

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON  
FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN INITIATIVE WORKPLAN

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) received a briefing by Drs. Kit Dahl (Pacific Fishery Management Council [Council] staff) and Tommy Moore (Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission) on the workplan to advance the new Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) initiative Ecosystem and Climate Information for Fishery Management, as presented in [Agenda Item H.2.a, EWG Report 1](#). The SSC appreciates the work of the Ecosystem Work Group (EWG) to advance the new FEP initiative and supports the proposed timeline outlined in the report.

The SSC discussed the risk table approach proposed by the EWG and currently used by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). Risk tables could be used by the Council to inform decisions on harvest specification and provide supporting information in decisions to set P\* and annual catch limits (ACLs). Risk tables or similar tools could also be used to inform the scientific uncertainty buffer selected by the SSC, as is the approach adopted by NPFMC. The current SSC approach for groundfish and coastal pelagic species using category designations incorporates aspects of assessment and population uncertainty but does not allow for climate or ecosystem uncertainty to be incorporated. The SSC is interested in further discussions on potential applications of these types of approaches, noting the importance that information in risk tables should allow for both increased and decreased buffers and not be unidirectional in their application. The SSC recommends that stock assessment authors be included in risk table development and that climate and ecosystem information be brought into the process as early as possible.

The stock assessment prioritization process is another avenue that could be expanded to incorporate more climate and ecosystem information. Also, the strong recent cohort of sablefish suggested by this year's CCIEA Report ([Agenda Item H.1.a, CCIEA Report 1](#)) indicates the potential need for pathways to bring environmental information into management outside of the assessment prioritization or review process. This may be particularly important for other species that are not frequently assessed.

The SSC supports the EWG recommendation to focus on groundfish and its choice of petrale sole as a demonstration species, given the timing of the groundfish harvest specifications cycle, the scheduled petrale sole assessment, and recent research on environmental drivers of recruitment. There may be value in piloting more than one species, to the extent workload considerations allow. The SSC discussed several other potential species for consideration and recommends the EWG consider species with a range of life histories and with differing amounts and qualities of available information. Recent presentations on ecosystem considerations for Pacific hake by the Joint Technical Committee of the Pacific Whiting Treaty revealed the utility of climate and ecosystem research in providing contextual information and corroborating evidence for the stock assessment in years when recruitment is estimated to be highly variable and uncertain. Formalizing that information into a risk table for Pacific hake could be another demonstration species for the FEP initiative. The SSC also discussed the potential to focus on coastal pelagic species and salmon, noting that further work may be needed to understand how risk tables could be applied in those cases.

The SSC also discussed the potential use of Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profiles (ESPs) as a stepping stone between ecosystem status reports and more actionable tools like risk tables. ESPs may be particularly valuable for gathering relevant information for species or groups of species where that information has not yet been compiled. For petrale sole and other species where environmental linkages have already been identified, moving forward directly with risk table development is a reasonable approach.

The SSC recommends developing a framework for prioritizing the selection of species for focused climate and ecosystem work and supports the general criteria outlined in the EWG report. The availability of existing environmental information may also dictate which species can be brought into the process. Formalizing a process for choosing focal species would help ensure species are selected using pre-specified criteria rather than in an ad hoc manner.

The SSC is willing to review products from the FEP initiative (e.g., the risk table approach and any demonstration risk tables) this year in September or November and notes that a decision to forgo the SSC Ecosystem Subcommittee review of CCIEA topics this year would allow time for that review to occur.

PFMC  
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