

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON STOCK ASSESSMENT PROCESS REVIEW AND PROPOSED PROCESS REVISIONS

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) received an initial version of the Pacific Fishery Management Council Stock Assessment Review Process during March that was subsequently withdrawn. A revised report was presented at this meeting ([Agenda Item E.3 Attachment 1](#)). Thomas Remington (Lynker) provided an overview of the revised report and was available to answer questions.

The SSC was not requested to review the quality or the scientific rigor of the Lynker report. However, the SSC continues to have concerns about nonrepresentative sampling of interviewees from across the diverse groups impacted by Council actions, insufficient QA/QC, and a lack of transparency regarding analytical methods. The SSC consequently continues to lack confidence in the report and its conclusions.

The SSC focused its review on the Stock Assessment Review Action Table prepared by Council staff ([Agenda Item E.3 Attachment 2](#)), which maps actions from the Lynker report to the current PFMC process and identifies the workload that would be needed to implement them. Diana Perry (Council staff) gave a presentation and was available to answer questions. The SSC discussed the table provided in Attachment 2 and used member experiences in previous assessment cycles to help inform recommendations for process improvement.

Attachment 2 was useful in guiding discussion around areas of improvement in the stock assessment review process. Some of the recommended actions are already included in the assessment review process. Others are being evaluated as part of current or scheduled processes such as the review of the groundfish stock assessment Terms of Reference ([Agenda Item E.7. Attachment 1](#)). Others are not fully developed and will require further discussion.

The SSC identified the following high priority actions that may improve the assessment review process and some of the considerations related to implementing these actions.

Efficiency

- Employ the full continuum of stock assessment methods. Given capacity constraints and the large number of stocks in the Fishery Management Plan, identifying and employing index-based approaches, indicator methods, and other methods as alternatives to benchmark and update assessments should be prioritized.

- Limit redundant review steps by developing a technical referral protocol that standardizes when the SSC should re-review materials. The criteria that trigger additional reviews should be developed carefully. In particular, socioeconomic considerations such as changes in the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) alone should not trigger additional review, and criteria for when new data may trigger additional reviews should be explicitly outlined. Reducing redundancies should not limit the SSC's ability to reopen discussion when appropriate. Implementing multi-stage approaches to STAR Panel meetings may increase redundancy and may add scheduling challenges.

Communication

- Develop plain language descriptions of model uncertainty alongside the accepted technical terminology. This will require additional effort from Council staff. Existing materials such as those used to train new Council members at NMFS headquarters may be repurposed to transmit information on stock assessments and the review process to the public.
- Improve SSC communications to the Council on the justifications behind Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA) determinations in statements.
- Implement pre-assessment workshops for both benchmark and update assessments. Data workshops should aim to document data sources rather than attempting to illustrate the technical rationale behind model structure and assumptions.
- Extend the stock assessment document repository on the Council website to include additional products to improve transparency, including catch-only projections and final harvest specifications, which may be collated into dedicated sections.

Engagement

- Improve participant understanding about when and how public engagement can be maximized during the assessment process. All participants in the stock assessment process should identify and participate in engagement opportunities. The current process minimally includes opportunities for stakeholder engagement during stock assessment prioritization, pre-assessment workshops, stock assessment review meetings, and subsequent Council meetings that involve decision-making. Increased public awareness of existing engagement opportunities (e.g., MREP) may help resolve many of the concerns communicated in previous stock assessment cycles.
- Ensure that the advisory bodies make full use of their representatives in stock assessment reviews and work with analysts to identify specific types of public comment that can be incorporated when assessment models are developed.
- Identify efficient ways to incorporate feedback into the assessment review process. Addressing all feedback and questions received as public comment during assessment review meetings would be impractical. Not all feedback is actionable, and addressing questions meaningfully can require substantial work from assessment scientists. A framework for managing requests for revisions and additional model runs that are received

as public comment may help categorize feedback into immediately actionable versus future research goals.

- Provide opportunities for engagement with stakeholders through the proposed GAP appendix. The appendix can be used as a conduit to collate feedback and information from the industry and the public. Initiating that appendix early in the stock assessment cycle would provide assessment scientists with actionable information. Additionally, GAP representatives participate in STAR Panel meetings, which is a direct way to continue engagements through the science review stage.
- Create an opportunity for scheduled opportunities for engagement between the SSC and the GAP to help build cross-body understanding and connection. Timing these opportunities with the April and June Council meetings could promote engagement in the early stages of the assessment review process.
- Develop a process for co-production of knowledge and supplemental data. This is desirable but would require substantial efforts and future research to implement. For example, incorporating local ecological knowledge from a broad range of user groups into stock assessments would require training participants in data collection, developing analytical frameworks to use the data, and setting expectations on the effects that supplemental data would have on model outcomes.