

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
PRELIMINARY WEST COAST REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR DETERMINING THE
BEST SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION AVAILABLE

The Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) and the National Standard 2 guidelines interpreting the MSA require Regional Fishery Management Councils (RFMCs) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to base decisions on the best scientific information available (BSIA), and a recent procedural directive called for each region to document their process for determining BSIA. The focus of this process is on the current BSIA process for catch specifications and status determinations.

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) provided feedback on a proposed Regional BSIA Framework in March and June 2021. The SSC received an update presentation on Developing a Regional BSIA Framework from Ms. Sarah Shoffler (Southwest Fisheries Science Center) and Dr. Jim Hastie (Northwest Fisheries Science Center). This included how NMFS has addressed issues previously raised by the SSC. Overall, the presentation and documents provided describe the existing BSIA process for annual catch specifications and status determinations well.

The SSC had requested more detail on the proposed approach to an arbitration process in the case of disagreements between the SSC and Science Centers. Documentation of this process now describes what the Science Centers will do in such cases, and at the SSC's request, NMFS has added the National Standard 2 criteria for BSIA to the framework.

Questions were previously raised by the SSC regarding the review and updating of the reference points used in salmon status determinations and about the process for initiating reviews of the processes and models providing inputs to annual salmon management, such as the forecasts used to inform catch specifications. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries has yet to fully resolve these matters and will continue collaborative efforts to better document processes as the framework is refined leading up to the March/April Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) meetings.

The process for designating a NMFS BSIA Point of Contact with the SSC for each Fisheries Management Plan has now been documented in the framework.

The SSC had identified differences between Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) and Groundfish in the review and harvest specifications processes. These are now presented separately for CPS and Groundfish in the framework.

The SSC thanks NMFS for addressing its comments on the framework from the March and June 2021 meetings. The SSC notes that the development of the BSIA Framework is continuing with a final version to be considered by the PFMC in March or April 2022. The SSC asks that NMFS:

- Provide fuller documentation of the stock status determination process for CPS.
- Be consistent and clear in documenting the role of the SSC in the stock status determination process for each of the FMPs. The SSC notes that no role is described for the SSC or Council

in status determinations for CPS or groundfish and suggests that the final draft framework should add roles or describe why no roles are assigned.

- In the arbitration process documentation, clarify the definition of science providers and be specific about the role of the SSC versus other “science providers.”

PFMC

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