

Charter for Northeast U.S. Trawl Advisory Panel

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

We propose the following focus areas for the panel: understanding the existing NOAA/NEFSC trawl survey gear performance and methodology, evaluating the potential to complement or supplement this and other regional research surveys, improving understanding and acceptance of NOAA/NEFSC trawl survey data quality and results, and improving the trawl survey.

Understanding the trawl gear performance and methodology

Suggested topics for consideration:

- 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

Suggested topics for consideration:

- Inter-calibrations between industry vessels and NOAA FS/V *Henry B. Bigelow*. 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 Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) Surveys (*i.e.*, VIMS Mid-Atlantic/Southern New England Nearshore Trawl Survey, Massachusetts Div. Marine Fisheries Bottom Trawl Survey, & Maine Dept. of Marine Resources Maine/New Hampshire Inshore Trawl Survey), and various other state research surveys

- Ensuring that NEFSC trawl survey abundance estimates are robust to spatial and temporal changes in distribution due to environmental changes (e.g. climate change).

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

Suggested topics for consideration:

- 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

Section 3: Proposed Organizational Structure

The NTAP is a joint advisory panel of the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils. 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 Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council is designated as the lead organization for administering the panel. The NTAP shall report directly to the FMC's and the NTAP's recommendations will be forwarded by the FMC's to the NEFSC only upon the approval of both FMC's and the ASMFC. 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: Proposed Membership

The NTAP will consist of 18 members drawn from the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, industry experts, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, non-federal scientists and Northeast Fisheries Science Center scientists:

- two fishery management council members from each Council (4)
- up to three fishery stakeholder representatives appointed by each Council (6)
- 2 academic and non-academic scientists appointed by each Council (4)
- 2 members from the Atlantic States Fisheries Management Commission (2)
- 2 staff members of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (2)

Minor deviations for this composition plan may be permitted if both Council Chairs approve. Each fishery management council shall be responsible for making council, fishery stakeholder and scientific nominations. The Science and Research Director of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center shall recommend two 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 Mid-Atlantic and New England Fisheries Management Councils who will be jointly responsible for conducting meetings and ensuring that summaries and other products from meetings are produced and distributed.

Section 6: Panel/Membership Longevity

The NTAP shall operate for three years from the date of the first meeting, but its tenure may be extended at the discretion of the FMC's. If the NTAP does continue to operate, new membership will be considered at that time along with new recommended focus areas.

Section 7: Meetings

During the first three months of panel activity, two meetings should occur during which summary information of relevant research and activities to date will be provided and discussed. Thereafter, the NTAP 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 a simple majority (10 members) are required to constitute a quorum. This total must include at least one of the designated member from each Council, and a representative of the NEFSC.

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 Mid Atlantic Fishery Management Council by NOAA. Panel activities including communications, meeting and venue scheduling, meeting equipment support shall be supported by staff of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. NEFSC staff shall be responsible for the development of a draft agenda for approval by the FMC's. Meeting summaries and/or reports shall be the responsibility of NEFSC staff. Travel cost reimbursement for non-federal government members of the NTAP shall be coordinated through the Mid Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Analytical support will be provided by the NEFSC as needed.