

# **SSC Report**

## **April 2025**



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# SSC Administrative Discussion

- SSC administrative updates include:
  - Reviewing SSC Handbook updates and providing feedback
  - Receiving a brief summary of SCS8 proceedings and a discussion of potential SCS9 topics for 2026
- The SSC will narrow down potential SCS9 topics to submit to the Gulf Council for consideration following the April Council meeting

## B4 AFSC Report

- The SSC appreciates the comprehensive review of NOAA-AFSC organizational structure, fishery and ecosystem surveys and their prioritization, and ongoing research.
- The SSC notes the high degree of uncertainty in future funding and loss of staff and expertise that has already occurred in 2025.
- The SSC **supports** AFSC's survey priorities, emphasizing the importance of the critical resource surveys supporting stock assessment and management (bottom trawl, acoustic, and sablefish longline surveys).
  - Importance of reliable catch data and the collection of age/length compositions.
  - Management of PSC species
- The SSC **highlights** that reduced survey frequency will reduce the ability to detect rapid stock changes.
- The SSC **highlights** that the value of data can and should include consideration of vulnerable species and species of concern in survey prioritization processes

## B4 AFSC Report

- The SSC **supports** the use of fishery-dependent data, socioeconomic data and local knowledge to supplement survey gaps, should they arise.
- The SSC **suggests** AFSC consider opportunities to expand collection of ecosystem data in conjunction with fishery resource surveys.
- The SSC **supports** the use of MSE and simulation analyses to quantify the effects of proposed modifications to survey frequency or design.
  - These methods may not fully quantify the risk associated with loss of survey information in the face of unanticipated mortality events or recruitment failures
- The SSC **supports** efforts to operationalize FT-NIRS aging methods for efficiency, but highlights the need to maintain expertise in traditional aging methods for validation.
- The SSC **supports** the inclusion of across-species comparisons of catch-to-quota ratios (Catch/TAC, Catch/ABC) over time, within each SAFE introduction.

## C3 MRA Adjustments Analysis – Initial Review

- The draft for initial review EA/RIR evaluates measures intended to improve and simplify regulations that implement MRAs, and considers exemptions under special circumstances
  - Evaluates whether alternatives increase catch mortality, including key Steller sea lion prey species
- The SSC ***finds*** the document sufficient to inform the Council for final action after consideration of SSC recommendations, as practicable
  - SSC did not believe the action would be detrimental to Steller sea lions based on the information presented in the analysis
  - Draw on past experience with offload-to-offload MRA accounting
  - Include local knowledge to refine fleet level impacts

## C3 MRA Adjustments Analysis – Initial Review

- The SSC **suggests** the analysts improve the fleet profiles to the extent practicable:
  - Identify dependence of particular fleets on MRA catch and potential gains in species retention
  - Associate impacts and benefits with particular subfleets, by size, gear or home port
- The SSC **recommends** that the analysis be more clear on interpretation of the minimum applicable MRA rule for the alternative trip triggers (paths described by analysts)
- The SSC **recommends** clarification about how the implementation of emergency exceptions would be carried out, including the benefits to safety and risk of misuse

## D4 Survey Modernization

- AFSC is transitioning from the long standing systematic survey design (grid) to a stratified random design that aims to combine the EBS, NBS, and slope surveys. This transition will also include a reduction in tow length (30 to 15 min) and a general upgrade in bottom trawl gear.
- The SSC **supports** the efforts of this major undertaking and looks forward to the continued progress.
- The SSC **suggests** additional metrics such as conservation concerns and management thresholds be considered in addition to optimizing the precision estimates of multiple species.
- The SSC **suggests** additional rationale be developed regarding the prioritization of including deeper stations and ecosystem data streams at the cost of “core” stations and/or stocks due to logistical constraints.

## D4 Survey Modernization

- The SSC **suggests** project leads thoroughly examine other examples of large scale survey transitions to learn from prior experiences.
- The SSC **suggests** that a more condensed timeline for the transition be considered; this may provide a larger effect that can be “corrected” for, rather than attempting to understand a series of small effects
  - This may also reduce the time when changes in assessments are confounded with changes in methods.
- The SSC **emphasizes** that it will be a number of years before this large of a change will “stabilize”.



## D4 Survey Modernization

- The SSC ***supports and encourages*** the AFSC modernization team to continue working with stakeholders and relevant experts
- The SSC ***recommends*** further consideration regarding how the number of strata will interact with any post-stratification that may be necessary by assessment teams; fewer strata may be beneficial.
- The SSC ***recommended*** analysis of existing calibration data for tow duration and consideration of further paired experiments instead of randomly allocated shorter tows.
- The SSC ***looks forward*** to additional updates as this project moves forward.