

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
FUTURE COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA AND WORKLOAD PLANNING

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed the 2015 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-152 “Prioritizing Fish Stock Assessments” along with a presentation by the document’s editor Richard D. Methot, NOAA Senior Scientist for Stock Assessments.

The prioritization system was developed to guide regional planning decisions for upcoming stock assessment cycles; it will be implemented regionally through joint efforts by NMFS and the Councils. It provides a quantitative approach to ranking the need for each stock to be assessed, to inform the Council harvest specification process. The system relies both on quantitative data and subjective scores for each stock, some of which are already available in national/regional databases (e.g., years since last assessment), and regional expertise from scientists, managers, and advisors. NOAA Leadership, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Government Accountability Office support this system as an appropriate approach to schedule regional stock assessments. According to Dr. Methot, NOAA Fisheries has identified the 2017 Pacific Coast Groundfish stock assessment process as an “ideal candidate for the first implementation of the system.” He would like to present this approach to the Council at the upcoming November 2015 meeting.

The SSC sees both merit and challenges in the proposed assessment prioritization system. It uses a transparent process that should result in a comprehensive plan for assessing the Council’s stocks while balancing diverse management objectives. The SSC notes that the Council currently has no formal committee responsible for scheduling stock assessments. The Council will need to develop working groups for assembling the technical data that will inform the prioritization process. The system relies on assigning relative weights to the different prioritization factors. Deciding on these subjective weights is a substantial exercise and will require the commitment of time and resources. Nonetheless, the SSC recommends that the Council consider Dr. Methot’s proposed system at the November Council meeting.