



New England Fishery Management Council

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To: Tom Nies, Executive Director
From: Scientific and Statistical Committee
Date: April 21, 2014

Subject: NOAA's proposed stock assessment prioritization process

The SSC was briefed on NOAA's proposed process for prioritizing and scheduling stock assessments. At the request of the Executive Director, the SSC offers the following comments:

1. The proposed process might be overly formalized, and perhaps even naïve, given the complexity of factors that determine when different assessment should take place. Flexibility and professional judgment of scientist leaders and fishery managers are always likely to be important and necessary.
2. Despite the preceding concern, one advantage of a more formalized process could be to provide a more clear rationale for scheduling decisions, and therefore counteract the often unproductive influence of politics on scientific process.
3. Specification cycles, regulatory deadlines and other management timelines are likely to remain overriding factors in determining which stocks are assessed each year.
4. Discussions by the SSC and in other venues have emphasized the need to incorporate new information in a timelier manner, to the point of including new catch and survey data into catch advice on an annual basis in some cases. Yet, the proposed process aims for multi-year assessment timelines in many cases. These seem to be at odds, a disconnect that needs to be reconciled.
5. Investments of ship time, funding and other resources by fishermen should see a return in the form of more frequent assessments of those stocks, and this should be considered in prioritizing and scheduling.
6. The differences in time and resources required for benchmark versus update assessments, or the research track versus operational assessments under the new system, will be an important determinant of how many stocks can be assessed.
7. Similarly, the cost-effectiveness of different analytical approaches, i.e., relative complexity or data-intensiveness, can also determine how many stocks can be assessed per year.
8. However assessments are prioritized and schedule, it will always be important to manage unrealistic expectations about the number of assessments that can be produced per year.