

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) WHITE PAPER ON
BEST SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION AVAILABLE (BSIA)

Dr. Patrick Lynch (National Marine Fisheries Service, NMFS) briefed the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on a draft of the white paper “Framework for Determining that Fishery Management Decisions are Based on the Best Scientific Information Available” ([Agenda Item C.6, Attachment 1, June 2017](#)). There was little written material provided for this agenda item, so SSC discussion was based on the presentation by Dr. Lynch. The SSC understands that the framework presented is meant to document the general process for determining best scientific information available (BSIA), with the intention that each Council will document their own processes. Thus, the SSC’s comments are based on this framework being non-prescriptive and adaptable to the extent allowed under the applicable laws.

The SSC notes two major differences in the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) process relative to the proposed general framework. First, in many cases the peer review process for stock assessments is not complete without SSC sign-off, and thus is not as distinct as portrayed in the proposed framework. The current review process of the SSC is well organized and provides advice to the Council about BSIA, as directed by National Standard 2 (NS2) guidelines. The SSC recommends that NMFS consider the PFMC’s SSC conclusions on BSIA before making a determination of their own, as SSC review is an integral part of the peer review process. Second, in the PFMC process the SSC does not specify an acceptable biological catch (ABC), except for salmon. Instead, for most species the SSC makes the determination of scientific uncertainty (sigma) and endorses an overfishing limit (OFL), while the Council makes a policy decision on risk tolerance by selecting an overfishing probability (P^*) value. The OFL, sigma, and P^* are then used together to calculate an ABC.

The SSC suggests that the proposed framework clarify that the requirement for BSIA applies to all stock assessments used for the Council process, not just stock assessments performed by NMFS as implied in the slide presentation. The SSC is concerned that there is not an established protocol to resolve a disagreement between NMFS and the SSC on a determination of BSIA, although this issue is simply highlighted by the proposed framework and is not a new concern. The SSC also notes that for some Council-managed fisheries, such as salmon and Highly Migratory Species, the process may depart more substantially from the framework than the process for groundfish and coastal pelagic species.

PFMC
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