



## New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116  
 John Pappalardo, *Chairman* | Paul J. Howard, *Executive Director*

### Research Steering Committee March 4, 2009 Westin Hotel, Waltham, MA DRAFT Meeting Summary

The Research Steering Committee (RSC), chaired by Council member David Goethel, met on March 4, 2009 at the Westin Hotel in Waltham, MA. Other committee members at the meeting included David Preble, fishermen Richard Taylor and Curt Rice, Gib Brogan of *Oceana*, Michael Pol of the MA Division of Marine Fisheries, Dr. John Hoey of the National Marine Fisheries Service's Cooperative Research Program (CRP) and Dr. Fred Serchuk from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC). CRP staff member Dr. Earl Meredith also was present along with New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) staff member Patricia Fiorelli.

The audience included Paul Perra from the National Marine Fisheries Service Regional Office (NMFS/RO), Sarah Pike from the NEFSC, Rachel Gallant Feeney from the Northeast Consortium, Dr. Steve Cadrin from the UMASS CMER Program, Cape Cod MA gear technologist Ron Smolowitz and Olivia Free from the Mass Fishermen's Partnership. New England fishermen included Ted Platz from Rhode Island, Bob Johnson from CT and Tim Malley from MA.

#### **Overview of Agenda**

Before undertaking discussions about strategic planning, the RSC discussed a list of cooperative research projects that have not yet been reviewed by the committee, but which have received a technical review by the Northeast Consortium or NMFS for CRP-funded projects.

With respect to the region's cooperative research efforts, collaborations have been undertaken in various forms throughout New England for over 10 years. RSC members discussed their views on the direction and future of cooperative research. The committee's half-day session was followed by a stakeholder meeting, convened by the National Marine Fisheries Service and facilitated by Gulf of Maine Research staff, to assist the agency in identifying potential research priorities for the next three to five years.

#### **Discussion of Management Reviews for Final Research Projects**

In reviewing a list of 15 final projects that have received technical reviews and were subsequently forwarded by the CRP or the Northeast Consortium to the Council and RSC, the committee identified inconsistencies in the quality of the technical review process. Some reports have received very thorough reviews while others have been brief and incomplete. In the case of the latter, the RSC has filled the gap and undertaken their own technical reviews within the confines of the expertise on the committee.

As background to the RSC discussion, the NEFMC's Research Review Policy calls for cooperative research projects to be evaluated by the RSC prior to the Council's use of the results in decision-making. As further discussed by committee and audience members, for projects funded

through the Scallop Research Set-Aside Program, this has rarely been the case, while other projects have undergone extensive reviews at RSC meetings.

The inconsistency was attributed to the need, in particular with scallop survey projects, to move information to managers as quickly as possible for use in the scallop rotational area management program planning. In these cases, either the Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) has served as the review body, or alternatively, a subset of the PDT, augmented by the principal investigators and NEFSC staff, has formed ad hoc working groups to validate survey results prior to their use by the Council.

It also was noted that the Research Review Policy contains a provision that allows for projects to be reviewed by the Council's PDTs and/or other processes such as the Stock Assessment Workshops/Stock Assessment Review Committees. Given the comments made during the discussion, the committee acknowledged, but was not specific about the need for an alternative and more consistent policy and/or process to review final reports.

A model was suggested in which the committee could be better informed about the current status of research by inviting Council or NMFS staff, and/or principal investigators, to present an overview of the specific areas of research. The scallop example was used in which the committee could annually discuss the major areas of cooperative investigation --- surveys and assessments, habitat, fish bycatch and sea turtles --- to promote a more holistic view and general understanding of the most important or emerging research issues. It was suggested that such an approach might allow the RSC to more effectively address its "steering" role. The same approach could be used to review the several social and economic projects that are now available for RSC review. The committee's review could be enhanced by a briefing on what constitutes social science, again to provide context and perspective on the projects that have been funded in the Northeast.

It was also suggested that the RSC could support policy issues that affect research (i.e. a proposal to increase in the scallop research set-aside from two percent to three percent, with one percent to be used for resource surveys).

#### **RSC Views of Cooperative Research**

*The RSC explored a number of subjects under the broader topic of what has been accomplished over the last 10 years of cooperative research and what should occur during the next three-five years.* Issues identified included specific areas of research as well as potential changes that may affect the nature of the collaborations that have already occurred. The following issues were discussed.

- Ecosystem-based fisheries management should be explored in the context of cooperative research, given the level of buy-in that has already been expressed by the fishing community. Efforts also should be placed on supporting the evolution of the output-based controls in the region.
- Gear solutions should continue to be a high priority because of the need to address issues related to bycatch, selectivity and habitat impacts.
- The wider use of sectors could affect cooperative research by decentralizing decision-making and potentially generating new or different priorities as discrete communities develop and operate under quota-based systems.
- Individual researchers could play a larger role as ambassadors to the fishing community by "selling" or otherwise promoting successful gear solutions.

- Significant resources should be placed on the issue of how to make cooperative research a self-sustaining program in the future.
- While a great deal has been accomplished to date with short-and long-term projects, the RSC and Council may want to generate a “big picture” scenario, a vision that addresses the overarching policy issues, followed by the development of research needs. The ideal would encompass a region-wide approach that goes beyond specific agencies and institutions.
- A two-way educational dialogue needs to occur between industry and management to address issues that are difficult to anticipate as major changes in management are adopted. Equally important is to ask industry what it wants to look like. The alternative is that basic economic and social changes to the fishery will evolve without the active participation of fishermen as drivers of the outcome.
- Specific suggestions about projects included the inclusion of more small-scale pilot projects for relatively less money than has previously been spent; narrowing the goals and objectives of larger projects and using fishermen to more effectively “shop” successful ideas to their peers.

***Based on the above comments, the RSC Chairman also asked members to identify the mechanism that should be used to promote and fund cooperative research in the future.*** Suggestions ranged from the development of public-private partnerships to seeking a line item in the federal budget. Other suggestions included the development of additional research set-aside programs to support the continuance of successful cooperative research efforts over the long-term, largely because of the close link it provides between the management process and fishermen. A much better dialogue with the fishing industry could help in this respect as funds are scaled back and the most critical research needs are indentified. Promotion of these types of approaches could help address, or perhaps minimize, the still persistent mistrust of government-generated science that exists in the region.

Others discussed the adoption of a more open and transparent Request for Proposal process that more effectively includes fishermen who have made the effort to participate in cooperative research. There also was a general push for greater transparency in cooperative research overall. A more dynamic model for the program also was suggested, one that is self-correcting and an integral part of the management process, and that is able to respond more rapidly than the current program to address research questions.

Some members advocated more support for better social and economic research as well as programs that might allow for the survival of coastal communities. Many others stressed the need to strengthen the linkages between research and management. Networking to maximize outcomes within and outside of “the system” was discussed. It was noted that there are many successful examples of such collaborations that could be used as a model to build this type of partnership.

While all members agreed that there were many successful examples of cooperative research over the last several years, both small and large scale, there was general agreement that no single model was ideal in answering research questions, promoting collaborations and providing meaningful information to managers. The committee also agreed that it may or may not be possible to widen the circle of both scientists and researchers that have an interest in participating in cooperative research, but it is possible to capitalize on the successes of such programs in indirect ways --- through education and outreach --- that make such efforts a highly desirable.