

# SEDAR

## *SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review*

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council  
Caribbean Fishery Management Council  
NOAA Fisheries  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission  
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

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### SEDAR Steering Committee

May 5, 2008

St. Thomas, USVI

### MEETING SUMMARY

#### 1. *Introduction and Opening Remarks*

The meeting convened at 9:00 am Monday, May 5, 2008 by vice-Chair Geiger. Attending members: Bonnie Ponwith, Roy Crabtree, Larry Simpson, Rick Leard, Tom McIlwain, Miguel Rolon, Eugenio Pinero, Bob Mahood, and George Geiger. Others attending: John Carmichael, Rachael Lindsay, Phil Steele, Graciela Garcia-Moliner, Duane Harris, Karyl Brewster-Geisz, and Gary Reisner.

#### 2. *Agenda Review*

The agenda was approved without modification.

#### 3. *Election of Chair*

The Committee approved a motion modifying the SEDAR guidelines to establish the SEFSC Director as Steering Committee Chair.

The Committee elected Duane Harris, incoming SAFMC Chair, as vice-Chair beginning with the next meeting.

#### 4. *Approval of Minutes: October 2007 Meeting*

The minutes were approved.

#### 5. *Update on Recent Activities*

##### a. Recently Completed Activities

SEDAR 15: SA Red Snapper and Greater Amberjack

##### b. Current Assessment Activities

SEDAR 16: King Mackerel

SEDAR 17: SA Spanish Mackerel, Vermilion Snapper

SEDAR 18: Red Drum

SEDAR 19: SA & GOM Hogfish, SA white grunt

##### c. Other Activities

SEDAR Procedural Workshop 1: Indices

SEDAR Procedural Workshop 2: Catchability

SEDAR Data Evaluation Workshop 1: Caribbean Data Review

The Committee received reports on ongoing and activities completed since the last meeting.

Sampling gaps identified in the northern North Carolina king mackerel gill net fishery were discussed briefly. The committee was informed that several working papers addressing this issue were prepared for discussion at the king mackerel assessment workshop. SEFSC will review the SEDAR 15 recommendations regarding sampling deficiencies and work with representatives of the state of North Carolina to improve sampling coverage where appropriate.

Caribbean Council representatives informed the committee that their SSC was evaluating catch data to identify information available for supporting fishing level recommendations. Results will be made available for consideration during the Caribbean data review workshop.

6. *Review of SEDAR Update Process*

The Committee was provided an overview of the SEDAR update process as specified in the SEDAR guidelines.

7. *Future Shark-HMS SEDAR Process*

The Committee was provided background on previous shark SEDAR assessments, including the responsibilities of SEDAR, SEFSC, and HMS staff.

The Committee is satisfied with the process for developing prior shark SEDAR assessments. However, to increase transparency, improve resource allocation, and maintain consistency for constituents, the committee approved a motion to fully incorporate future shark assessments into SEDAR and to create a seat on the Steering Committee for an HMS representative. Future shark assessments will be developed in additional SEDAR cycles and will not reduce the 2 benchmark cycles annually allocated to Council assessments.

SEDAR guideline revisions necessary to incorporate Shark assessments into the full SEDAR framework will be developed by SEDAR and HMS staff for consideration at the next meeting. Items to address include appointment of workshop participants, schedule and Terms of Reference approval, HMS and SEDAR staff obligations, and funding sources for travel and administrative support.

8. *Schedule Review*

- a. Priority benchmark assessments for 2010/2011 MSRA requirements
- b. Update assessments
- c. Sharks

The Committee reviewed the current benchmark schedule. Concerns were raised regarding additional benchmark assessments required to improve efforts to address statutory requirements for 2010 and 2011 under the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act and the need for updates of recent Gulf of Mexico assessments. It was acknowledged that future assessment needs will increase as councils implement the OFL/ACL requirements of the reauthorized Act, and methods need to be developed to improve efficiency and productivity.

The Committee discussed the SEDAR 18 benchmark assessment of Gulf and South Atlantic red drum and was presented a letter supporting retention of red drum from member Vince O'Shea, who was unable to attend this meeting. The red drum assessment is important

to the state partners, especially those in the South Atlantic, and planning and preparations are already underway.

Consideration was given to allocating the SEDAR 18 cycle to several stocks in the South Atlantic identified as undergoing overfishing but not yet assessed through SEDAR, or to benchmark assessments of Gulf of Mexico red and gag grouper. The Committee determined that the availability of approved benchmark assessments for Gulf of Mexico grouper allowed addressing concerns with those stocks through assessment updates. The committee discussed the feasibility of assessing alternative South Atlantic stocks in SEDAR 18, such as speckled hind, Warsaw grouper, red grouper, or black grouper that are scheduled for later SEDAR cycles, and determined that such a change was impractical at this time due to the lack of data on these stocks and the time required to evaluate age structures. The committee decided against changing the benchmark schedule.

The committee discussed the update schedule for 2009 in detail. Gulf red snapper is scheduled for update in late 2009, to include data through 2008, and is expected to be a major update requiring considerable time and resources. The Committee directed GMFMC representatives to request that their SSC consider update Terms of Reference at their next meeting and identify the scope of the red snapper update. The SEFSC will provide a summary of additional data and recent research for consideration by the SSC when it meets in May.

The committee recommended adding Gulf of Mexico gag and red grouper to the update schedule for completion in mid-2009, prior to red snapper. It is suggested that these two stocks be updated together in a single update workshop. Chairman Ponwith will consult with SEFSC staff and consider resource availability, and GMFMC staff will consult with their SSC to establish TORs and define the scope of those updates. The Committee agreed to hold a conference call on Tuesday, June 10 to finalize the update plan for 2009.

The committee recommended adding Gulf of Mexico vermilion snapper, gray triggerfish, and greater amberjack to the update schedule in 2010.

The committee discussed resource availability and assessment workload. It was noted that future needs could easily reach 10 updates a year, in addition to the 2-4 benchmark stocks.

The committee requested copies for the next meeting of the NOAA fisheries report to congress detailing assessment capabilities and assessment scientist availability. SEDAR staff will solicit similar information from the state agencies in the region.

A benchmark review of Gulf of Mexico menhaden was added tentatively for 2011.

The committee was advised that the next shark activity could be addressed as a benchmark of large coastal sharks in 2010/2011. The next assessment of small coastal sharks may be addressed through an update, perhaps in 2012. These items will be addressed further in future meetings.

#### 9. *Prioritized Data Needs*

The committee received updates from the Councils on their research prioritizations. The SAFMC plan is complete and the Gulf's should be complete this summer. The CFMC is working with their SSC now. The Committee's role in this activity will be reconsidered once guidelines for the reauthorized MSA are available.

## 10. Procedural Issues

### a. Determination of Best Available Science

The Committee reviewed the SEDAR intent to provide 'Best Available Science' and reiterated that SSCs are not obligated to provide a second review of a SEDAR assessment. There was discussion regarding which entity is obligated to provide the 'Best available science' determination, whether it is the Secretary through NOAA fisheries and SEFSC or whether it is a charge to the SSCs. Future guidelines related to the reauthorized MSA may address this, so the committee decided table this item until guidelines are final.

### b. Management Information Development

SERO staff will be responsible for completing the SEDAR management information worksheet well enough in advance of future data workshops to address analysts concerns. SEDAR staff was directed to submit a request via Memo to the Regional Administrator. There was discussion of possible state-federal regulatory differences. SEDAR staff was directed to consult the GSMFC website for state regulations back to 1997. The South Atlantic Council will develop a state regulatory database for federally managed species.

### c. Assessment Workshop Objectives & Process

The Committee was briefed on ongoing challenges in the assessment workshop process. The primary issue is that datasets are completed late, thereby delaying model development and distribution to assessment workshop participants. The Committee expressed concern with continued delays and lack of adherence to deadlines, but understood the challenges posed by first time benchmark assessments and the SEDAR mandate to reconsider all available data sources. Additional milestones added to the 2008 benchmarks, primarily in the form of conference calls prior to workshops, have proved ineffective in the current SEDAR 16 king mackerel assessment. However, it was acknowledged that SEDAR 16 and 17 were subjected to accelerated schedules and may not provide a fair evaluation of recent procedural changes. SEDAR staff was directed to keep the Committee updated on progress during subsequent workshops.

### d. Completion of Assessment Workshop Reports

The Committee reviewed the assessment workshop report process and agreed that complete and thorough documentation is critical. Concerns were raised as to the ability of limited SEFSC assessment staff to accommodate additional report writing responsibilities as well as the need for greatly increased assessment production. SEFSC needs to evaluate overall workload expectations and available manpower before considering procedural changes. No action was taken at this time.

### e. SEDAR Data Spreadsheet and Data Compiler

The committee supported the data spreadsheet process and SEFSC will retain responsibility for providing staff to compile the spreadsheet.

### f. State Cooperative Statistics Agreements

It was noted that not all states have such agreements. In particular, the Gulf states operate differently and not all have formal statistics agreement. The committee recognized that current support to the states seldom covers basic council operations.

g. Post-SEDAR revisions and updates

The Committee agreed that any revisions or updates prepared following SEDAR review should be provided to SEDAR staff for inclusion in the administrative record and posting to the SEDAR website.

*11. Increasing Assessment Productivity*

The committee agreed that current SEDAR productivity does not meet Council needs and that this situation will be exacerbated by the OFL/ACL process. Little opportunities to significantly streamline the benchmark process have been identified and efforts to increase resources may benefit the long-term but will not address short-term needs. All partners are encourage to consult with their staffs and committees to develop acceptable means of increasing productivity.

The Committee agreed that greater use should be made of update assessments that build on an approved framework as these require considerably less time and resources. It is likely that as many as 10 update assessments a year may be required to address current needs. Achieving such productivity will require adherence to manageable Terms of Reference and an understanding that assessments can be informative for management even if they do not address every conceivable scenario. Expectations must be realistic and the process must be managed so that assessments required to develop management guidance do not become endless research projects. All assessments have uncertainty, but such uncertainty should not be used to endlessly delay action.

The Committee tabled this item until the next meeting.

*12. Future Procedural Workshops*

The Committee agreed that the next procedural workshop should address estimation and treatment of natural mortality. SEDAR staff will coordinate with SEFSC to develop a proposal for a national workshop to develop a best practices document, perhaps as a topic of the next National Stock Assessment Workshop. SEDAR staff was directed to contact Steve Murawski following this year's SAW to determine if national interest exists. Additional resources will be considered if the workshop achieves national status.

A progress report and complete proposal will be provided at the next meeting. Additional topics will be considered at that time.

*13. Regional Management Coordination*

- a. Update from April 22-23 Regional Operations Meeting
- b. Evaluate whether to continue this activity via SEDAR Steering Committee
- c. Council Activities Updates
- d. SERO Outlook
- e. SEFSC Outlook

The Committee was briefed on the recent regional operations meeting. It was agreed that in the future such meetings would be held in conjunction with SEDAR Steering Committee meetings. SERO staff will handle the portion of the meeting addressing management operations.

Each partner was asked to provide at the next meeting an updated timeline of management projects, including staff assignments, extending 2 years into the future. SEFSC

staff is preparing a project and staff overview timeline similar to that prepared and submitted by SERO and SAFMC. Staff will develop an integrated timeline of management and assessment activities to help the Committee manage workload issues and foresee scheduling jams.

#### *14. Budget Update*

Bob Mahood provided an overview of the CY 2008 budget and briefed the committee on the budget development process.

#### *15. Other Business*

An issue was raised regarding inconsistency in assessment outputs. The Committee agreed that the SEDAR assessment summary should present consistent outputs using consistent units in a standardized framework and that the summary should provide critical outputs in a simple and easy to understand format. An outline and format will be developed and approved by the Steering Committee at the next meeting.

SEDAR staff was directed to consult with Council, HMS, SERO, and SEFSC representatives to review past summary reports and develop a summary report framework that provides the necessary information in a mutually agreeable format. The working group will consist of John Carmichael (SAFMC), Rick Leard (GSMFC), Graciela Garcia-Moliner (CFMC), Karyl Brewster-Geisz (HMS), Jack McGovern and Andy Strelcheck (SERO), and Erik Williams (SEFSC).

#### *16. Next Meeting*

The committee recommended that one of the SEDAR Steering Committee meetings each year should be held in conjunction with one of the CCC meetings. Timing of the Fall/Winter CCC meeting is usually dictated by budget availability, so it will likely be held with the Spring/Summer meeting.

The Committee will establish a date for its next meeting during the conference call scheduled for June 10. The meeting will be hosted by the SAFMC and held in Charleston, SC.

### **Summary Motions:**

1. Move to establish the SEFSC Director as chair of the SEDAR Steering Committee. Crabtree/Mahood; carried.
2. Move to nominate Duane Harris as vice-Chair beginning with the next meeting. Simpson/Mahood; carried.
3. Move to approve the summary minutes of the October 2007 meeting. Geiger/Simpson; carried.
4. Move to formally incorporate shark assessments into the SEDAR process, provide HMS representation on the SEDAR Steering Committee, and direct staff to develop the necessary procedural revisions for consideration at the next meeting. Crabtree/Geiger; carried.

## Summary Task Assignments & Due Dates:

### SEDAR Staff:

- Arrange June 10 Conference Call: 05/14/08
- Modify guidelines to establish SEFSC Director as Steering Committee Chair : next meeting
- Develop proposed Guidelines changes to fully incorporate sharks and HMS into SEDAR: next meeting
- Update benchmark and update planning schedule : following 06/10 conference call
- Obtain copies of the report to congress addressing assessment staff availability and provide to committee: next meeting
- Review MSA for language addressing determination of 'Best Available Science', review associated text in future guidelines, and report to the committee: next meeting
- Modify guidelines to assign responsibility for completing SEDAR management information worksheets to SERO: next meeting
- Continue efforts to find ways of increasing productivity: next meeting
- Report on possibility of elevating natural mortality workshop to national level: 06/10/08
- Develop proposal for natural mortality workshop: next meeting
- Provide example summary reports to workgroup for review: 05/23/08
- Develop summary report outline and format proposal: next meeting

### GMFMC

- Direct SSC to review red snapper update data report from SEFSC and develop TORs for the red snapper update: report on scope and feasibility by 06/10/2008
- Direct SSC to develop TORs for red and gag grouper updates: report on scope and feasibility by 06/10/2008
- Prepare amendment staff assignments and task timeline: next meeting

### CFMC

- Prepare amendment staff assignments and task timeline: next meeting

### SAFMC

- Update amendment staff assignments and task timeline: next meeting

### HMS

- With SEDAR staff, develop guidelines revisions to formally incorporate shark assessments into SEDAR: next meeting
- Prepare amendment staff assignments and task timeline: next meeting

### SERO

- Update amendment staff assignments and task timeline: next meeting

### SEFSC

- Evaluate feasibility of conducting updates of red snapper and gag and red grouper in 2009: by May Gulf SSC meeting.
- Prepare management and assessment project staff assignments and tasks timeline: next meeting
- Prepare memo of invitation to a seat on the SEDAR Steering Committee to HMS leadership