

New England Fishery Management Council
Scientific and Statistical Committee
Meeting Summary
 December 13, 2011

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The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) met in Boston, MA to discuss / make recommendations concerning the following agenda items. Present from the SSC were Dr. Annala, Dr. Cadrin, Dr. Chen, Mr. Correia, Dr. Georgianna, Dr. Sharov, Dr. Sissenwine, Dr. St. Martin, Dr. Sullivan, Dr. Thunberg and Dr. Legault. Council members who attended were Mr. Avila, Ms. Tooley, Mr. Dempsey, Mr. Kendall, Mr. Libby, Mr. Cunningham and Mr. Preble. Staff members present were Mr. Kellogg, Ms. Fiorelli and Mr. Nies. Dr. Rago served as the liaison from the NOAA\NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center.

Reports on 2011 National SSC Workshop

The SSC heard reports on the ecosystems based management discussions at the 2011 National SSC Workshop from Mike Fogarty and on the discussions of social sciences issues from Dan Georgianna and Eric Thunberg. One of the issues raised during the report on the ecosystems based management discussion was the need for National Standard 1 guideline revisions to allow more flexibility for the management of individual stocks. Otherwise it will not be possible to achieve some of the important benefits from simplifying fisheries management under an ecosystems based approach. The SSC discussion of the reports on social science issues focused on the topics of including social science considerations in a risk policy for setting ABCs, social science TORs for SSCs, and communications among SSC social scientists. Some of the comments made by SSC members who attended the workshop were that the social scientists were not able to reach as many conclusions as were those in the EBFM discussions. Some of the points of agreement were that social scientists on SSCs have had a wide range of different experiences; rarely were there social science TORs for SSC meetings; the importance of analyzing the opportunity costs of setting ABCs at various levels was not universally agreed although most social scientists seemed to support the idea; and there is a need to augment social science expertise on SSCs. Some NEFMC SSC members were disappointed that there was not a consensus for including social science in setting ABCs explaining that the OFLs should be based in biology but the ABC buffers should include social science considerations.

At the end of the reports the SSC agreed to ask the Executive Committee for the Council to host a national SSC workshop in 2012 or 2013; however, the committee agreed that an SSC workshop should focus on SSC issues and problems and not become just another scientific workshop. Possible topics suggested were spatial modeling and planning or National Standard 1.

Including social science information in advice to the Council

The committee discussed how social science information might be included in advice to the Council.

- 1) Social scientists on the SSC recommended that the SSC should not review all social science analyses in every Council action but thought that such analyses for actions with significant social or economic impacts merit some review by the SSC.
- 2) The committee agreed that an appropriate place to consider social science information, as noted in the 2011 National SSC Workshop discussions, would be in the development of a risk policy to help guide the Council in setting ABCs. The Committee also agreed that it might help the Council move forward on the development of an ABC risk policy by adopting the same approach the SSC used to provide the advice on ecosystems based fisheries management. As a result, it recommended the following steps:
 - Create a workgroup of SSC, Council and staff members

- Communicate/involve the MAFMC SSC and staff as appropriate
 - Organize a workshop
 - Prepare a whitepaper on this subject for the Council
- 3) The committee also discussed how industry or advisory input might help the SSC understand factors not captured by assessments or projections when the SSC develops ABC recommendations. At least one SSC member commented that understanding major changes in the fishery and for example, whether the lack of market demand might constrain catch could be an important factor in making ABC recommendations. The committee discussed the industry reports used by the MAFMC. Mr. Cunningham suggested that the committee could work on refining the process already in place of getting information through the PDT. The Committee did not reach any decisions but expressed interest in having the staff suggest an FMP as a candidate for developing this type of information for the ABC setting process.

Transition to new stock assessment process

Dr. Rago made a presentation on the new stock assessment process developed under a Northeast Regional Coordinating Council initiative. The process calls for decoupling routine or operational assessments from the benchmark or “research” assessment process. Operational assessments would have limited terms of reference so more of them could be done routinely. Their frequency would be determined primarily by management needs such as management adjustment cycles and some biological factors such as how stable the exploitable biomass might be. Research assessments would be done on an as needed basis, for example, when operational assessments do not perform adequately or when improved models or different type of information might be available. Dr. Rago also explained according to current plans, the last SAW/SARC that would include research track assessments would be SAW/SARC 57 (at the end of 2013).

Several SSC members commented that the new approach would be necessary to meet the demands for more operational assessments to adjust ACLs; however, they had questions about how much an operational assessment could be modified before it became a research track assessment, whether an ecosystems approach would be more efficient, the difficulty of transitioning from the current process to the new one and possibly from the new process to an ecosystems based assessments in the future. They also had questions about whether stocks would automatically be scheduled for a research track assessment after a certain number of years, who might make this decision and whether it would be a technical group or the NRCC or similar group.

SSC 2012 calendar and planning

Chris Kellogg reported on 2012 Council priorities and stated that the committee would be asked to recommend ABCs for the twelve groundfish stocks after the assessment reports are available. (This would be after mid- March). He noted that other tasks that would determine the schedule of SSC meetings were the development of an ABC recommendations for herring in early August and ABC recommendations for scallops in September. There would be additional groundfish issues for the SSC to address in September including developing ABC recommendations for SNE yellowtail flounder following the SAW/SARC 54 benchmark assessment this summer and possibly other issues related to the assessment updates or the TRAC process. Other anticipated meetings would be one to follow-up on the Jan. 25 SSC meeting originally scheduled to develop ABC recommendations for GOM cod, but it was unclear when that meeting might be scheduled, a meeting for other issues identified by the Council such as addressing the cod discard mortality issue and a joint SSC/Council workshop on risk policy, should the Executive Committee support one.

SSC outreach and communications

The committee discussed a number of suggestions for improving SSC outreach and communications with the Council and public developed by a subcommittee that included Patrick Sullivan, Steve Cadrin, Steve Correia, Chris Kellogg, Chris Legault, Daniel Georgianna and Pat Fiorelli. Dan Georgianna and Pat Fiorelli reported on the discussion of the subcommittee and which considered the following suggestions:

1. Holding SSC meetings in concert with Council meetings. *Not recommended* because of the time necessary to prepare well-thought out meeting summaries that committee must read and agree to.
2. After introductions, and in addition to taking public comment during the meeting, invite audience members to comment at the outset of the meeting. *No specific recommendation* was provided, but this would be up to the chairman.
3. Repackage SSC reports and include “10 things you should know about SSC decisions.” Write the reports in layman’s terms and include the rationale for SSC decisions, not only the decisions themselves. *Not recommended at present*. “Ten things you should know about SSC decisions” was considered a good idea,” but was left for future development.
4. Hold a joint Council/SSC meeting annually. The meeting might include an informal review of the SSC’s performance and identification of Council expectations or issues to address in the future. Also it could include a social hour. *Strongly recommended*. (The Council also formally supported the idea of a “super meeting with SSC and Advisory Panels). Agenda would require careful thought but should be developed to address the issues that these groups share with the Council.
5. Field trip or two to visit fishermen, processing plants, a fish auction, etc. *Maybe, if time allows*.
6. Hold meetings with industry before SSC meetings, including using Council advisory panels in a manner similar to the MAFMC. *The Social Sciences subcommittee will report to the full committee on how to get industry input to SSC decisions*.
7. Provide a list of acronyms at SSC meetings to allow a better understanding of the discussion for the audience. *Recommended*.
8. PDTs might provide the SSC a “roadmap” (background information” similar to that provided to the SAMFC SSC. *Recommended, but the full SSC should discuss further*.
9. Ask the Council Chair and the chairman of the committee with issues under SSC consideration to sit at the table during SSC meetings. *Recommended*.

The full committee agreed with the recommendations for holding at least one joint meeting with the Council annually to address special topics, that the list of acronyms should be provided at SSC meetings and to ask the Council Chair and the chairman of the committee with issues under SSC consideration to sit at the table during SSC meetings.

Timing of research recommendations

Chris Kellogg reported that the SSC and the Council had previously developed five-year research recommendations in November 2010 for consideration by NOAA/NMFS; however, NOAA/NMFS had not yet published its recommendations. He also reported (based on personal communication) that NOAA/NMFS would update the recommendations in the third year of the five-year period. The committee decided to wait until NOAA/NMFS considers updating its recommendations before making any changes to its November 2010 SSC recommendations. (Note that these do not include recommendations that might be made in response to individual stock assessments that take place in the interim period).

