

COUNCIL AND SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act states:

Each Council shall establish, maintain, and appoint the members of a scientific and statistical committee to assist it in the development, collection, evaluation, and peer review of such statistical, biological, economic, social, and other scientific information as is relevant to such Council's development and amendment of any fishery management plan.

Each scientific and statistical committee shall provide its Council ongoing scientific advice for fishery management decisions, including recommendations for acceptable biological catch, preventing overfishing, maximum sustainable yield, and achieving rebuilding targets, and reports on stock status and health, bycatch, habitat status, social and economic impacts of management measures, and sustainability of fishing practices.

In recent years, questions have arisen regarding certain aspects of the role the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) plays in several of the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council's) processes. These questions have resulted in ongoing dialog concerning roles and responsibilities between members of the SSC, Council staff, Advisory Panels, and Management Teams. The uncertainty regarding the type of SSC activities that are needed to support Council objectives also appear to have led to an expansion in the number of activities the SSC takes on. This has resulted in workload levels for some SSC subgroups that may not be sustainable over the long term, and this is occurring while the Science Center capacity to support Council processes (e.g. stock assessments, etc.) has declined.

This agenda item is an opportunity for the Council and the SSC to clarify roles and responsibilities, workload demands and expectations, and the type of support the SSC can provide to help support Council objectives. For purposes of effective discussion and management of this agenda item, the Council is encouraged to focus on processes related to salmon and groundfish management.

With regards to salmon processes, there appear to be two main points of focus for discussion. These two points include: 1) the salmon methodology review process, and 2) the season setting process. The salmon methodology review process has historically been designed as a collaborative process between the SSC and the Salmon Technical Team, however this has resulted in questions regarding the SSC's role when it comes to when and how the SSC determines a change in methodology to be best scientific information available. With regards to the season setting process, the nature of this process leaves little time and opportunity for SSC review and input as forecasts and analyses are developed and considered. This has led to frequent questions regarding the role of the SSC during the March/April season setting meetings.

With regards to groundfish, the Council is considering one of the basic foundations of sustainable fisheries management—how to define a stock. This issue is a combination of both science and policy, with science being needed to estimate population status and appropriate removals, while policy perspectives are brought forward when considering managed species, their associated management units, and the geographic management scales of those species that are in need of

conservation and management. Where the line between science and policy should be drawn on this matter is an issue of ongoing discussion.

The SSC has recently completed a stock assessment process that will feed into the Council’s 2025-2026 groundfish management biennium. Recent stock assessment processes have brought forth the use of data moderate assessments. While the Council’s stock assessment process has remained relatively stable over the course of many years (e.g. the use of Stock Assessment Review panels, etc.), data moderate assessments have posed new challenges. One rationale for the use of data moderate assessments is to maintain a pace and output of stock assessments to support management at a time when the capacity to do so is declining. However, the broader uncertainty associated with these assessments has indicated that the same – or more – levels of scientific review may be necessary for data moderate assessments to be utilized effectively in the Council process. Increasing workload for SSC members may not allow for more time to be spent on review processes, meaning different approaches to reviewing assessments may be necessary. This question is also related to the more detailed consideration of an initial stock assessment plan and Terms of Reference that will be taken up under Agenda Item F.3.

As time allows, the Council and SSC may choose to discuss other matters warranting clarification and discussion.

Reference Materials:

None

Agenda Order:

- E.1 Council and Scientific and Statistical Committee Discussion
 - a. Discussion

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