

SEDAR Committee Summary
April 6, 2016
Kevin Anson, Chair

The agenda was modified and approved to include a discussion of the 2016 National Marine Fisheries Service report on regional stock assessments.

Staff reviewed the proceedings from recent SEDAR Steering Committee meetings. The Data Best Practices Workshop was summarized, and is expected to improve the timeliness of data coming into the Data Workshops, as well as efforts to standardize data synthesis practices. An Assessment Best Practices Workshop will be scheduled for a future date.

The stock assessment prioritization process provided by Dr. Rick Methot during the Fall 2015 Steering Committee was summarized by staff. The process would serve as one of many tools available to the Councils to use to determine which species to assess, and at what frequency. The process would require input from the cooperators and SSCs; however, SEDAR cooperators would not be required to use the process. The SEFSC plans to assist the Council with the metrics used to determine stock assessment priorities.

The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) is considering a new approach for conducting stock assessments in the southeast among the respective cooperators (Councils, Commissions, NMFS HMS). The SEFSC has proposed a two-part process, including a “research cycle” and an “operational assessment”. The research cycle would be similar to a benchmark assessment, in that it would lay the groundwork for future assessments of the same species. Data compilation and synthesis methods, modeling practices, and other facets of assessing the subject species would be developed during the research cycle; however, management advice would not be generated. The operational assessment process would function similar to the current standard and update methods of assessing species and the output would result management advice. SEFSC staff think that operational assessments would be conducted with increased frequency compared to the current assessment tracks employed by SEDAR.

Committee members asked about estimates for the number of assessments to expect from the new process. SEFSC staff acknowledged that it was not possible to accurately anticipate the number of possible assessments which could be completed in a given year, but added that the process is expected to constitute an improvement on throughput compared to the current benchmark/standard/update system used by SEDAR. The SEFSC will return with more information for the cooperators and the SSCs to consider and will provide a summary at the June Council meeting. Information provided to the Council will include possible timelines using the research cycle and operational assessment and comparisons of assessment output for species managed by the Gulf Council between the new proposed method and the current SEDAR process.

A portion of the 2016 National Marine Fisheries Service report on regional stock assessments was reviewed by the Committee. The selected portion of the report highlights the number of

assessments conducted in each of the regions served by the different NMFS fishery science centers. Committee members commented on the differences in the number of assessments being conducted in the southeast compared to other regions in the US, pointing out the low number of assessments being conducted in the southeast. SEFSC staff noted that the SEFSC serves seven cooperators (GMFMC, SAFMC, CFMC, GSFMC, ASMFC, NMFS HMS, ICCAT), and conducts many data-intensive assessments. Additional assessments may be able to be conducted; however, to do so would require sacrifices in transparency with the public. Committee members noted that the Florida FWC conducts some assessments for the Council, and queried the possibility of other such efforts in the Gulf. SEFSC staff replied that the chief bottleneck in the current stock assessment process is data compilation and synthesis, due to a combination of staffing and the number of datasets for each species. Further, since the SEFSC is the curator of a great deal of the data used in Gulf stock assessments, some manner of cooperation with the SEFSC by other lead analytical bodies would likely be necessary. Ultimately, so long as the SEDAR review process (or similar) were employed to peer-review the stock assessment, such efforts conducted by lead agencies or cooperatives other than the SEFSC could still be considered in compliance with National Standard Two which references the “best scientific information available”.

The Committee discussed the SEDAR schedule, with staff reviewing the current assessment schedule. Committee members were encouraged to consider any changes to the proposed assessments for 2018, and which assessments they wanted to see initiated in 2019. Committee members made the following motions:

The Committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend to the Council Chair and Executive Director that an assessment of king mackerel be conducted in 2018 in conjunction with the Gulf of Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem joint project with Mexico of the same species.

Motion carried unanimously.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, to add gray triggerfish to the SEDAR schedule for 2019 at the appropriate assessment level.

Motion carried unanimously.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, to add cobia to the SEDAR schedule for 2019.

Motion carried unanimously.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, to add Spanish mackerel to the SEDAR schedule for 2019.

Motion carried unanimously.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, to add yellowedge grouper and tilefish to the SEDAR schedule for 2019.

Motion carried unanimously.

Staff clarified that the “terminal year” noted for each species on the assessment schedule referred to the last year of data used in the assessment, and that the “Start/End Dates” referred to when the assessment process is anticipated to begin and end for a particular species. The Committee asked about progress with red drum management in recent history. Staff replied that the Council had postponed further action concerning red drum until the assessment currently underway on the species is completed. SEFSC staff were asked whether gray snapper, currently scheduled as a benchmark assessment for 2017, could be assessed using some less time-intensive track. SEFSC staff replied that a benchmark assessment was most appropriate because gray snapper has not yet been assessed in the Gulf. Lastly, Committee members expressed a desire for the Steering Committee to consider an “emergency assessment” method for species which are overfished, and that gray triggerfish be given priority over other species to be assessed in 2019.

This concludes my report.