

Proposed New Categories and Definitions for NPFMC Research Priorities

Based on the recommendations of the NPFMC SSC at the June 2014 meeting in Nome, a subgroup of SSC/Council members was formed to discuss and refine the categories and definitions used for the NPFMC research priorities. The SSC/Council subgroup consisted of Pat Livingston, George Hunt, Bill Tweit, and Glenn Merrill. The group corresponded via email and by teleconference over the summer and arrived at the following draft research priorities definitions.

Background and History

In June 2012, SSC recommended that the research priorities process be revamped. At that time research priorities were separated into two categories:

- 1) Immediate concerns: Research activities that must be addressed to satisfy federal requirements and to address pressing fishery management and ecosystem issues related to fishery management
- 2) Ongoing needs: Research to advance the Council's fisheries management goals as defined in the Groundfish PSEIS, other strategic documents of the Council (i.e., FMPs, AI FEP, and EFH, crab, salmon PSC, and other EISs) and NMFS). It also includes efforts on which assessment models depend for annual updates (e.g., survey information) for setting OFLs and ABCs.

Based on the June 2012 SSC recommendation, a summary of the proposed revamp still included the idea of maintaining the above two categories but also to include a relative rank (high, medium, low) among all the priorities submitted by a Plan Team. A workgroup met in August 2012 to go over the proposed fields and there appeared to be duplication between items that were both immediate concerns and ongoing needs. When the SSC revamped the list in April 2013, those two categories were removed.

In June 2014, the SSC went through the scallop PT and crab PT research priorities and attempted to provide more delineation between high, medium, and low priorities so that all priorities were not in the high priority category. However, this differentiation was difficult without a definition of those categories and the Council asked for an explanation of how the SSC made the differentiation. The SSC recommended in June 2014 that a subgroup be formed to look at the research priority categories and derive definitions. In discussion, some members wondered whether a return to the use of the "immediate concerns" and "ongoing needs" categories would be useful. The discussion also noted that the list of research priorities would generally tend towards including mainly the highest priority research items anyway and that differentiation between high, medium, and low might not be so critical.

Research Priorities Subgroup Discussions about Options

Possible options initially considered by the subgroup:

- 1) Bring back immediate concerns and ongoing needs categories and remove hi, med, low
- 2) Retain high, medium, low categories and derive definitions for those
- 3) Bring back immediate concerns and ongoing needs and retain high, med, low categories after deriving definitions for those

After several rounds of discussion the first option was refined to arrive at a 4 category prioritization system that consists of: **urgent/important/useful and critical ongoing monitoring**. Wording from the IPHC research categorization scheme was considered and partly incorporated into the proposed scheme.

DEFINITIONS:

CRITICAL ONGOING MONITORING: Monitoring activities placed in this category consist of those that: (1) provide an essential management function; and (2) cannot be achieved through other means. This is monitoring essential to maintain our compliance with federal requirements, National Standards, or is necessary for the ongoing management of the fishery. Postponement would have a significant and immediate impact on management.

Examples include monitoring that has a direct bearing on the assessment or its inputs, harvest policy, or current management structure such as: agency fish surveys that are the inputs for fish stock assessment, marine mammal surveys needed for tracking Biological Opinion requirements, or socioeconomic data collections needed to evaluate impacts of management decisions and track performance of programs.

URGENT: Research that is essential for compliance with federal requirements, National Standards, or identified by management as important to aid decision-making. It is expected that a one or two year project would meet the information need. Postponement would have a significant impact on management.

Examples include genetics analyses to resolve stock delineation questions for harvest specifications, social science surveys to inform the design of new rationalization programs, deep-sea coral habitat mapping, or marine mammal ecology or fishery interaction studies that would provide important input into Biological Opinions or NEPA analyses.

IMPORTANT: Obtaining a new set of data or research result that is likely to aid in the evaluation of a management goal or advancement of information for EBM. The research might be a several year program. Postponement will not have an immediate significant impact on fishery management but will likely impact future analyses.

Examples include studies to improve parameters for stock assessment, gear research to reduce bycatch, management strategy evaluations to examine robustness of harvest policies to climate change, incorporation of uncertainty into harvest-setting, examination of ecosystem thresholds for management, particularly if these have been identified as items to implement expressed goals of the NPFMC through the groundfish PSEIS workplan or FEP.

USEFUL: Research which addresses current issues of any subject but is not considered having a timely need or being crucial to current management or operation.

Examples include ichthyoplankton surveys or analyses that have not yet been linked to a stock assessment or fishery management, new methods to monitor disease, or monitoring of contaminant levels in living marine resources.