



## D8 Social Science Planning Team and Other Issues

December 2018 Council Meeting

### Action Memo

Staff: Sarah Marrinan  
Action Required: 1. Review SSPT minutes and draft terms of reference  
2. Review staff suggestions for a process to select an SSPT member to represent Tribal organizations and provide clarification  
3. Review information on social science advisory groups elsewhere

### Background and documents provided

The Council's Social Science Planning Team (SSPT) held an interim teleconference on November 9, 2018 to review responses to several Council requests, receive an update on the data gap analysis, and plan for the May in-person meeting. The agenda, as well as documents for the meeting, are posted on the SSPT's webpage: <https://www.npfmc.org/committees/social-science-planning-team/>.

This agenda item includes three documents: (1) SSPT minutes, (2) a draft Terms of Reference, and (3) staff suggestions for a process to select an SSPT member to broadly represent Tribal organizations, as requested by the Council. This action memo also includes a response to the Council's request for information on social science advisory groups in other regions.

Both the SSPT's minutes and the Council staff suggestions highlight a desire to have the Council clarify its policy for membership affiliation. This may prompt the revision of text about membership in the draft SSPT TOR (language in red). In addition, both documents seek further consideration from the Council on the specific type of expertise and/ or affiliation that it is seeking to augment on the SSPT (e.g., a representative of (a) Tribe(s) and/or Tribal organization(s); a Tribally-affiliated social scientist; an Alaska Native traditional knowledge bearer). This distinction will help determine whether a special process would be necessary, and if so, what process might be most appropriate for soliciting the vacancy the Council is seeking to fill.

### Response to Council's request for information on social science advisory groups in other regions

In June 2018, the Council requested a review of whether other fishery management councils have bodies similar to the Social Science Planning Team (SSPT) to incorporate social and economic information into decision making.

As far as we can tell, no other region has formed a group with the same scope and objectives as that which has been set out for the North Pacific's SSPT. The SSPT's purpose is to broadly:

- Improve the quality and application of social science data to inform management
- Strategize medium- and long-term improvements in analytical methodology, and
- Improve utilization of existent social science data and identify gaps.

In other words, this group's main functions are to be proactive in connecting social science information sources and encouraging the development of social science information that can be useful in the management process.

SSPT's scope is intended to be different than a social science review body, which may otherwise overlap with the role of the North Pacific's SSC. The SSC at the North Pacific is an interdisciplinary committee (including anthropologists and economists) that provide their expertise to determine the quality and thoroughness of the information and analytical methodology provided in, for instance, a stock assessment, a Council amendment package, or program review. When issues are presented to the North Pacific's SSC that are more social or economic in nature, SSC members that are social scientists are often assigned as "lead" reviewers; however, any SSC member may contribute to the evaluation. SSC members have highlighted the benefits of having an interdisciplinary team review these documents, as many issues transcend the confines of particular field; however, this workload may not allow sufficient time and opportunity to follow-up on reoccurring challenges in social science data and analysis. The SSC recommended the creation of the SSPT to provide longer-term accountability for enhancing the use and availability of social science data in the management process.

Other regions have developed different versions of social science advisory groups which often serve a review role more similar to that of the North Pacific's SSC, sometimes with specific socio-economic subcommittees. These bodies generally provide recommendations for a regional fishery management council on a specific action. For example, **the Pacific Council has an SSC Economic subcommittee.** This subcommittee is made up of a sub-set of the SSC members that meet outside of the typical Council cycle (on an ad hoc basis) to provide a more in-depth and technical evaluation of data and methodology on one particular Council issue. For example, the five-year groundfish trawl program review required technical evaluation of data and methodology from this group. The Pacific Council's SSC Economics subcommittee may spend a full day with presentations/ discussion of one specific issue. They provide a detailed report and recommendations back to the full SSC, who may respond at that point. The group generally operates on a consensus basis.

**The Gulf of Mexico Council has a small Special Socioeconomic SSC** in addition to a standing SSC. The Special Socioeconomic SSC essentially constitutes additional members, generally academics and contractors, who join the SSC when a particular issue necessitates additional expertise. The group meets with the standing SSC (not separately) on an ad hoc basis, based on the topic and the discretion of the Council ED in consultation with the Council Chair. The Special Socioeconomic SSC most recently joined the SSC to evaluate the Catch Share Review for the Grouper/ Tilefish IFQ Program. This group does not include any Council or Council staff members, although Council staff members write up the minutes from standing SSC and Special Socioeconomic SSC meetings. The standing SSC votes on decisions, although sometimes they operate by consensus.

The South Atlantic Council has social scientists (economists and sociologists) on their standing SSC which meets twice a year for three days. The South Atlantic SSC may convene topical sub-committees or ad hoc committees to address specific issues. SSC members are asked to volunteer for these committees. The only **permanent subcommittee of the South Atlantic SSC is the Socio-economic Panel (SEP)** made up of economists and other social scientists who advise the Council of the social and economic impacts of fishery management measures. Social scientists who are on the SSC are automatically on the panel and the chair must be an SSC member. The panel also includes non-SSC members.

The SEP chair sets the agenda with consultation from the Council economist and social scientist. Generally, this group tracks Council actions (FMP amendments) and provides feedback on choosing models and data, as well as how to communicate these choices to the Council or the public. In the past, they have received requests from the NMFS regional office economist to provide feedback on particularly complex analyses. Recently this group provided feedback on the wreckfish ITQ review and as well as the modeling used to predict landings an analysis for a snapper grouper amendment.

The SEP's report goes to the standing SSC for approval, who may respond and possibly approve to be passed on as recommendations to the Council. They generally meet once a year plus the occasional webinar. Sometimes they host a joint webinar with the SSC when needed.

While these are three example of social science review bodies, a Gulf of Mexico Council staff member mentioned that she communicates informally with social scientists at the Southeast Fisheries Science Center about data gaps and potentially useful areas of research. This type of communication, while informal, may be more along the lines of what the North Pacific's SSPT is seeking to enhance. It may be that other regions also have more informal lines of connecting social science information sources and encouraging progress toward filling priority data gaps as well.

Also of note is an **inter-regional social science group; the Social Scientists in Regional Fisheries Management (SSRFM)** group. This group includes staff and contractors from each Council and most of the NMFS regions, providing a forum for participants to address cross-cutting issues across the regions. For instance, topics have included the sociocultural issues in fisheries research and analyses pertaining to Social Impact Assessment, management plan development, compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and the Executive Order on Environmental Justice, socioeconomic indicators of fishery conditions and methodology for program reviews.

SSRFM is similar to the SSPT in that its focus is intended to be broad, strategic, and process-focused, rather than necessarily based around reviewing specific Council analyses. It is different in that the SSRFM forum is an opportunity to compare and contrast data availability, methodology, and process to address social science analytical requirements across regions, while the SSPT is generally focused on data gaps and methods within the North Pacific.