

***SEDAR* Procedures Guide**

SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review

Cooperative Stock Assessment Development Program of:

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Caribbean Fishery Management Council

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Division

SEDAR

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Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) is a cooperative Fishery Management Council process initiated to improve the quality and reliability of assessments of fishery resources in the southeastern United States, including the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and US Caribbean. SEDAR is managed by the three Regional Fishery Management Councils in the Southeast in coordination with NOAA Fisheries and the Interstate Fishery Commissions (Atlantic States MFC and Gulf States MFC). SEDAR seeks to improve the quality and reliability of stock assessments, improve the quantitative basis of fishery management actions, and increase the relevance of research and monitoring programs in the Southeast Region. This document describes SEDAR Policy and Procedures as determined by the SEDAR Steering Committee. A broader overview of the program and its development over time is provided by the companion document *SEDAR Description and Background*.

1. Administration and Oversight

1.1 Oversight

- Oversight of the SEDAR process and operations schedule is provided by the SEDAR Steering Committee.
- The SEDAR Steering Committee shall be included as an official Council Advisory Panel in each Council's SOPPs.
- The SEDAR Steering Committee shall meet at least once annually to review policies and establish the work plan.
- The Steering Committee is composed of representatives of the SEDAR Cooperators, including:
 - NOAA Fisheries Southeast Science Center Director
 - NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Administrator
 - Executive Directors of the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Fishery Management Councils
 - Chairs of the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Fishery Management Councils
 - NOAA/NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division Chief
 - Executive Directors of the Atlantic and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commissions.
- The SEDAR Steering Committee is supported by SEDAR Staff.
- Members may designate alternates.
- The Steering Committee shall elect a Chair and vice-Chair from its membership. Steering Committee officers shall serve 2 year terms. Officers may serve successive terms without limit.

1.2 Administration

- SEDAR is administered through the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils with funding provided by NOAA Fisheries and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.
- The South Atlantic Council ED, Administrative Officer, and SEDAR Program Manager shall develop an annual (Calendar Year) SEDAR activities schedule and budget for consideration by the Steering Committee.

- The South Atlantic Council provides the SEDAR Program Manager, SEDAR Coordinators, and general SEDAR administrative support. The South Atlantic Council administers travel and meeting arrangements.
- The South Atlantic Council maintains the SEDAR Administrative Record.
- The SEDAR program provides travel expenses for workshop panelists appointed by the Cooperators, Council members appointed to observe the workshops, and associated support staff.
- The Gulf Council provides administrative support for SEDAR workshop involving Gulf Council managed species.

1.3 Cooperator Obligations

- Each Cooperator shall approve the project schedule and terms of reference, and appoint workshop participants. The Cooperator may include review of such documents by their technical and advisory bodies as part of their approval process
- Each Cooperator shall provide notices of workshops and SEDAR activities, such as through press releases, mailing lists, or newsletter notices, as they deem appropriate.
- Each Cooperator shall designate a staff person who shall serve as a lead contact and liaison between their agency and SEDAR Staff for SEDAR projects involving their organization. This designee shall be responsible for ensuring appointments to SEDAR panels are made promptly and that their organizations appointees meet deadlines for data and document submissions. This designee is responsible for assisting SEDAR staff in preparing for SEDAR workshops and ensuring designated workshop roles are filled.
- Each SEDAR Cooperator shall establish guidelines and procedures for approving schedules, terms of reference, and panel appointments.
- NOAA General Counsel recommended that Council FMP's and Amendments incorporate the SEDAR process as outlined in these Guidelines as a source of assessment information. The Steering Committee acknowledges that SEDAR is not necessarily the sole source of assessment information available to the Councils and other Cooperators.
- Invitations to appointed participants shall be issued by the Cooperator making the appointment so as to make it clear which organization is responsible for appointments.
- Partners shall provide written notification to the SEDAR Coordinator of schedule and TOR approval and a list of appointed participants.
- Nothing in these guidelines is intended to prohibit any Cooperator from pursuing its own chosen process of further technical review and development of advice necessary for its management programs.
- Each Cooperator is allowed to determine how SEDAR assessment products are presented to the Cooperator and its technical and advisory bodies, and may negotiate with the lead assessment agency to ensure appropriate presentation of information.

2. SEDAR Panel Participant and Appointment Process

- Each Council and HMS shall establish a SEDAR Advisory Panel (typically considered the SEDAR Pool) from which participants shall be selected for each workshop. Note that provisions related to the SEDAR Advisory Panel do not apply to the Interstate Fisheries Commissions.

- All Workshop Panel participants appointed by a Council or HMS must be included in that Council's SEDAR Advisory Panel.
- The SEDAR Advisory Panel is governed by the same requirements as other Council Advisory Panels and should be included in each Council's SOPPs. Each Council and HMS shall establish a process for making SEDAR AP appointments.
- Each Cooperator shall establish a process for making SEDAR workshop appointments.
- The Cooperator requesting the assessment and having jurisdiction over the species assessed is responsible for appointing panelists.
- Each Cooperator shall ensure that all appointed participants are eligible, in that they are members of the Cooperator's SEDAR Advisory Panel.
- The SEFSC Director and SERO Administrator are responsible for designating agency employees to participate on workshop panels, to provide expertise, data, and analyses, and represent their offices as appropriate.
- In the event of joint jurisdiction, each Cooperator with an interest makes appointments from within its SEDAR Advisory Panel. Cooperators involved in joint assessments should establish participant numbers as part of the annual SEDAR budget review.
- For a Review Workshop Panel where the number of panelists is more restrictive, when multiple Cooperators have an interest in the species being assessed, the Cooperators shall each agree to an equitable division of the available seats when the SEDAR project is approved by the Steering Committee.

3. SEDAR Approach

3.1 Workshop Process

- SEDAR Assessments shall be developed and peer reviewed through a series of workshops and webinars. A report documenting findings and recommendations shall be developed at each step. Individual workshop reports shall be compiled to create the overall Assessment Report.
- The charge to each workshop is specified in terms of reference.
- All workshops and webinars are open public meetings subject to the standards and procedures of the Cooperators and provisions in this document.
- All SEDAR workshops and webinars, and steering committee meetings, will be recorded and recordings retained for the Administrative Record. Written transcripts of workshop proceedings and steering committee meetings may be prepared upon written request by any SEDAR Steering Committee member.
- Public comment and questions shall be taken during SEDAR workshops, at an appropriate time determined by the workshop Chair.
- The names and affiliations of all participants and attendees will be disclosed in workshop documents.

- Written comment shall be submitted in accordance with the stated policies of the Cooperators involved with the project.
- All appointed panelists shall actively contribute to the workshop process by reviewing all workshop documentation, preparing supporting analyses, contributing documents and datasets, participating in workshop discussion, and producing workshop report text.
- Panelists are expected to provide alternative solutions along with any criticisms and work toward consensus while conducting themselves with respectful and professional behavior. No personal attacks or aggressive behavior will be tolerated from any participants, and those who persist in such actions will be asked to leave.
- Council Members and senior agency representatives may participate as official observers but not as panel members.
- Members of the public who attend are noted as observers.
- The SEFSC Director may appoint additional experts (such as university researchers, international experts, and NOAA Fisheries employees from outside the SE Region) for Data and Assessment Workshop panels as necessary to complete assigned Terms of Reference and ensure adequate expertise is available at each workshop.

3.2 Workshop Documentation

- All submitted materials are subject to public distribution through the SEDAR website.
- Documents will be distributed to participants electronically through FTP or other web-based sources.
- Workshop documentation shall consist of working papers prepared for each workshop, reference documents selected from published literature, and the reports of each workshop
- Working papers shall be considered draft with distribution restricted to the workshop panel until the conclusion of the workshop.
- Draft workshop reports shall not be distributed outside the workshop panel until finalized by the panel and the chair.
- Each participant is individually responsible for ensuring that their viewpoints and opinions are reflected in the workshop report.
- SEDAR workshop panels are not approved for viewing of confidential information. Confidentiality shall be maintained in accordance with agency and data collector requirements for all submitted datasets, working papers, and workshop reports. Each author or data provider is personally responsible for maintaining confidentiality.
- The final assessment report, including the reports of all SEDAR processes and any necessary addenda, shall be disseminated to the Cooperators involved in the project through memorandum from the SEDAR Coordinator following completion of the review panel report and compilation of the final SEDAR Stock Assessment Report.

- Each Cooperator is responsible for subsequent distribution of SEDAR documentation to its panels and committees.

3.3 Science Based Decision Making

- SEDAR panel decisions and recommendations shall be achieved through consensus of the entire workshop panel rather than formal votes and shall be structured to ensure that the full range of variability and uncertainty is reflected.
- SEDAR workshop panels shall consider biological and technical aspects of datasets and stock assessments and base recommendations upon the scientific merit of the alternatives proposed.
- Decisions shall not be based on possible management outcomes or regulatory impacts. At no point should a SEDAR workshop panel consider such concerns.
 - Participants who embark upon discussions of management implications or regulatory consequences will be notified by the workshop chair that such deliberations are beyond the scope of SEDAR workshops and explicitly and intentionally prohibited.
 - If such issues continue to be raised and notices to the contrary are ignored, the workshop Chair, Council staff, and Council members present are authorized by the Steering Committee to ask the offending individual to leave the workshop.
 - If the individual refuses to leave the workshop upon such a request, the Chair shall be under no obligation to recognize them during further workshop panel discussions.

3.4 Data Workshop Details

- Data workshop participants shall assemble and critique all available fishery data, monitoring programs, and life history information.
- Data workshops shall be chaired by the SEDAR Coordinator.
- Data workshop participants shall include database managers, data specialists, and data collectors; life history researchers and biologists; and stock assessment scientists from States, NOAA Fisheries, Interstate Commissions, universities, independent laboratories and institutions; and Council appointed representatives.
- Data workshops shall be structured around working groups devoted to primary data areas.
- Each group shall select a rapporteur from among its members to take notes during workgroup and plenary sessions.
- All decisions of the data workshop are made during the plenary sessions by consensus of the entire membership.

3.5 Assessment Process

- The assessment process is conducted primarily through webinars
- Assessment process participants shall develop assessment models to estimate population parameters and management benchmarks, and evaluate uncertainties.

- Assessment process participants include NOAA Fisheries stock assessment scientists, Commission/State/university/independent assessment scientists, Council advisory panel (commercial, recreational, and/or NGO) representatives, Scientific & Statistical Committee members, and Council staff and members.
- Assessment workshops and webinars shall be chaired by the SEDAR Coordinator.

3.6 Assessment Pre-Review

- A peer review draft assessment report shall be distributed for public comment prior to the review workshop.
- Availability shall be noticed in the Federal Register
- Comments received shall be compiled by SEDAR staff and forwarded to the assessment panel for consideration. The assessment panel shall conduct such revisions and additional analyses it deems appropriate and prepare the final assessment workshop report.

3.7 Review Workshop

- The Review Workshop shall provide an independent peer review of SEDAR stock assessments. The intent of the review is to ensure that the assessment and results presented are scientifically sound and that decision makers are provided adequate advice that reflects uncertainties in the data and methods.
- Review workshop panels shall be composed of:
 - 3 reviewers appointed by the CIE (Center for Independent Experts),
 - up to 3 reviewers from the Science and Statistical Committee (or its analog) of the cooperator having jurisdiction over the stocks under review
 - 1 reviewer appointed by each Cooperator having jurisdiction over the stocks under review.
- The Review workshop shall be chaired by a member of the Cooperator's SSC or other scientific body. This chair shall serve as a facilitator, not as a reviewer, and is responsible for compiling the review panel report.
- The lead analytical agency for each stock shall provide a rapporteur to support the review panel during their deliberations.
- All reviewers shall be independent from the assessments under review and any potential regulations resulting from the assessment findings.
- Each Cooperator may appoint several official observers, typically including representative of the Council or additional scientists, and appropriate Advisory Panels.
- Review panels may not conduct alternative assessments. Panels may request additional sensitivity runs and minor corrections. Results of such runs shall be documented in addenda to the assessment report.
- Assessment findings shall be presented by the lead analysts with support of other assessment panel members as appropriate and necessary.

- The review panel shall not provide specific management advice. Review panel recommendations are advisory in nature.
- If the Review Panel finds an assessment deficient to the extent that technical staff present cannot correct the deficiencies during the course of the workshop, or the Panel deems that desired modifications would result in an alternative assessment, then the Review Panel shall provide in writing the required remedial measures and suggest an appropriate approach for correcting the assessment and subsequently reviewing the corrected assessment.

4. SEDAR Assessment Classifications

4.1 Benchmark Assessments

- Standard SEDAR assessments are considered benchmarks and involve the full process described herein.
- Each managed stock should be benchmark assessed before updates are considered.
- Each subsequent benchmark of a previously assessed stock provides an opportunity for consideration of new data and methods and reevaluation of prior benchmark decisions and recommendations.

4.2 Assessment Updates

- The basic benchmark framework of input data and model configuration may be updated in the future by adding additional years of data.
- The Steering Committee shall determine whether a benchmark or update is necessary.
- Assessment updates adhere to the same administrative policies, record keeping, and support requirements as benchmark assessments.
- Updates may incorporate technical advances approved through other SEDAR benchmark assessments where appropriate. The SSC shall be consulted when considering such modifications to the benchmark framework and shall recommend to the Cooperator whether the desired changes may result in the need for a benchmark rather than an update.
- The SEDAR Update process is modified from the benchmark process to increase efficiency.
 - Data are reviewed through a scoping conference call or webinar
 - The benchmark assessment model is updated with the recent data and developed through several webinars.
 - Model results are finalized during an update workshop.
 - Peer review of the update assessment is provided by the SSC.
 - The SSC shall develop the peer review report and forward it to the SEDAR Coordinator for inclusion in the assessment update report.
- All general administrative procedures described herein apply to the update process.

5. Role of the SSCs

- SSC members shall participate in all phases of the SEDAR process.
- The SSC shall not provide another peer review of SEDAR assessments when the final report is received.
- SSCs shall determine whether assessment findings are adequate for management and to provide fishing level recommendations to the Council.
- SSCs may request additional sensitivity analyses if deemed necessary to adequately characterize uncertainty and additional projection analyses if necessary to adequately evaluate management alternatives.
- If the SSC determines that a mistake has been made in the assessment model or in any input datasets, and further determines that such mistakes significantly impact the assessment results, and in particular the magnitude and direction of required management actions, the SSC shall prepare a written report for submission to the Council and SEDAR Steering Committee which details (1) the nature of the mistake, including appropriate documentation of the correct information; (2) specific concerns related to the mistake, including the estimated parameters that are affected; and (3) the recommended process and timeline for correction, review, and reconsideration by the SSC.
- The SSC is responsible for presenting to their Council their evaluation of the adequacy of the assessment, their interpretation and summary of the assessment methods and findings, and their recommendations regarding appropriate actions.
- Councils may request that the lead analyst or other members of the analytical team provide an overview presentation to the Council and Advisory Panels. Such requests should be made to the appropriate representative of the lead assessment agency in accordance with normal agency and Cooperator procedures.

6. Relation to State Agencies

- State agencies may request SEDAR peer review of assessments conducted by their staff or through contract.
- SEDAR Staff may support the state agency during data and assessment phases of the process if feasible; SEDAR projects will take precedent, however.
- SEDAR Staff will serve as a liaison between the state agency and the other Cooperators for purposes of reviewing schedules, terms of reference, and accommodating Cooperator appointees.
- The Steering Committee may also request that state agencies provide analytical lead in developing assessments through SEDAR, especially with regard to species found primarily within one state's boundaries.

7. NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Division

- For the HMS Management Division, NMFS' staff shall review the report and process and determine whether the assessment findings are adequate for management.
- Staff may request further evaluation of assessment uncertainties and alternative projection scenarios if deemed necessary for management.
- If these staff determine that a mistake has been made in the assessment model or in any input datasets, and further determines that such mistakes significantly impact the assessment results, in particular the magnitude and direction of required management actions, the staff shall prepare a written report for submission to the SEDAR Steering Committee that details (1) the nature of the mistake, including appropriate documentation of the correct information; (2) specific concerns related to the mistake, including the estimated parameters that are affected; and (3) the recommended process and timeline for correction, review, and reconsideration by NMFS.
- Upon completion of its review, NMFS shall consider the SEDAR assessment findings and the results of any additional supplementary analyses requested in developing specific management recommendations as the best scientific information available.
- Representatives of the analytic team that participated in one or more workshop or the SEDAR staff will assist the HMS Management Division in making a presentation of the assessment to the HMS Advisory Panel either during or after the NMFS review and recommendations phase.