



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Northeast Fisheries Science Center  
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March 27, 2023

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Dear NRCC Principals,

As you know, NEFMC passed a motion requesting an additional management-track assessment for white hake in 2023, to repeat and update the management-track assessment that was peer reviewed in 2022. This is the first request for a schedule change under the new assessment process that wasn't a result of other schedule changes (e.g., research track extensions) or external drivers (e.g., government shutdown, missed surveys due to COVID). In order to more fully consider this request, the NRCC Assessment Working Group (AWG) discussed the general standards/criteria for such requests, recognizing that (a) the new assessment process is intended to provide flexibility to adapt if needed and (b) the long-term schedule was negotiated to minimize the need for additional, intervening management track assessments.

In terms of standards/criteria for requests of additional assessments, the AWG suggested that such requests should be based on new science/information (e.g., strong signal in data) that indicates a substantial change in status of the stock from the expectation/projection from the most recent peer reviewed management-track assessment (e.g., overfishing, overfished, or substantial change in biomass or catch expectations). Such requests could also be based on identification of errors that cannot be addressed appropriately without peer review.

The AWG considered the NEFMC's white hake request with these criteria in mind and felt that the request did not meet these standards, although Chris Kellogg, as NEFMC staff, supported the Council motion (for the rest of this paragraph, "AWG" refers to all other AWG members, not Mr. Kellogg). The white hake request is premised on SSC comments regarding several uncertainties and data issues that were reviewed by the peer review panel and have not changed since the terminal year of the assessment data. The NEFMC request also raises SSC concerns about the time frames of recruitment used to estimate reference points and develop projections. The recruitment time frame approach was reviewed by the peer review panel, who accepted its use and provided a research recommendation to evaluate the approach in future management tracks. Notably, the review panel did not recommend an earlier revisiting of the assessment to address this, or any other, research recommendation. The SSC and Council also both raised concerns about economic impacts of white hake as a choke stock. The AWG felt that requests for additional assessments, with



associated additional peer review, should be based primarily on new scientific information not economic impacts.

With regard to workload capacity, the NEFSC assessment lead for white hake is also leading efforts on data preparation for the cod research track and the spiny dogfish management track assessment, is the assessment lead for skates, and provides significant support to NAFO. NEFSC does not have other staff capacity to pick up the white hake assessment, and even if such capacity existed, there would be substantial transition work by the assessment lead that is not feasible in 2023.

If desired, the NEFSC could provide the relevant NRCC scientific committees (e.g., SSCs) with a data update to provide context for the advice from the 2022 assessment.

Sincerely,

Jon Hare, Ph.D.  
Science and Research Director

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