

Proposed Process for the Development of NPFMC Research Priorities

A subgroup of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) drafted recommendations for changes to the current process for the development of the [NPFMC Research Priorities](#) (RPs). The overarching goals of these recommended changes were to:

1. formalize and document the process for the development of RPs,
2. ensure transparent and equitable "pathways" for RPs to be proposed,
3. provide a means for all RP suggestions to be initially reviewed and/or revised by an expert advisory group, prior to formal submission to the SSC, and
4. streamline the SSC process for selecting and recommending RPs to the Council.

While the process has varied, in previous years RPs were generally developed and reviewed by the four stock assessment plan teams (PT), including BSAI/GOA Groundfish Plan Teams (GPTs), BSAI Crab PT (CPT) and Scallop PT (ScPT), the SSC, and ultimately the Council. Public input has been provided at each of these meetings, but for the most part, ideas for new RPs derived from SSC or PT members. Additionally, the SSC wants to more formally incorporate and balance research priority suggestions from subject areas outside of the PT's expertise (e.g., habitat, halibut, or Arctic issues).

The [Magnuson-Stevens Act](#) (MSA) requires that Councils develop "multi-year research priorities for fisheries, fisheries interactions, habitats, and other areas of research that are necessary for management purposes". This includes research to support fishery management plans and associated regulations for fisheries requiring conservation and management to prevent overfishing, rebuild depleted fish stocks, and ensure sustainable fishing practices.

To address research priority goals, the NPFMC has identified Critical Ongoing Monitoring at the highest priority level. These priorities create and maintain indispensable monitoring data that substantially contribute to the understanding and management of fish populations, fisheries, and the communities dependent upon those fisheries. **The SSC subgroup continues to provide the utmost support for these Critical Ongoing Monitoring priorities.**

The MSA identifies the intended audience for Council research priorities as the Secretary of Commerce and, for the NPFMC, the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC), "for their consideration in developing research priorities and budgets" for Alaska. In past years, NPFMC research priorities were provided to the Secretary of Commerce, the AFSC, as well as research and funding entities including the: [University of Alaska](#), [University of Washington](#), [Oregon State University](#), [North Pacific Research Board](#), [Alaska Department of Fish and Game](#), and [Alaska Ocean Observing System](#). In addition to this current list, the SSC subgroup anticipates that these RPs will inform additional entities that intersect with NPFMC management responsibilities as participation in the development of the RPs broadens. This list could include, but is not limited to, organizations such as: ANCSA Regional Corps, BOEM, Chugach RRC, National Park

Service, Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, Aleut Marine Mammal Commission, and Tribal, Local, State and Federal lawmakers.)

Given these goals, MSA requirements and the target audience, the SSC subgroup recommends the following changes to the process for the 2024 Research Priorities cycle, with the intent to have finalized RPs at the April 2024 meeting.

Solicit ideas for RPs during a formal Submission Process (tentatively, late June - mid-October 2023):

- A novel process for the submission of new RPs could be used to solicit RP suggestions from a broader range of stakeholders and other knowledgeable parties.
 - An online submission portal, such as a custom [google form](#), would be used to provide a template for new RPs.
 - This could be advertised widely for several months (June - October 2023) to the Council community and the target audience described above. A link could be included on the NPFMC home page.
 - Each submission would include a short form statement of the RP, how the information learned would impact Council management, justification for why it is urgent/important, and a categorization regarding the type of research (e.g., groundfish biology, seabird-fisheries interactions, community fishery dependence, etc.). The submission form would be designed to structure the proposed RP to mirror the current structure of the RPs in the existing database.

Initial Phase of RP Review: Bodies and Process for Initial Review (tentatively, January 2024)

- Initial Review bodies¹, could include (new bodies in [blue](#)):
 - BSAI/GOA GPT
 - CPT
 - ScPT
 - [Fishery Ecosystem Plan Team \(currently only Bering Sea FEP\)](#) ²
 - [Social Science Planning Team \(SSPT\)](#) ²
 - [SSC Research Priorities subgroup](#)
- Online RPs would be allocated to the appropriate initial review body by NPFMC staff, using the proposers' initial categorization as a starting point. Some submissions could be reviewed by more than one initial review body, to account for the need for multiple perspectives to assess particular submissions. Generally:
 - All groundfish related RPs would be provided to the relevant GPT (JGPT, BSAI/GOA GPT).

¹ The SSC subgroup evaluated and discussed whether to recommend any other Council committees be utilized as an initial review body, but ultimately believed the development of RPs to be outside many committees' purview.

² The SSC subgroup recognizes that the FEP and SSPT might require some additional coordination effort to ensure they are ready to accept and review RPs by January 2024.

- All crab related RPs would go to the CPT.
- Scallop related RPs would go to the ScPT.
- Broader ecosystem or climate change related RPs would be provided to the FEP.
- Any social science or economics related RPs would be provided to the SSPT.
- Finally, the SSC subgroup agreed that the SSC RPs subgroup would need to act as a “catch-all” review body for those topics that do not have a dedicated Plan Team.
- These could include, for example, priorities related to marine mammals, seabirds, salmon, the Arctic, bycatch, and priorities that include a social and natural science component.
- Designated initial review bodies could receive the relevant RP suggestions from the online submission process, as well as include research suggestions from previous PT discussions, stock assessment author SAFE chapters, and member inputs. The PTs would review them at public meetings. Initial review bodies would produce recommended additions to the RP database, as well as a list of the top 3-5 prioritized RPs for potential inclusion in the final top 10 list.
 - Prior to the January 2024 review meetings, NPFMC staff and the SSC subgroup co-chairs would meet with the chair(s) of each PTs to answer any questions, ensure that a consistent and equitable process is being used across initial review bodies, develop general criteria for the review of RP submissions.
 - PT members or stock assessment authors could continue to propose new RPs as desired at these initial review meetings, as in past cycles, or could use the online submission portal as well. This could be a point of further discussion with the PT chairs.
 - The initial review bodies may need to add a specific meeting to accommodate this timeline.
- The SSC subgroup also proposes the FEP serve as an umbrella review body for any taskforce reporting back to that FEP. For example, the BS FEP would serve as the review body for any new RPs proposed by the CCTF or LKTKS taskforce.

SSC Review Process: (tentatively February - April 2024)

- At the February 2024 meeting:
 - The SSC subgroup suggests that the SSC receive an informational presentation to review the RPs recommendations from each of the initial review bodies. This presentation would include any new recommended RPs and their 3 - 5 recommendations for those to be included in the top 10 list.
 - The co-chairs of the SSC subgroup would provide the presentation of the SSC subgroup initial review body.
 - Finally, the SSC would also develop its own new RPs, if desired, at this meeting.
 - This meeting is also another point at which the general public could provide comments on the proposed RPs (but no new RPs would be accepted to preserve the review process).

- Between the February and April 2024 meetings:
 - The SSC subgroup would review the input from the PTs, AP and Council. The subgroup would develop a candidate list of more than 10 RPs for the top 10 list and review the recommended new RPs.
 - These subgroup meetings would not be open to the public. However, other opportunities for public comments include all of the initial review body meetings and the February and April SSC and Council meetings.
- At the April 2024 meeting:
 - The co-chairs of the SSC subgroup would present the list of new RPs, including the candidate list for the top 10, as a typical agenda item, with the opportunity for public comment and SSC discussion.
 - The full SSC would finalize their recommendations to the Council for the top 10 RPs list and proposed new RPs to be added to the existing RPs database.
 - At this time, no new RPs will be reviewed, to ensure equitable review of RPs.
 - The SSC reports to the Council the top ten and

Request for Council Guidance:

- The subgroup recognizes that receiving guidance from the Council on its key areas of focus over the next 1 - 5 years would allow the SSC to match the top 10 research priorities with the Council's pressing management needs. If the Council were interested in adding this step, the Council might consider scheduling an agenda item in advance of April 2024, perhaps at the February 2024 Council meeting.