Topical Working Group Discussion Document – September 2020

Background
During the May 2020 SEDAR Steering Committee Meeting, Chair Porch provided the Committee a brief review of the Science Center's intentions and expectations for the Research Track (RT) and Operational Assessment (OA) approaches. He highlighted some potential misunderstandings that have arisen in the implementation of the recent OAs, and provided recommendations for future OAs. The following is from the draft May SEDAR Steering Committee Report:

Operational Assessment Process Clarification
Chair Porch provided the Committee a brief overview regarding the Science Center's original intent in proposing the Research Track (RT) and Operational Assessment (OA) approaches.
- *Research Track assessments were most similar to previous benchmark assessments, but with a more flexible timeline and no requirement to produce management advice.*
- *Operational Assessments should focus on taking the peer-reviewed assessment and updating it with the most recent data, most closely resembling previous Update assessments.*

The SEFSC is responsible for preparing OAs and managing the technical aspects of them, including data acquisition and model development.

The SEFSC did not anticipate having Assessment Panels for every OA. However, increasingly panels and in-person meetings are requested by the Cooperators. The SEFSC notes that the panels and workshops result in OAs taking much more time than originally anticipated.

The SEFSC recommended eliminating "Assessment Panels' for all future Operational Assessments. Instead, OAs may have Topical Working Groups (TWG), which are ad-hoc working groups assembled to discuss specific topics identified in the SoW. Those topics should focus on potential variations from the previously-approved model structure and data. The SEFSC believes that this change will reinforce the intent to focus on new issues within OAs, rather than a broad review of all aspects of the assessment, and that the name change will help achieve the role change.

Topical Working Groups (TWGs):
- *Tasked to review and make recommendations on specific topics identified in the SoWs.*
- *Comprised of members of the SSC, stakeholders, and other technical experts*
- *May meet via webinars or in-person workshops; process recommendation should be included in the SoW*
- *Will produce a written report (SEDAR Working Paper) documenting their discussions and recommendations*
- *Timing of the TWG needs to be such that the report documenting the discussions and recommendations is available in time for the analytic teams to incorporate the information into the assessment.*
- *Most TWGs should be organized within the SEDAR Process, as that process it is already set up to handle Cooperator appointments, notices, meeting and webinar logistics, etc.*

Topical Working Group Discussion Document – September 2020

SEDAR and SEFSC staff met to discuss the implications of this change and how to logistically incorporate TWGs into the SEDAR process in an efficient manner.

The overall intent of the switch from Assessment Panels to TWGs is to increase the efficiency of the assessment process. That said, the approach needs to be developed in such a way that the integrity of the SEDAR Process is maintained. The iterative nature of the assessment process must be acknowledged, specifically the need for feedback between the Topical Working Groups and the analytic team developing the assessment.

SEDAR Staff also provided presentations to both the GMFMC and SAFMC SSCs to gather additional information and inquiries about the new process.

Below is a summary of the discussions and questions raised by various groups.

Questions Regarding the Incorporation of Topical Working Groups into Operational Assessments

How many Topical Working Groups will be convened for an Operational Assessment?
- Should not exceed two or three as the assessment has already been approved through a peer review. If more topics need to be discussed, a RT should be considered.
- Will likely depend on topics to be discussed.
- May need different groups if expertise does not overlap every topic for review
- Not all Operational Assessments will require TWGs.

Each Topical Working Group will likely need a Statement of Work.
These SoWs should include:

1. What is the goal for this Topical Working Group?
2. What data is needed?
3. What is the timing for this group to get its recommendations compete?
4. Who would participate in the topical working group?

Will the Center be involved in the development of these SoWs? - Likely

When do the Topical Working Groups meet within the overall Project Schedule?
- Will probably be topic specific
- If a data issue (life history, selection of indices, review of landings, etc.), the TWG will need to meet early in the process so recommendations can be finalized and provided to data providers prior to final analytic product deadline. The amount of lead time will likely be topic-specific and will need to be incorporated into the development of the specific Project Schedule.
- If a modeling issue (incorporating uncertainty, Steepness discussion, etc.), the TWG will likely need to meet after data compilation, and perhaps some modeling work, is complete. Timing will need to be considered when Project Schedule is developed.

Who will cover the costs of these TWGs for a given Operational Assessment?
- For TWGs conducted via within a SEDAR OA, SEDAR will continue to supply logistical and financial support similar to the previous process (within the constraints of its budget).
  - For TWGs held via webinars, SEDAR will provide logistical support. Any SSC or other stipends that may be required for individual participants will be provided by the Cooperator.
  - For TWGs that require an in-person meeting, SEDAR will provide all logistical support and cover meeting expenses, and provide travel support for a specific number of appointed participants, as allowed by the budget.

How are individuals appointed to TWGs?
- Once the details of a TWG are identified (topic, timing, process, etc.) Cooperators will be asked to appoint individuals to serve on specific TWGs for a given assessment. The Cooperators will follow their approved appointment procedures as for other SEDAR processes.

How do we ensure that the information that the TWG needs is available?
- Depending on data source, this may need to be added to the NMFS planning spreadsheet
- Data may also be required from non-Agency sources.
- Who will be responsible for ensuring the data will be available?
  - As the Center is ultimately responsible for the assessment product, it will most likely fall on the Agency to ensure the appropriate data will be available for the TWGs to review
  - That said, there will need to be reasonable limits on the number of variations of a data set that may be examined
- SEDAR is not involved in requesting data compilation and analysis
  - In previous assessments, it is understood data compilation and analysis would be done as part of the assessment process. Will this be the case for TWG information?
  - The determination of which data will be needed by a TWG, and who will be required to produce that data, will have to be discussed in the planning stages of a specific assessment.
- Council data requests require review which would extend the timeline needed to plan ahead.

Should SEDAR expect working papers from the Science Center in support of the Topical Working Group process?
- Will likely depend on the topic but in most cases, the TWG working paper will be the only new piece of documentation produced.
- Reference documents may be provided to aid in the TWGs discussions

What level of involvement should SEDAR expect with regards to Center Staff?
- Needed data providers – may be involved with TWG discussions as needed
- Analytic team – will likely be involved in all TWG discussions

Who will be Chairing the TWGs?
- As this is a Technical component to the assessment, it should not be the SEDAR Coordinators.
- The Center will likely Chair the majority of the TWGs, though they may choose to appoint another Technical Chair to serve in that role for a specific assessment/topic.

Topical Working Groups will need to produce a SEDAR Working Paper documenting their discussions and recommendations. Who will be tasked with that task?
- Will likely depend on the topic but in most cases, an expert in the data involved or issue being discussed will take the lead on producing the working paper, with support from other members of the TWG.

What is the feedback mechanism between the TWG and the analytic team?

The following general approach for a TWG process was discussed:
1) Topical Working Group meets to discuss assigned topic
   - May meet a few times depending on need
   - First call to discuss topic in general, review potential data sources, come up with "homework" list of requested analysis
     - Analytic team and data providers will be available to answer questions/provide data or additional analysis
   - Second call to review analysis and discuss recommendations
2) TWG will produce a SEDAR Working Paper documenting discussions and final recommendations
3) Analysts will implement recommendations and evaluate results
4) On a publicly-noticed webinar, analysts will present results of the recommendation on the assessment to the TWG
   - Gives TWG chance to see impacts of their recommendation
   - Gives analysts a chance to present any issues that may have arisen from recommendation and provide guidance on a way forward
   - Public webinar will serve as part of the record for the decisions

General Operational Assessment Questions
Should SEDAR expect working papers from the Science Center to document other components of the operational assessment not under TWG review?
- That will depend on whether the Center believes additional documentation of the methods or results is needed that will not be included in the assessment report.

How do we incorporate a ToR for data/research that is produced in the 18-month time period between the approval of the statement of work and the start of the assessment process?
Should new information become available after the Sows and ToRs are finalized, the following process was suggested:
- Cooperator writes a memo to the SEFSC detailing the new information and requests if it may be accommodated within the frame work of the current assessment

- The Center will evaluate the new information, discuss how it may be accommodated within the assessment structure and timing constraints of the OA underway, and respond to the Cooperator request
- This is very similar to how additional data is currently considered for incorporation to an assessment already underway when the new data/method is made available.

Should there be some consideration to conducting additional workshops (procedural style) to help address some larger issues and address topics for multiple species at once? This may decrease the number of topical working groups needed for operational assessments.

- Who organizes these? Council? SEDAR?
- Who would fund these?
- More discussion is needed regarding this topic