

Charter for Northeast U.S. Trawl Advisory Panel

Revised as of 7/28/2021

Section 1: Panel Purpose

The Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP) is established to bring commercial fishing, fisheries science, and fishery management professionals together to identify concerns about regional research survey performance and data, to identify methods to address or mitigate these concerns, and to promote mutual understanding and acceptance of the results of this work among their peers and in the broader community.

Section 2: Objectives

There are three primary areas of focus: understanding the existing NOAA/NEFSC trawl survey gear performance and methodology, evaluating the potential to complement or supplement this and other regional research surveys, and improving understanding and acceptance of NOAA/NEFSC trawl survey data quality and results.

Understanding the trawl gear performance and methodology

Including but not limited to:

- Survey design (station selection, temporal, and spatial considerations)
- Survey operations
- Sweep efficiency/selectivity
- Fish behavior effects on trawl performance (*e.g.*, herding/avoidance)
- Vertical distribution effects on trawl performance
- Day/night differences in trawl performance
- Current effects on trawl performance

Evaluate the potential to complement or supplement current NEFSC surveys

Included but not limited to:

- Inter-calibrations between industry vessels and NOAA FS/V *Henry B. Bigelow* and FS/V *Pisces*. This would allow industry partners to supplement survey activity and be better positioned to perform the survey in the event that the *Bigelow* is not available.
- Increased trawl survey station density using industry vessels. This effort may improve precision of indices for species that are presently at low abundance.
- New industry-based surveys to supplement/complement existing research trawl surveys. This might include fixed-gear surveys in untrawlable habitat or a dedicated trawl survey for bottom tending species.
- Inter-calibration among the established regional research surveys: NEFSC Ecosystem Survey, Northeast Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) and the Massachusetts and Maine New Hampshire state research surveys.

Improving understanding and acceptance of NEFSC trawl survey data quality and results

Included but not limited to:

- Developing routine reporting products and distribution.

- Explaining similarities and differences between research survey and commercial trawl operations.
- Identifying preferred routine, near real-time research survey data types and format.
- How to reconcile perceptions derived from survey data trends and commercial catch per unit of effort.
- Best practices for keeping peers informed about the panel's work and results.

Action Plan

To fulfill its objectives, NTAP will:

1. Review progress and accomplishments since it was re-established in 2015.
2. Consider the use of fishery independent data in other regions (particularly within the North Atlantic, as well as internationally).
3. Brainstorm concerns about the performance of trawl surveys relative to the reliability of scientific advice:
 - a. considering differences between species or species types and bottom types, if appropriate,
 - b. considering existing information relevant concerns,
 - c. identifying short term analysis that are likely to be informative regarding concerns,
 - d. prioritizing (in terms likelihood and importance) concerns.
4. Recommend data collection, analyses, and procedures to address priority concerns. Recommendations may include alternative methods of collecting fisheries independent information.
5. Review progress and advice on course corrections, as necessary.

Section 3: Organizational Structure

The NTAP is a joint advisory panel of the New England Fishery Management Councils (NEFMC) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC). It is composed of Council members, fishing industry, academic, and government and non-government fisheries experts who shall provide advice and direction on the conduct of trawl research. The MAFMC is designated as the lead organization for administering the panel. The NTAP shall report directly to the Fishery Management Councils (FMC's), and the NTAP's recommendations will be forwarded by the FMCs, and then the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) only upon the approval of both FMC's. However, the NEFSC should be able to act based on scientific information that is available from NTAP meetings. The NEFSC is committed to the serious consideration of all recommendations brought forth through this process and will strive to implement them, although it is possible that not all recommendations will be enacted due to fiscal or statutory requirements.

Section 4: Membership

The NTAP will consist of 20 members drawn from the NEFMC and MAFMC, industry experts, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), non-federal scientists and NEFSC:

- 2 fishery management council members from each Council (4)
- 3 fishery stakeholder representatives appointed by each Council (6)
- 2 academic and non-academic scientists appointed by each Council (4)
- 2 members from the ASMFC (2)
- 4 staff members of the NEFSC (4)

Minor deviations for this composition plan may be permitted if both Co-Chairs approve. Each fishery management council shall be responsible for making council, fishery stakeholder and scientific nominations. The Science and Research Director of the NEFSC shall recommend four NEFSC staff members for Panel membership.

Key areas of expertise that will be important in success of the panel include:

- Gear design and construction
- Trawl gear efficiency
- Trawl mensuration
- Fish behavior
- Fishery acoustics
- Survey statistics and stock assessment

Section 5: Panel Leadership

The panel will be co-chaired by representatives of the NEFMC and MAFMC who will be jointly responsible for conducting meetings and for coordinating with NEFSC to ensure that summaries and other products from meetings are produced and distributed.

Section 6: Panel/Membership Longevity

The NTAP shall operate at the discretion of the FMC's and is contingent upon the availability of funding. Panel membership will be reviewed by the co-chairs annually or at any time that the primary focus areas are modified. The co-chairs shall also appoint and annually review the NTAP working group membership.

Section 7: Meetings

The NTAP and or NTAP Working Group shall hold in-person meetings two to three times annually. If the NTAP determines that more frequent meetings are warranted, scheduling of additional meetings is subject to budget availability. Additional panel business may be conducted through teleconferences or electronic communications, but any decisions made by the NTAP must be made in a public forum. All in-person meetings shall be announced through established fishery management council processes.

For a meeting that develops formal recommendations, at least 10 members are required to constitute a quorum. This total must include at least half of the designated representatives from each Council, the NEFSC, and the ASMFC.

NEFMC/MAFMC representatives: 4 of 7 required for quorum

ASMFC representatives: 1 of 2 required for quorum
NEFSC representatives: 2 of 4 required for quorum
Total representatives: 10 of 18 required for quorum

Section 8: Panel Organizational Support

Travel costs, staff support, and administrative costs associated with panel operations shall be financially supported funds made available to the MAFMC. Panel activities including communications, meeting and venue scheduling, meeting equipment support shall be supported by staff of the MAFMC. Travel cost reimbursement for non-federal government members of the NTAP shall be coordinated through the MAFMC.

NEFSC staff shall be responsible for the development of a draft agenda for approval by the co-chairs. Meeting summaries and/or reports shall be the responsibility of NEFSC staff. Analytical support will be provided by the NEFSC as needed.