traps and that led to the NEFMC and ASMFC discussions. Mr. Nies provided an update on their activities. The NEFMC's Groundfish PDT and the ASMFC technical team tentatively decided that, given the lobster assessment going on and PDT's workload, the time to get together for further discussions may be in July. Any discussions that occur shouldn't impact the upcoming lobster assessment.

c. Update on Potential Legislative changes for observer funding coverage and update on I-F Observer Amendment

Mr. Robins discussed how both Councils for various reasons are currently in a position where they are not able to effectively implement their observer objectives. NMFS disapproved observer coverage levels in Herring Amendment 5 and Squid, Mackerel, Butterfish Amendment 14 due to legal and funding constraints. Mr. Robins notes that the Alaska region benefits from Section 313 of the Magnuson-Steven Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), which provides for a collection of fees and also allows the region to create a fund to appropriate fees to fund the observer program. As Congress continues to move forward with MSA reauthorization, Mr. Robins believes it would be helpful to make the suggestion to expand Section 313 to include the Mid-Atlantic and New England. He recommended forming a working group to review the language in Section 313 and consider a more specific request that would ensure we have the tools we need for funding mechanisms and collection of fees that would address the Councils' ability to set observer coverage levels in our fisheries. NRCC members generally discussed that we would need Congress to ask the Councils for input in order to provide these suggestions, but there was support for creating a working group. Alternatively, some members recall that NMFS representatives stated at a previous Council Coordination Committee meeting that they are interested in Councils ideas on MSA reauthorization. Mr. Beal offered ASMFC support as well. Ultimately, this discussion resulted in Action Item #3, to set up an MSA Section 313 Working Group and prepare ideas for the next Council Coordination Committee meeting.

d. Discuss plan for future bycatch monitoring in small mesh fisheries

The Maine Department of Marine Resources has been conducting a small mesh bycatch monitoring project that was funded through the ACCSP. This funding will no longer be available for this project to continue in the long term. Mr. Stockwell wanted to inform the NRCC of this funding issue and the NRCC discussed that this project is an important element of river herring and shad bycatch monitoring. Members are hopeful that there may be a way to

repackage/focus this proposal so that it is not specific to a single state and receive more funding as a result.

10. Update on Catch Limit Specifications Process

At the last NRCC meeting, members suggested putting together a working group to further explore the Alaska specifications process. GARFO was tasked with leading this working group. Since that time, GARFO has gotten feedback that there are no resources to put towards this working group. At the same time, the NEFMC is concurrently working on amendment for the scallop FMP that considers the Alaska logical outgrowth model, as well as other mechanisms to quicken the development and implementation of allocations. The NRCC agreed that this issue is closed for now due to competing issues taking up staff time, and that the topic can be reconsidered after we see the outcome of Scallop Amendment 19.

There was a brief discussion about how GARFO has concerns over adapting the Alaska model to the scallop fishery due to how complicated and interactive the allocations are (i.e., individual allocations and access area rotational closure schedules). As a result, it is much harder for the public and the NEFMC to be aware of scope of measures that may be put forward. Mr. Pentony mentioned that staff is working on finding other ways to streamline the implementation of scallop specifications that would not involve changes to the FMP. Mr. Nies asked if this was a problem for other, more simplified specification-setting processes in other FMPs. General Counsel had been focused on the scallop fishery and did not feel that it could offer overarching advice on this subject without knowing the specifics of each fishery.

11. SAW Working Group Update

Dr. Weinberg presented a new draft of the SAW Working Group document, which had only minor changes since the last revision presented to the NRCC. Dr. Weinberg will give a presentation on this document at the upcoming Council meetings, but wanted to hand it out at this meeting as well.

12. Priority Setting Discussion

GARFO and NEFSC discussed the need to better prioritize staff workloads. It is difficult at Council meetings to make firm commitments to requests that come up at these meetings and Mr. Bullard and Dr. Karp stated that they will need more time to determine if they can handle these types of requests, and what will need to fall lower on the priority list to accommodate them. GARFO and NEFSC want to find a way to be more transparent so others understand how these priority shifts are made.

13. Meeting wrap-up

Fall NRCC 2015 meeting dates revised to be November 17-18 in Providence, RI. The NEFSC will be hosting.

ATTACHMENT 1

NRCC Spring Meeting 2014 Action Items

May 27-28, 2015 Georgetown Westin, Washington D.C.

Color code key:	
ASMFC	MAFMC
NEFMC	NEFSC
GARFO	NRCC

1. Discard Methodology Peer Review TORs

Lead: **NEFSC**

Appointees need from **GARFO** (APSD), **NEFSC**

Next step(s): Draft bycatch terms of reference

Distribute for input and review (Councils and SSCs)

Due date(s): June 15, 2015

2. Cod Stock Structure Working Group

Lead: **NEFSC**

Appointees needed from **NEFSC**, **DFO**

Next step(s): Bullard and Karp speak with DFO

NEFMC and NEFSC implement the three stage plan from A Proposed Process for the Evaluation of the Stock Structure of Atlantic Cod in NAFO Divisions 4X, 5YZ, and 6ABCD

Due date(s):

3. MSA Section 313 Working Group

Lead: **MAFMC**

Appointees needed from **MAFMC**, **NEFMC**, **ASMFC**

Next step(s): Prepare for CCC meeting

Due date(s): June 2015

4. Catch limit specifications process issues resulting from AK process

Lead: **GARFO**

Completed

5. Operational Assessment Parameters Letter

Lead: **NEFSC**

Next step(s): Draft letter from *NRCC* or from *Karp to NRCC*

Distribute to NEFMC SSC for review

Due date(s): June 5, 2015

6. Implementation of SAFE Report Process

Lead: **GARFO**

Next step(s): Develop implementation plan

Due date(s): Fall 2015 NRCC meeting

Fall 2015 NRCC (**NEFSC host**) – November 17-18, 2015, Providence, RI

Spring 2016 NRCC (**NEFMC host**) – May 10-11, 2016

ATTACHMENT 2

Guidance on Admissible Changes for Operational Assessment

NRCC

Washington DC

May 28, 2015

Basis for Admissible change

Departure from Benchmark model configuration
Magnitude of impact in terms of scale/ status determination
Contrast **new vs updated** measures
Experimental evidence vs anecdotal
Management considerations
Congressional intervention

+++++

Measures of Trend

Survey indices **NOT OK**
LPUE **NOT OK**

Measures of scale

New or revised measure of Catchability **NOT OK**
Discard mortality **OK**
Recalibrated catch estimates **NOT OK**

Bases for Reference Points

Change values but not change basis of reference points (eg SR function) **OK**
Updated priors on steepness etc. **NOT OK**
Regime Change (eg truncated time series of S-R, use of environ data as predictors) **NOT OK**

Changes in Model configuration/identification

Changes in stanzas for selectivity **NOT OK**
Changes in selectivity function **NOT OK**
Differential weighting of likelihood components **NOT OK**
Introduction of retrospective adjustment for terminal B, F **OK**
Down-weighting of information (eg year classes) **NOT OK**
Splitting survey **NOT OK**
New models **NOT OK**

Biological Information

Natural mortality **NOT OK**
Growth **OK**
Maturation **OK**

Projection Inputs

Open for further discussion