

# Scientific and Statistical Committee

## Overview of roles and responsibilities

Updated December 2025

# Overview

- NEFMC jurisdiction
- SSC tasks and policies
- Steps in catch setting (assessment to implementation), where SSC fits in
- Magnuson-Stevens Act provisions and NOAA policy guidance for SSCs
- Council's *Harassment Policy*
- Renumeration and travel reimbursement

Details on SSC roles and responsibilities are included in the Council's [\*Operations Handbook\*](#).

# Typical SSC tasks

- Recommend overfishing limits and acceptable biological catches (ABC) for NEFMC-managed stocks.
- Review analyses by plan development teams and contractors to support a Council action. Recent examples:
  - Methods for calculating the monkfish discards deduction from the annual catch limit.
  - Comment on revising the groundfish ABC control rule.
  - Review a management strategy evaluation for potential use by the Council.
- Review the *State of the Ecosystem Report – New England*.
- Comment on the Council's list of *Research Priority and Data Needs*.
- Individuals serve on peer review panels for stock assessments.
- SSC Chair and Vice-Chair serve on the Scientific Coordination Subcommittee of the Council Coordination Committee.
- SSC Chair attends Northeast Regional Coordinating Council meetings, sits on Assessment Oversight Panel, reports SSC recommendations to the Council.

# NEFMC SSC policies

- **Membership and Term Limits:** at least 17 members (9 fisheries stock assessment expertise, 4 fisheries ecology, 4 social science). Serve three consecutive 3-year terms; membership can be extended annually after that.
- **SSC Recommendations:** Quorum (50%) necessary for ABC recommendations. Strive for consensus building; minority reports possible. Only matters of process shall be voted on (e.g., recommending a Chair).
- **Conflict of Interest:** SSC expected to be objective and avoid COIs.
  - Must complete financial interest disclosure form annually and after a relevant employment change.
  - Recusal if SSC member is an author of work being considered. SSC member can participate in (but not lead) the review of work by an individual under their line of supervision.
  - SSC members can compete for Council contracts.

# NEFMC's ABC Remand Policy (see *Operations Handbook*)

- **Remand:** Council may remand an SSC's ABC recommendation back to the SSC based on specific criteria:
  - (a) failure to follow the SSC's terms of reference;
  - (b) an error in the materials provided to the SSC;
  - (c) an error in the calculations;
  - (d) failure of the SSC to follow standard operating procedures

# Magnuson-Stevens Act, National Standard Guidelines

- MSA: SSCs to provide scientific advice on: ABC, preventing overfishing, maximum sustainable yield, achieving rebuilding targets, stock status and health, bycatch, habitat status, social and economic impacts of management measures, sustainability of fishing practices, etc.

*Standard 1. Conservation and management measures shall prevent overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield (OY) from each fishery for the U.S. fishing industry.*

## **NS1 Guidelines (selected points):**

- Incorporate scientific and management uncertainty in control rules and in adaptive management using annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs).
- ACLs recommended by the Council may not exceed the fishing level recommendations of the SSC (ABC).



# Magnuson-Stevens Act, National Standard Guidelines

## NS1 Guidelines (selected points):

- ABC is level of annual catch based on an ABC control rule that accounts for scientific uncertainty in the estimate of OFL, any other scientific uncertainty, and the Council's risk policy.
- “Phase-in” and “carry-over” ABC control rules are permitted but must be articulated in the FMP and cannot lead to overfishing.
- SSC may recommend an ABC that differs from the ABC control rule calculation based on factors such as data uncertainty, recruitment variability, declining trends, and other factors, but must provide an explanation for the deviation.
- For overfished stocks, ABC must be set to reflect the annual catch that is consistent with the schedule of fishing mortality rates ( $F_{\text{rebuild}}$ ) in the plan.

# National Standard 2 - scientific information

*Standard 2. Conservation and management measures shall be based upon the best scientific information available.*

- BSIA components: Relevance, inclusiveness, objectivity, transparency, timeliness, verification and validation, and peer review, as appropriate.
- Assessment peer review process established by the Secretary and each Council. Work in conjunction with SSC, not a substitute.
- SSC should attempt to resolve any conflicting scientific information – debate and evaluation of science is the role of the SSC, not the Council.
- SSC members may participate in a peer review, and that should not impair the ability of that member to fulfill SSC responsibilities.



# NOAA Procedural Directive on BSIA (2019)

- Stock status determinations and catch limits must be consistent with BSIA.
- It is the Agency's responsibility to certify BSIA is used, but it relies on input from SSC and peer review process.
- Directive describes stock assessment and peer review standards, how the SSC uses that information, and how NOAA makes final stock status determinations.
- SSCs “should not repeat the previously conducted and detailed technical peer review;” rather it should sufficiently understand the assessment and its uncertainties before making recommendations.
- If the SSC disagrees with the findings of a peer review, the SSC must prepare a report outlining the areas of disagreement and rationale.

# NOAA Procedural Guidance on Known to Unknown Stock Status (2020)

- Describes scenarios when stock status (overfishing/overfished) may change from “known” to “unknown.”
  1. Change in management units
  2. Aging stock assessment
  3. Stock assessment insufficient to support a status recommendation
  4. Stock assessment deviates from status determination criteria specified in FMP
- Recommends approaches for addressing new status.

Policy can help guide SSCs in making recommendations on whether stock status should change.

# Renumeration

- Except for Federal and State employees, SSC members are eligible for renumeration for attending authorized meetings (considered taxable income).
- Contracts: stock assessment reviews, SSC subpanel reviews, ad-hoc reviews and other with specific TORs and report requirements.
- Stipends: routine SSC meetings; specific Committee, PDT, or other meetings authorized by ED; SSC Chair (or designee) attending a meeting as the SSC representative.
- Statement of Financial Interest (SOFI)
  - SSC members not employed by a State or Federal agency must complete a SOFI before January 31 each year.
  - Without a current SOFI, cannot participate in SSC meetings or receive renumeration.
  - Update any time your employment changes.
- Except for Federal employees, SSC members are reimbursed for travel expenses incurred while attending authorized meetings (e.g., mileage, hotel, per diem).

# Travel

- Mileage reimbursed from primary residence.
- To qualify for overnight lodging, your travel distance must be over 50 miles or you are required to be available before 6 a.m. or after 8 p.m.
- Travel Reimbursement Voucher (TA)
  - Meeting-specific voucher e-mailed to you by Woneta Cloutier.
  - Must be submitted within 6 weeks; late vouchers will only be paid at the discretion of the ED.
  - Expense reimbursements are not taxable income.
- Additional guidance in *Operations Handbook*.
- Questions on travel? Contact us before travel takes place.