

## Optimizing SSC agenda time

SSC and Council leadership have been discussing how to address the reality that the SSC does not have sufficient time to get to all the issues that the Council asks the SSC to review. Always in the fall, and this year at other meetings as well, the SSC is overloaded with harvest specifications agenda items for crab and groundfish, and now Cook Inlet salmon, and it is creating a scheduling challenge for their review of other Council items such as management analysis initial review drafts, program reviews, and other science-based topics such as the Council’s climate work, or recommendations to NMFS on data collection programs such as survey modernization or the ADP.

In general, the SSC is scheduled for 2.5-3 days of agenda time at each meeting (which occur 4-5 times a year). Some SSC members are also asked to participate in subgroup work during the course of the year, for example to do prep work for research priority agenda items, issues that are specific to the use of economic and socioeconomic information, or review of national documents such as changes to the National Standard guidelines. We have heard clearly from our SSC members that we are already asking a lot of them, and that we cannot add extra days to the SSC workload without burning out members. As a result, we have a maximum available time of 15 days a year that the Council can benefit from SSC advice which means that we need to think carefully about how best to utilize that time.

Staff have been discussing how to optimize SSC time, and several actions are already ongoing, including: developing specific guidance to the SSC about their task for each agenda item; more communication with the Plan Team chairs, both in advance of the SSC meeting about what to focus on in the presentation, and how to interpret SSC comments if the report is ambiguous; adjustments to the level of detail in the SSC report and the SSC Chair’s summary of the agenda item. While these actions all have the ability to be effective to some degree, the greatest impact will be from being more selective about which items go on the SSC agenda. **The Council and public should expect that some issues which, in the past, have always gone in front of the SSC for review, may no longer be scheduled that way.** This may be exacerbated if proposed legislation adds to SSC duties.

The SSC’s agenda is developed by the Executive Director in consultation with the Council Chair and SSC leadership. Under our current practice, and given available time, the SSC would typically review the follow documents:

- a) all harvest specifications and related documents (SAFE reports, Plan Team reports, ESRs, Econ SAFE and ACEPO, spatial management policy analyses);
- b) initial review management analyses (peer review to ensure that the best scientific information is available for the Council to make its policy decisions);
- c) LAPP reviews and other retrospective reports of Council actions;
- d) ecosystem and climate reports (FEP team and taskforce reports and products, climate/IRA work);
- e) research priorities and other data collection-related items (e.g., survey changes, ADP, EDR changes, SSPT reports);
- f) Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) applications and sometimes final reports;
- g) national or regional guidance with a scientific component that affects Council management (e.g. National Standard guidelines, Regional Climate Action Plans);
- h) scientific presentations or workshops that are informational but important learning for SSC members to provide better advice to the Council in future (e.g., annual SSC workshop; marine mammal status updates); and
- i) anything else that the Council requests the SSC to review (e.g., crab conservation plan).

As staff put together the agenda for each upcoming meeting, we assess whether the time available is sufficient to address all agenda items that might normally be scheduled for SSC review; if the time available is insufficient, we will prioritize items for the SSC and remove agenda items as needed. The following table provides some notes about factors that are taken into consideration regarding Council and SSC priorities. **Staff are presenting this list in order to provide more transparency about how those decisions are currently made, and to get feedback as to whether other factors should be taken into consideration when it is necessary to prioritize SSC agenda time.**

a) Harvest specifications documents	<b>Highest priority</b>	This is a required agenda item for the SSC, to ensure the quality and integrity of scientific assessments that are used to determine biologically acceptable catch limits. Efforts are underway at the SSC and with Plan Team chairs to ensure that specs presentations and discussions are as focused as possible.
b) Initial Review analyses	<b>Case by case</b>	The SSC reviews analyses for the soundness of the impact methodology, whether the appropriate data is utilized, and whether the document is complete for decisionmaking. NPFMC is unusual among regional fishery management councils in using its SSC as the scientific peer review body for its management analyses as well as assessments. However, for routine management actions with minimal impact, or which are analyzed using a previously-reviewed methodology, or which address halibut management actions only (that are not subject to MSA provisions regarding the SSC), sometimes initial review actions are not prioritized for SSC review compared to other actions.
c) LAPP reviews and other retrospective reports	<b>Only when debuting LAPP reviews for new programs or using a new format</b>	While all program reviews in the past were reviewed by the SSC, each report takes 3-4 hours of SSC agenda time, plus 1 hour for workplan reviews. Now that we have mature LAPPs, more of our programs have undergone at least one if not more program reviews. Given the priority for the SSC to review the methodology staff use for the report, so that the Council can assess whether the program continues to meet its objectives, perhaps we can limit SSC review to new program reviews only, or bring reports back to the SSC only when methodologies change.
d) Ecosystem and climate reports	<b>Priority, as possible</b>	The SSC's advice resulting from scientific review of ecosystem, habitat, and climate work for the Council (e.g. FEPs, habitat modeling, IRA climate work) provides the Council with a way to groundtruth how to value and integrate emerging science tools into the mgmt. program.
e) Research priorities, data collection-related items	<b>Priority</b>	The Council is required to consult with the SSC over <b>research priorities</b> . The Council also relies on the SSC for scientific advice on <b>survey</b> changes and other <b>observer and monitoring</b> work that affects the availability of data integral to stock assessment and other management actions. Other <b>data collection</b> papers are also routinely reviewed by the SSC. However, a consideration for whether the SSC reviews the annual observer reports and plans should be whether the methodology is significantly different than that reviewed in previous years.
f) EFPs	<b>Case by case</b>	The regulations stipulate that the Council should be consulted on EFP applications before they are approved by the agency. As the AFSC already does a comprehensive scientific review of EFP applications, we have recently been more selective about which EFPs to send to the SSC for review before they go in front of the Council, to exclude EFPs with routine or operational changes.
g) New national or regional guidances	<b>Priority/ case-by-case</b>	NMFS and the Council periodically request the SSC to review such documents as revisions to national standard guidelines or regional or national policies, procedures, or issues with a scientific component. Such reviews are often developed by a subgroup of the SSC offline, and just the final recommendation reviewed by the whole committee.
h) Informational scientific presentations	<b>Case-by-case</b>	Some agenda items or workshops are useful to the SSC in order to keep abreast of fishery research, development of new tools and methodologies, status of species that interact with the fisheries, or to develop advice on future management needs. Including agenda time for such opportunities helps the SSC to provide better advice on core fishery management analyses and assessment review.
i) Special requests from the Council	<b>High Priority</b>	As issues come up, the Council may ask the SSC to address specific questions. These will always be a high priority for SSC time.