

EXCERPT FROM FEBRUARY 2022 DRAFT SSC REPORT

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE DRAFT REPORT TO THE NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL January 31st – February 4th, 2022

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Reflection on Council process and ideas for change

The SSC reviewed the staff discussion paper, “Reflections on Council process and ideas for change” and noted some initial thoughts for Council consideration (sections not listed had no SSC discussion). Ideas noted below included support by one or more SSC members but do not represent SSC consensus:

1. Reduce the number of annual Council meetings from 5 to 4, and drop the February meeting

SSC members acknowledged and agreed with the difficulty in planning and addressing Council topics with the short turnaround time between the December and February meetings. A number of SSC members expressed support for reducing the number of annual meetings from five to four, even if the four in-person meetings were four days instead of three. Even if the number of meetings is reduced, some SSC members expressed support for continuing to have an SSC workshop (normally scheduled in February), since it is a valuable opportunity for the SSC to do proactive and strategic thinking. Some SSC members expressed concern over being able to cover the current SSC workload in four meetings. Some SSC members noted that there are bigger projects and longer-term issues for which there has not been sufficient time even with five meetings. If the workload stays the same, some SSC members recommended continuing with five meetings due to the time-sensitive nature of issues, the increased preparation prior to the meeting within the same amount of time, and concern over making the remaining meetings longer than they are.

2. Create a schedule that makes 1-2 meetings per year virtual and the remaining meetings in-person

SSC members did not speak directly to whether one to two meetings per year should be virtual and the remaining in-person, nor to which meetings would be most important to have in person. SSC members did, however, note the value of in-person meetings, which includes fuller conversations, ability to talk amongst SSC members outside of the meeting, ability for SSC members to talk with the public, industry and NGO representatives outside of the meeting, and the loss of that value during virtual meetings. An SSC member also noted that given the high SSC workload, allowing a virtual option for members that could not attend in person would allow additional expertise to be included in the meeting and a greater distribution of workload.

4. Change the timing of the October meeting to avoid government shutdowns

SSC members noted a desire to avoid the impacts of holding a meeting during a time of potential or realized government shutdown. They noted the excessive time required to develop and operate under multiple schedules in an effort to continue meetings under the possibility or reality of government shutdowns. SSC members also questioned whether such excessive efforts should be made in an attempt to do an impossible job or whether the consequences of a government shutdown (inability to continue or reschedule meetings if a shutdown occurs) should instead be accepted as reality.

5. Reevaluate the timing of crab and groundfish harvest specifications in light of fishery needs and stock prioritization

SSC members supported reevaluating the timing of crab and groundfish harvest specifications due to (1) the tight turnaround for authors between surveys and specifications (particularly for crab), (2) the inability to include some data sources (NBS) and some modeling efforts (e.g., VAST) for crab stocks (e.g. snow crab in 2021), (3) the challenges of obtaining reasonable model runs in short amounts of time if data input values exhibit extreme changes, (4) the tight turnaround for authors between Plan Team/SSC review of groundfish model runs in October and final specifications in December, (5) the excessive workload of authors and review bodies in the fall that is exacerbated by the timing, and (6) limited meeting time to address the high numbers of stock reviews and how that impacts the quality of review. One idea for streamlining specifications that was introduced for exploration by SSC members was to consolidate preliminary model reviews for groundfish into the June or earlier SSC meeting. This could ease the burden on groundfish authors and allow them more time to explore new data and new model options between preliminary model runs and final specifications in December. It might allow more time for SSC review and reduce the SSC review burden in October, as that meeting is heavily focused on final specifications for crab. This would require moving the September Groundfish Plan Team meeting earlier (e.g., April/May).

12. Changes to the nomination/reappointment process for the SSC – timing, recruitment, soliciting SSC input

SSC members indicated support for being able to contribute recommendations to the Council as to areas of expertise needed, as has been done in previous SSC reports.

13. Consider how to reduce SSC workload

SSC members appreciated the consideration of the SSC workload. Some SSC members suggested that one way to reduce the workload would be to limit non-action items. Other SSC members felt that updates on projects in development (e.g., ACLIM), updates on factors that affect fisheries management (e.g., marine mammal and seabird updates) and updates that inform recommendations and harvest specifications (e.g., Ecosystem Status Reports) are critical. One suggestion was to bundle informational topics into one meeting that does not require an SSC report. SSC members suggested reducing the rigor of Plan Team and SSC peer review of assessments and suggested that these reviews occur external to the Council process, such as with more CIE reviews. That way the SSC could focus on strategic discussions and setting OFLs and ABCs, rather than assessment review. Other SSC members were concerned to reduce the SSC's focus on peer review, noting the value of the timeliness of analysis review, the institutional knowledge provided by the Plan Teams and SSC, and the public transparency and communication of the reasons for SSC recommendations.

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