

Mid-Atlantic Council Scientific and Statistical Committee
Baltimore, MD
January 22, 2009
Summary Notes

SSC Committee members present included Brian Rothschild (Chair), Tom Miller, Bonnie McCay, Ed Houde, Mark Holliday, John Boreman, Yan Jiao, Scott Crosson, Cynthia Jones, and Mike Wilberg. Others present included Lee Anderson, Mark Millikin, Kate Simmons (PEW), and Ken Hinman. Staff present included Rich Seagraves, Jessica Coakley, and Kathy Collins.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss SSC organizational details for the upcoming calendar year, recent National SSC Workshop, SSC terms of reference/defining role of SSC, elements to consider in SSC specification of ABC, incorporating scientific uncertainty in SSC advice, operating procedures, 2009 schedule, species/assessment assignments, election of SSC Vice-Chair, and review implementation of ACLs and AMs.

L. Anderson raised the issue that if the end result of the SAW/SARC process is a point estimate of MSY, the SSC has to determine how they are going to incorporate scientific uncertainty around that estimate.

An overview of the National SSC Workshop held November 14-16, 2008 in Honolulu, HI was presented. Workshop discussion items included SSC operating procedures and the role of SSC in peer review and setting annual catch limits. MAFMC SSC members in attendance at the workshop included B. Rothschild, E. Houde, and R. Latour (Seagraves from staff). The consensus from National SSC Workshop was as follows:

- 1) Accurate catch data needed for all managed fisheries in US.
- 2) Increase in SSC responsibilities under MSRA requires increased Council funding.
- 3) SSCs should be final arbitrators regarding what constitutes best available scientific information used by the Council for fishery management decisions.
- 4) Second workshop should be convened prior to 2010 focusing on technical aspects of establishing OFL (overfishing level) and ABC (SSC Steering Committee should be formed comprised of SSC chairs).

E. Houde noted that MAFMC SSC interactions with the Council have been sporadic. Historically the MAFMC SSC has been one of the better Councils, but the NPFMC has used their SSC more frequently.

B. Rothschild noted that the SSCs would work better if they had more feedback from the Councils. There are catch and data issues that the Council might want to reaffirm the need to shore up. We need an action plan for the SSC regarding funding and we could have workshops to deal with focusing on technical aspects of establishing OFL and ABC.

M. Holliday was concerned about the 3rd item of consensus as written. It is clear that the role of the SSC is to advise Council. He was not sure that the SSC should be final

arbitrators - the Council should get information from a variety of sources. J. Boreman noted that any advice we put forward to the Council should be based on best available science, whatever the source

The SSC agreed by consensus with items 1, 2 and 4 from the National SSC Workshop consensus statement. There was a general concern about the 3rd item of consensus. The SSC noted that the role of the SSC is to advise the Council on scientific questions but the group was not sure that the SSC should be final arbitrators. There was general agreement that in cases where there are no definitive conclusions or conflicting conclusions resulting from a SARC review, then it is appropriate for the SSC to assume the final arbitration role.

The SSC discussed and endorsed the need for a follow-up National level SSC workshop dedicated to identifying/quantifying various levels of scientific uncertainty. To that end, the SSC endorsed the concept of the formation of a National SSC Steering Committee comprised of the eight Council SSC chairs and recommended that this issue be placed on the upcoming Council Chairs Meeting Agenda.

The Final Rule for the National Standard 1 guidelines was published on Jan 16, 2009, which provides guidance on MSRA requirements that specify that FMPs shall establish a mechanism for specifying ACLs in the plan implementing regulations, or annual specifications, at a level such that overfishing does not occur in the fishery, including measures to ensure accountability. The MAFMC is addressing ACL/AM requirements through an Omnibus Amendment and through Amendment 11 to the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid and Butterfish FMP and Amendment 14 to the Surf Clam and Ocean Quahog FMP. Council staff requested input from the SSC concerning the appropriate level of guidance/review by the SSC for Omnibus Amendment development.

C. Jones noted that setting the ACL is a policy decision and it is not within the purview of the SSC to set ACLs. The SSC's responsibility ends with the specification of the OFL and ABC.

B. Rothschild stated that for terms of reference (TOR), staff should provide the SSC with an opportunity to learn what the terms of references are but also to understand the reasoning for particular terms of reference.

J. Boreman stated that the SSC should decide what terms they want included in the TOR. If there are 5 key items that we need out of the assessment, then they should be in the TOR. We need to make sure ACLs and AMs are in TOR. The SSC needs to be more aggressive with assessment scientists and tell them what the SSC needs.

B. Rothschild noted that a lot of uncertainties relate to lack of data and a lack of life history information. There may be issues where the SSC would recommend a need for additional data and additional sampling of life history data.

J. Boreman cautioned against using the word "independent" when describing the SSC in the assessment process. The word implies that SSC members are totally divorced from the process, which should not be the case.

L. Anderson doesn't see conflict of interest. No one on the SSC is going to gain anything - we need informed people.

E. Houde noted that if one of the SSC members is involved in the development of a stock assessment, they might not want to officially be on the working group. That SSC member would have to come back to SSC to give a review on it. We are not supposed to be a peer review group for what comes out of the SAW/SARC.

B. Rothschild stated that we need to have direct input in TOR process and best way is to have a lead person participate. Staff needs to produce a mechanism to have an SSC member(s) participate. Need more than simple TOR, they need the concept. Should be a mechanism for staff to facilitate SSC member communication with SSC as issues come up or change during analytic process. Have SSC members participate in groups but not be members of them. The three items he would like to see clearly described in stock assessment documentation include: 1) theoretical discussion of sampling problem, 2) age length keys, and 3) uncertainty analysis.

J. Boreman noted that NMFS is developing a national bycatch report. Could talk to the Center and have them do a similar type of thing so we can get a characterization of the level of uncertainty with respect to fishery independent surveys, sea sampling/bycatch, and catch at age estimation by species. This would help the SSC characterize the uncertainty in observer data.

The SSC then discussed the e-mail from L. Anderson dated Jan 21. L. Anderson asked what type of goals do we want to set? What is the probability of reaching stock targets? What is probability that catch = ABC? He thinks the thing that we ultimately have to look at is "are reaching our goals in terms of stock targets"?

T. Miller noted that we can define an OFL based on estimate of MSY, but we are always faced with the problem that we are uncertain as to what the true value actually is.

M. Wilberg noted that the SSC needs to make decisions on what type of uncertainties we need to address. Consider uncertainties of data resources, uncertainties of what models are used, and uncertainties of what comes out of it.

Y. Jiao stated that for OFL, ABC, MSY, it is important for the stock assessment team to provide uncertainties of biological reference points. Need to have documentation about uncertainties of the values.

E. Houde noted that it is important to look at the consequences of uncertainty (i.e., over estimating ABC for example).

B. McCay stated that another part of uncertainty is habitat and function of the degree of knowledge we have. How far can you actually prove it?

J. Boreman cautioned against getting too wrapped around the axle. MSRA is asking the Councils to maximize catch without overfishing; that is where the SSC needs to put its focus

K. Hinman noted that MSRA contains new language for forage fish. The Council should consider the recommendation of maintaining forage fish at stock levels higher than target level.

The SSC established a Scientific Uncertainty/ABC Advisory Committee comprised of the following members: R. Latour, M. Wilberg, T. Miller, and M. Prager. The Committee will serve a dual function: create a framework for the specification and consideration of scientific uncertainty in OFL and ABC specification and provide advice to the Council relative to development of ABC control rules for all MAFMC managed species.

J. Boreman was appointed SSC Vice-Chair by acclamation.

The SSC schedule for 2009 and general operating procedures were discussed. Various SSC members were assigned as the species lead and backups for each managed species. The SSC agreed to the following work assignments for 2009:

Species	Lead	Backup
Atlantic mackerel	Boreman	Holliday
Atlantic surfclam	Gabriel	McCay
ocean quahog	Houde	McCay
spiny dogfish	Jiao	Crosson
bluefish	Jones	Crosson
butterfish	Latour	Holliday
black sea bass	Miller	Moore
tilefish	Smith	Moore
scup	Prager	Smith
summer flounder	Wilberg	Boreman

T. Miller presented an overview of the recent Data Poor Workshop held in Woods Hole. The purpose of the workshop was to recommend biological reference points (BRPs), provide indication of scientific uncertainty for SSCs, consider BRPs for species groups and make research recommendations for red crab, skates, wolfish, scup, and black sea bass. The Panel commented on uncertainty relative to: 1) overall uncertainty; 2) observation uncertainty (biology, survey, and fishery data); and 3) process uncertainty. The separation of uncertainty in this format worked well, but what didn't carry forward very well were the consequences of uncertainty.

B Rothschild noted that the solution to data poor situations is to collect more of the right data rather than torturing ourselves with analogies. The SSC should state the need to start data collection program for some species. Perhaps we could ask the Center to put together a plan for collecting data for these species.

M. Holliday noted that the three categories of uncertainty appeared to work out well, so perhaps they should form the standard core of information for our checklist.

T. Miller will summarize what the SSC should recommend to the Council with respect to consideration of uncertainty (i.e., use the categorical approach utilized in the data poor workshop) when specifying ABC and ultimately ACLs.

The SSC expressed a desire to provide advice to the Council on ecosystem approaches to fisheries management. An example discussed was the role of spiny dogfish in the ecosystem and the ecological implications of various management/harvest strategies. An evaluation of ecosystem-based models for managing fisheries would be useful.

J. Boreman noted that there is a report on the issue of ecosystems assessments on the NMFS S&T website.

There were no volunteers to Chair SARC 48. T. Miller stated that he would be willing to Chair SARC 48 if weakfish was not on the SARC agenda, otherwise he would have a conflict.

The next scheduled meeting of the SSC will be a two-day meeting on or around May 19-20, 2009.

