

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON COUNCIL OPERATIONS AND PRIORITIES

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussed issues related to Council operations and priorities raised in the Executive Director's Recommendations for Organizational and Process Refinements report (Agenda Item C.2 Attachment 1) and Council Staff Report on Agenda Topic Prioritization Methods (Agenda Item C.2 Attachment 2), as well the Pacific Council Staff Advisory Bodies Briefing held virtually May 21, 2024. The SSC has the following comments and recommendations relevant to this topic.

SSC meeting timing and location

In-person SSC meetings are generally preferred because they result in better and fuller exchange when evaluating models, methodologies, data constructs, or other topics that are complex and require extensive discussion. Holding SSC meetings remotely is feasible when the meeting has a short agenda and simpler topics. Remote meetings are now scheduled for once a year and this practice has worked to this point. The April meeting has been the preferred meeting to hold remotely and may continue to be if the SSC agenda for the April meeting remains similar in content and length. Remote SSC meetings could be held non-congruently with Council meetings within constraints of timing issues for the Briefing Book (BB). Consideration could be given to shifting BB deadlines and timing if the SSC meets in advance of the Council. If the BB schedule was earlier with respect to the Council meeting, the SSC could schedule its first day earlier than the day before the Council meeting starts. It is generally preferable to spread a remote meeting over two days rather than a single day, as it is difficult to participate effectively in remote meetings for a full day and to effectively craft and review statements in a single day.

Meeting ahead of the Council meeting rather than overlapping has advantages as it provides more time to review statements. It also avoids the need for SSC members to miss important discussions when they need to be on the Council floor to read a statement while the SSC is in session. Meeting ahead of the Council meeting also enables Council members and staff to attend SSC agenda items they have an interest in.

It can be challenging to prepare and review a statement the same day. The deadline for submitting a statement should be the following day or later.

Efficiencies during SSC meetings and reducing Subcommittee workload

There is a desire to reduce workload for some SSC Subcommittees, particularly the Groundfish Subcommittee, and this might be done by reducing the number of workshops related to improving stock assessments. One way to potentially reduce workload would be for some topics considered for workshops to be carried out independently by technical working groups and then reviewed by SSC Subcommittees. However, this may reduce the transparency in development of new methods and understanding and acceptance by stakeholders. SSC involvement in workshops can also identify problems that can be addressed during the workshop, avoiding the need for the technical working groups to redo work after it is reviewed, which may slow the process. Having SSC review of new methods prior to their use in assessments, rather than during stock assessment review (STAR) panels, is important to maintain incentives for assessment authors to innovate. Assessment

teams may be reluctant to adopt methods not yet reviewed by the SSC if doing so risks rejection of the assessment by a STAR panel. STAR panels also are time-limited relative to reviewing new methods.

The SSC discussed ways to make its workload planning more efficient by doing some workload planning in advance of the meeting either as a webinar or as an online process with input from Subcommittee chairs. The SSC needs guidance on whether holding a remote planning meeting of Subcommittee chairs in advance of the meeting for this purpose would require Federal noticing of the meeting.

SSC Membership and Term Limits

The SSC workload is increasing, and the SSC would be concerned if there were proposals to reduce its membership. A reduction in membership will reduce the Committee's ability to respond effectively to Council requests.

The SSC is concerned about proposals to limit the number of terms at-large members can serve. The tasks of the SSC include review and comment on items stretching across a number of years, which benefits from consistency in reviewer/scientist participation. It was also noted that these positions are generally held by those volunteering their expertise and time. Frequent changes in these positions may well result in lessening of applicant interest and willingness to volunteer. If the Council wishes to implement time limits on service for at-large SSC members, they should be implemented in a staggered manner to help maintain consistency in SSC activities.

Council Priorities and Process

The SSC has some concerns about the categorization of core and non-core activities in Agenda Item C.2 Attachment 2, including the exclusion of activities not directly related to fishery management plans (FMP). Some topics not related to specific FMPs such as ecosystem issues, environmental equity and justice, and other cross-cutting issues are important to meeting the Council's broader responsibilities but are not categorized as core activities in the staff report. It is also unclear why Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act (ESA) related issues are considered core activities.

There are some topics that may not require Council discussion, but would still benefit from review or discussion by the SSC. These include technical reviews of methods and data that may not require a Council agenda item and floor time. The summary of the SSC deliberations on these topics could be provided as informational reports to the Council.

When considering the need for ad hoc committees and work groups, the SSC notes that working groups are informal but valuable to Council work. For example, the Ecosystem Workgroup provides scientific coverage not possible otherwise, and it would be desirable to maintain it.

The SSC statement on Agenda Item F.3 Final Stock Assessment Plan and Terms of Reference notes that a holistic review of the groundfish assessment process, including the types of assessments done and the review process, may provide opportunities to reduce workload and enable the Council to meet target frequencies for assessments with available assessment staff capacity.

Holding meetings in difficult-to-travel-to locations imposes higher costs. Meeting locations not on major travel routes could result in higher travel costs and longer or less convenient travel times for

participants. This could place increased time demands on participants, which can have an impact on their other duties. If an SSC meeting is not concurrent with the Council, the SSC could potentially meet in a different location than the Council, which could reduce costs and travel time.

PFMC
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