

Guidelines for SSC Review of Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) documents June 2007

Federal fisheries managers strive to use the best available scientific and commercial data and analyses when making regulatory decisions. Scientific peer review is a useful process for ensuring the quality and integrity of scientific assessments that are used to determine biologically acceptable catch limits. By conducting a stock assessment review, the NPFMC SSC helps NMFS fulfill its stewardship mission to manage and conserve our Nation's living marine resources in a scientifically sound manner.

The purpose of the review is to assess the scientific validity of the stock assessment, including any assumptions, methods, results and conclusions. Specific aspects of the review will vary, but may include: quality of the data collected or used for the assessment, appropriateness of the analyses, validity of the results and conclusions, and appropriateness of the scope of the assessment (e.g., were all relevant data and information considered).

After reviewing the stock assessment document and receiving the respective report of the NPFMC plan team that also reviewed the stock assessment, the SSC shall make the final determination regarding the tier level of the assessment and will recommend ABC and OFL limits for groundfish or OFL limits for crab and scallops for each assessed stock or complex. Alternate (e.g., staircase) procedures may be recommended to arrive at ABC recommendations at the SSC's discretion. Such procedures have been used in the past as precautionary measures to avoid large fluctuations in ABC recommendations across years. In its report, SSC recommendations regarding future research priorities and direction will also be made.

Typically three SSC members will be assigned as the lead reviewers for each stock or stock complex. These lead reviewers will be members that are not directly responsible for the production of the stock assessment or directly supervising the person producing the assessment. The lead reviewers will lead the discussion on that particular assessment and will draft the portion of the SSC report dealing with that species. Recommendations may be made to the stock assessment author, plan team, or Council and the report shall clearly explain to whom the SSC's recommendations are directed.

The October SSC meeting is generally when detailed examination of any new stock assessment models for groundfish (benchmark assessments) occur. More scrutiny should be given at this stage to methods of model construction, fitting, and new data sources used. Additional workshops or reviews may be recommended to resolve any outstanding technical questions in a proposed new assessment prior to implementation. CIE (Center for Independent Experts) reviews are also conducted on a rotating or as-needed basis on stock assessments at the request of NMFS and the SSC will typically also receive a presentation on the findings of the CIE panel. The groundfish stock assessments are reviewed for setting ABC and OFLs at the December SSC meeting.

In general, with respect to peer review panels, the NPFMC SSC has adopted the May 12, 2003 Policy of the National Academies with respect to Committee composition and balance and conflicts of interest for committees used in the development of reports. (http://www.nationalacademies.org/coi/bi-coi_form-0.pdf)