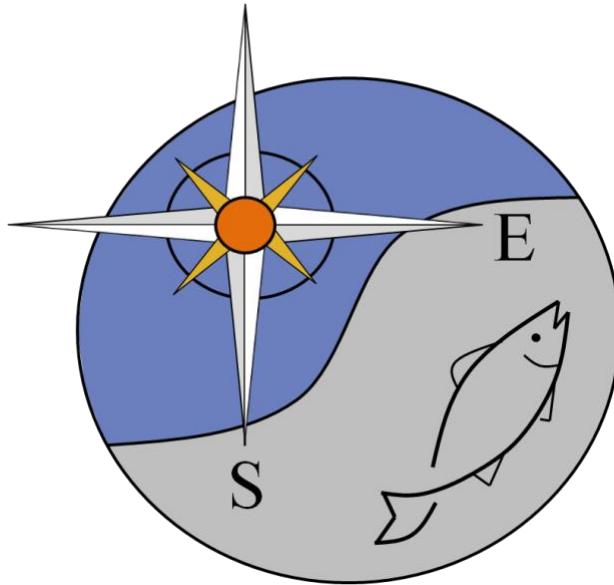


SEDAR



SEDAR Steering Committee Meeting Summary

February 7-8, 2023

Charleston, SC

Report Content Note:

To provide context for recommendations and maintain the full record, this document combines the briefing summary provided to the Committee for consideration during the meeting as well as summary of Committee discussion points and recommendations.

Outcomes from the meeting are found under the section headers “Meeting Outcome”.

Version: FINAL

5/17/2023

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Attachment 3: Description of the Role of the SSC from the SEDAR SOPPs

Attachment 4a: SEFSC Research Track/Operational Assessment Process Review and Proposal

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Attachment 4c: Presentation – Getting the Research Track Back on the Rails (or Lay New Tracks)

Attachment 5: Research Track/Operational Assessment/Topical Working Group Guidance Document

Attachment 6: Operational Assessments Topical Working Groups Process Summary

Attachment 7a: Research Track/Operational Assessment Development History (2019-present)

Attachment 7b: SEDAR Research Track – Operational Assessment Approach Development and Discussion Background (Attachment 5 of May 2018 Steering Committee Meeting)

Attachment 7c: Research Track Reference Documents Overview (Attachment 6 of May 2018 Steering Committee Meeting)

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Attachment 12: Modifications to the Project Planning Grid from the September 2022 Steering Committee Summary

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Carolyn Belcher, SAFMC
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Meeting Outcomes Summary

This Meeting Outcomes Summary highlights the major decisions of the Committee during the meeting. Additional details can be found under the heading “Meeting Outcome” for each relevant section and are italicized throughout the report.

SEDAR Process Review and Discussion

The Committee discussed some of the administrative details for TWGs. The following points were clarified:

- The IPT-style meetings are convened, conducted, and chaired by the lead analytical agency.*
- The Cooperators need a record of who attends the IPT-style meetings.*

The Committee discussed the TWG feedback provided by SEDAR Staff. The STC needs to work toward further improvements in the TWG process, particularly to better integrate the SSC in the process, ensure that process provisions do not prohibit developing the best assessment practicable at the time, and establish appropriate expectations for the SSC review and use of assessment products.

The Committee had a discussion regarding the SEFSC’s recommendation to move away from the concept of including a terminal year of data in the Statements of Work or Terms of Reference. The Committee agreed that SEDAR and the Center should develop some terminology for inclusion in future SoWs/ToRs regarding a minimum TY and including information that any additional data available at the data deadline would be welcome.

Jack McGovern provided a verbal update on the development of the BSIA Framework for the SE Region.

- It clarifies that the BSIA determination is the responsibility of the Agency, with advice from the SSCs and Councils.*
- The updated version will be distributed to the SEDAR Steering Committee, and then the individual Cooperators can distribute it for comment as needed.*

Managing expectations regarding the nature and intent of the SSC review is necessary to ensure and appropriate and robust review and avoid delays in providing advice to Cooperators. SSC review activities should be conducted consistent with MSA provisions, NS 1 and 2 guidelines, and NMFS policy directives.

- Cooperators may provide guidance to their individual SSCs (and equivalents) regarding acceptable assessment modifications.*
- Simple sensitivities to gain additional insight on uncertainty may be acceptable requests but asking for changes to configurations or other significant modifications are outside the role of the review body.*

The term “Research Track” has created an expectation that extensive new research and analyses will be conducted during the assessment process, and the bulk of the additional work falls on the lead analytic agencies to complete. This has in turn led to significant ‘mission creep’

it the RT process. Changing the terminology of this assessment type may be needed to clarify expectations.

Implementation of the RT process is proving to be very complex with many moving pieces. Most of the implementation issues are not items that the Steering Committee can resolve.

The Committee agreed that it is too soon to abandon the RT approach, but clarification of expectations is needed for currently scheduled RT assessments through 2025:

- Develop conceptual models that capture the essential dynamics of the system and provide a basis for stock status determinations and fishing level recommendations.*
- Determine what models may be available to capture the essential dynamics given the available data.*
- No need for final, QAQC data. Data streams from previous assessments may be sufficient for developing a working model.*
- Will not focus on model diagnostics.*
- Produce a preliminary model for review.*

The Committee discussed the SEFSC's Portfolio approach to assessments and made the following suggestions:

- The duration of an assessment process lies on a continuum, depending on requirements of a specific assessment. Better communication is needed to clearly explain the factors (for example the number of TWGs) that affect project schedules.*
- The terminology used to describe the assessment categories is important and requires thought. Highlighting the benefits of the different categories, in relation to the three Ts (Timely, Thorough, Transparent) will help with the impression of "better".*
- As interim analyses and management procedure approaches are outside of the SEDAR process, their details will not be included in discussions for the Committee. However, their time and data demands may impact the ability to address other Cooperator requests.*
- Not all species require a sophisticated model development process involving every available piece of data. Some stocks may be adequately served with simpler analyses and supported with a timely and consistent monitoring and management program.*
- SEDAR Staff will work with SEFSC Staff to refine the suggested categories and provide an updated document for discussion at the next meeting. Inclusion of more details/metrics to understand how changing the approach will help with efficiency was requested.*

There was a request to examine the simpler assessment approaches to see if efficiencies may be gained there. The following statement was proposed:

Consensus Statement: The Steering Committee requests that the SEFSC develop and add to each type of assessment outlined in Table 1a-1e a list of potential simpler modeling approaches that could be applied including consideration of a list of data inputs and time/staff requirements for each potential model.

- *The Committee agreed that there is value in considering simpler approaches and making modeling decisions based on the data availability and time requirements.*
- *The SEFSC will produce a document to provide additional information on the costs and benefits of alternative approaches.*

The Committee received a presentation from John Walter (SEFSC) on MSEs/MPs/Interim analyses.

- *The Committee agreed that interim analysis should continue to be managed and scheduled between the SEFSC and Cooperators. The results of an interim analysis and SSC feedback could be posted on the SEDAR website for the appropriate assessment if desired.*
- *The presentation indicated that MSE/MPs will not fall under SEDAR administration and the Committee supported this. It is unclear what role, if any, SEDAR will play in these processes in the future.*

Chair Porch informed the Committee that currently NOAA does not require staff to travel to or from locations of High COVID activity. When the status is Low or Medium, and the position requires travel, then the employees are generally expected to travel. If there are extenuating circumstances preventing travel, a NOAA employee will discuss that with their supervisor, who will decide on that employee's attendance.

The Committee received an update on the status of the Hybrid Proposal document, as it was not received in time for the meeting and discussed potential options regarding changes to the SEDAR policy on virtual participation/observing of in-person workshops.

- *SEDAR currently does not provide for any remote access to in-person meetings.*
- *Hybrid meetings may allow for more individuals who do not wish to or cannot travel to participant during the in-person stages.*
- *Person-to-person communications among stakeholders, data providers, and analytic staff are critical to the development and acceptance of the assessment process and are very difficult to achieve using virtual approaches.*
- *The Committee agreed to broadcast future data and review workshop plenary sessions.*
- *The Committee did not support a hybrid option for SEDAR workshops without more discussion regarding details, best practices, and financial considerations.*
- *It was noted that there is a difference between a hybrid meeting and the informal communications that often happen at in-person meetings. Informal communications are allowed within in-person meetings. Further guidance on informal communications may be offered by the Committee, and it was requested that materials be prepared for the briefing book for the Spring meeting.*

Assessment Schedule Review

The Committee agreed that for the Gulf of Mexico Gray Triggerfish RT on the schedule for 2024 the goal will be to capture the essential dynamics of the stock in a preliminary model that will be reviewed. The most recent data will not be included, and there will be little focus on model diagnostics.

The timing of the development of the SoWs was modified to allow for the SEFSC-SEDAR Master Planning call to be held prior to the Spring Steering Committee meeting. This was needed to allow for the finalization of the SEDAR schedule during the Spring meeting. Specifically, the modification was to change the window for SEFSC-Cooperator SoW negotiations from February 1st – May 1st each year to February 1st – April 1st each year.

Other Business

The SEFSC informed the Committee that an additional analyst for the SA Team is unlikely at this time and there should be four (4) analyst columns on the planning grid for future meetings.

The Committee did not recommend making changes to the current report dissemination practices. SEFSC Staff made recommendations to modify the information contained in the SEDAR SARs to help with this issue:

- *The final SARs should include a candidate base model, set of preliminary reference projections for diagnostic purposes, and stock status.*
- *Allow the SSC (or other technical body) to determine the projection settings used to produce the management advice.*
- *The analytic agency will produce a report documenting the final products used for management advice.*
- *SEDAR will archive those reports on the SEDAR website.*

Table 1: SEDAR Project Planning Grid – February 2023 SEDAR Steering Committee Outcome

Table Color Legend:

Steering Committee Approved and SEFSC Scheduled Projects										FUTURE Requests							
Steering Committee Approved, SEFSC TENTITIVELY SCHEDULED										2025 Preliminary Projects – To Be Finalized at the Spring 2023 Meeting							
SEDAR SCHEDULE OVERVIEW – February 2023 SEDAR Steering Committee Outcome																	
YEAR	SA Team					Gulf Team					Caribbean Team	HMS Team		FL FWCC	Menhaden/ RW only	CMP	
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	1	2				
2022	Scamp OA		Spanish Mackerel OA		Analyst in Training?	Scamp OA	Gray Snapper OA	Red Snapper RT	Red Snapper RT		Queen Trigger PR-STX-STT OA	Hammerheads RT			ASFMC Menhaden OA		
2023		Gray Triggerfish RT	Black Sea Bass OA	Red Grouper OA		Yellowedge Grouper OA					Gulf Spanish Mackerel OA						
							Yellowtail (PR); Stoplight Parrotfish (USVI) Benchmark	Mutton Snapper Benchmark									
2024			Tilefish OA			Red Grouper OA	Gray Triggerfish RT	Red Snapper OA	Red Snapper OA	Gulf Shrimp RT		HH OA	Hogfish Benchmark		ASFMC Red Drum (RW)		
2025	Red snapper RT	Grey Triggerfish OA		Blueline Tilefish OA								Spiny Lobster OA (all islands)					Gulf Menhaden OA
		Gag Grouper OA	Atlantic Migratory Cobia OA	Red Porgy OA		GAJ RT		Cobia OA	Gag Grouper OA				Bull, Spinner, Tiger, Finetooth Sharks RT		Atl Menhaden (RW only)	King Mackerel OA (SA & Gulf)	
2026		GAJ RT	Snowy Grouper OA	Dolphin (MP?)			Gray Triggerfish OA	Tilefish Complex (MP?)	Scamp OA	Shrimp OA	Hogfish (PR) Lane Snapper?						
2027	Red Snapper OA											Queen Snapper		Bull, Spinner, Tiger, Finetooth Sharks OA	Black Grouper Bench/MP?		
2028	Vermilion OA		White Grunt RT														

Timing of projects shown in this table is approximate and is intended for SEDAR Steering Committee workload planning purposes only. Please consult individual project schedules for specific start and end dates.

1 Introduction

1.1 Documents

- Agenda
- Attachment 1a. May 2022 Draft Meeting Summary
- Attachment 1b. September 2022 Draft Meeting Summary

1.2 Action

- Introduction
- Review and Approve Agenda
- Approve Meeting Summary

MEETING OUTCOME

The Committee adopted the agenda and approved the May 2022 and September 2022 Draft Meeting Summaries.

2 SEDAR Projects Report

2.1 Documents

Attachment 2. SEDAR Projects Update December 2022

2.2 Summary

The projects report (Attachment 2) provides a summary of current and recently completed SEDAR assessment projects.

Highlighted project developments:

SEDAR 74 – Gulf Red Snapper: The Data portion of the Research Track required more time than was originally scheduled, with the DW report not being released and final data not available until October 2022 rather than July 2022. This delay caused a subsequent delay in the Assessment development process. The Review Workshop is now slated for July 31-August 4, 2023 (originally scheduled for April 2023), with the final report scheduled for release in September 2023.

SEDAR 77 – HMS Hammerhead Sharks: The Research Track Assessment process was scheduled to be completed in November 2022. Additional webinars were requested due to staffing and analysis complications. The assessment process was extended to March of 2023 with the Review Workshop being postponed from March 2023 to August 2023. The assessment is scheduled to be released to NOAA: HMS in October 2023.

SEDAR 79 – SE US Mutton Snapper: The State of Florida and the SEFSC worked together to determine a new Project Schedule for this assessment. The terminal year of data for the assessment will be 2022, though the SEFSC can only guarantee data through 2021. Data Scoping will be held April 2023, with a Data Workshop scheduled for August 21-25, 2023.

Assessment webinars will be held from November 2023 to April 2024. The Review Workshop is scheduled for July 9-11, 2024.

SEDAR 80 – Caribbean Queen Triggerfish: The Final Stock Assessment Report for Queen Triggerfish in Puerto Rico was released on 20 July 2022. The CFMC SSC reviewed the assessment at their August 2022 meeting. The SSC had some concerns with the assessment and provided some guidance on ways to improve the assessment from their perspective. The SEFSC provided a presentation to the SSC at their October meeting, where they received additional feedback. An updated assessment for Puerto Rico was presented at the December 2022 SSC meeting.

The Final Stock Assessment Report for Queen Triggerfish in St. Thomas/St. John was released October of 2022 and presented at the December 2022 SSC meeting. The analytic team received feedback on potential modifications and an updated assessment will be presented in 2023.

The Final Stock Assessment Report for Queen Triggerfish in St. Croix has not yet been released.

2.3 Action

- Informational; none required

MEETING OUTCOME

The Committee had no recommendations on the Project Updates.

3 SEDAR Process Review and Discussion

3.1 Documents

Attachment 3: Description of the Role of the SSC from the SEDAR SOPPs

Attachment 4a: SEFSC Research Track/Operational Assessment Process Review and Proposal

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Attachment 9: Hybrid Meeting Discussion Document

3.2 Summary

- Topical Working Groups (TWGs) Process Updates

Data Requirements and Timing: SEFSC Staff have noted that TWGs are taking more time than initially planned. The TWGs are tasked with providing an in-depth review of the topic they are assigned to discuss, and in some cases that is requiring several webinars and additional data analysis. The Center has suggested that, for planning purposes, it should be assumed that a TWG will take 2-3 months and there should only be one TWG underway at any time.

Administrative Responsibilities: One advantage of the TWGs was the ability for appointed participants to meet and discuss issues outside the publicly- noticed webinars that SEDAR coordinates. Those additional webinars are not coordinated by SEDAR but rather by Center personnel. A record of who attends these webinars is needed for the Administrative Record. Guidance regarding who is responsible for these administrative roles is needed.

Follow up on Need for TWG Member Appointments: During the May 2022 Steering Committee meeting, the Committee discussed the need for participants in a TWG to be appointed by a Cooperator. Subsequent discussions with NOAA General Counsel have verified that for someone to participate in both the publicly noticed and non-noticed TWG discussions, they must be appointed by a Cooperator. It was further clarified that an individual member of a TWG may reach out to an individual not on the TWG regarding a topic or data set, and those discussions should be reported back to the TWG.

Feedback on TWGs from SEDAR Participants: SEDAR has received feedback on the TWG process from various process participants and several common themes have arisen:

- While TWGs have resulted in more focused discussions on the TWG topic, those discussions are in some cases far more detailed and require more analysis than was expected, thus lending them to be less efficient than predicted.
- Restricting discussions to just TWG topics means that the bulk of the data and assessment decisions are not reviewed by anyone outside the analytical team until the release of the SAR and presentation to the SSC. This has had the unintended consequence of SSCs raising issues during their review about topics not covered by a TWG, and subsequently requesting additional analyses before utilizing the assessment for management. More on this is described in the discussion of the role of the SSC in reviewing OAs below.
- It is believed by many that reverting to OAs Panels for species where there are known issues that need to be reviewed will provide more efficient feedback. The Panels allow all data to be reviewed, even if just to verify that the data resembles what was used in the previous assessment, and questions identified during the development of the assessment. The Panels also provide a group for the analytical team to turn to for feedback, when something in the assessment is not working as expected.

MEETING OUTCOME

The Committee discussed some of the administrative details for TWGs. The following points were clarified:

- TWGs meet in open, SEDAR-scheduled meetings for making decisions and recommendations. To prepare information and analyses for review during these regular meetings, TWGs can also meet in informal IPT style meetings. Discussions from IPT style meetings must be reviewed during open meetings.*
- The IPT-style meetings are convened, conducted, and chaired by the lead analytical agency. The Chair may be the lead analyst, a data provider familiar and potentially responsible for the data topic to be discussed, or another individual such as the Project manager for a specific assessment.*
- The Cooperators need a record of who attends the IPT-style meetings for the administrative record, to support stipends for eligible SSC members, and to maintain the transparency of the process. TWG members need to be appointed to participate in the TWG process, including the IPT-style meetings, so the list of potential participants is known in advance.*
- SEDAR will provide a list of appointed participants to the individual leading the meeting, and they can use it as a check list of those in attendance. Alternatively, attendance may be taken by some other means, such as a Google Meet report. Once the meeting is complete, the attendance list will be provided to the SEDAR Coordinator, and they will provide the information to the appropriate Cooperator.*
- The IPT-style meetings do not require a meeting summary, as the final recommendations are vetted on a publicly noticed webinar and are documented in the assessment report.*
- SEDAR does not arrange, support, or facilitate the IPT-style meetings. This provides the TWG flexibility in scheduling and maintains a clear separation between the IPT-style calls/webinars and the noticed, public components managed by SEDAR.*

The Committee discussed the TWG feedback provided by SEDAR Staff. The STC needs to work toward further improvements in the TWG process, particularly to better integrate the SSC in the process, ensure that process provisions do not prohibit developing the best assessment practicable at the time, and establish appropriate expectations for the SSC review and use of assessment products.

- While TWGs allow for more flexibility in scheduling meetings, and focused conversations on specific topics, they don't enable the broad look at all aspects of the assessment that occurred with general assessment panels. This has led to some challenges when a final assessment is provided to the SSC for review. If the SSCs raise concerns with the assessment products and therefore request additional analyses or clarifications, then gains in efficiency from not having assessment panels may be lost at the SSC and management level.*
- The Committee noted that there is a need to ensure that there is flexibility in the OA/TWG process to handle unforeseen issues which may arise once the OA is underway.*
 - Should an unanticipated issue arise, the analytic team should reach out to the technical body to get input prior to completing the assessment. That feedback should then be explored during the assessment process which will hopefully address the issue and not impede the review and utilization of the assessment.*

- *Further revision to the TWG process, especially regarding the timing of TWG webinars, is needed.*
 - *TWGs require a clear focus and proper timing to be successful.*
 - *The amount of time needed for TWGs needs to be better accounted for in the project schedules: Data TWGs may take a month while more involved topics that require multiple meetings may take three months. (Red tide would be an example for a more involved TWG.)*
 - *The timing of specific TWGs needs to be considered when developing project schedules.*
- *The level of detail that can be addressed during a TWG is much greater than during the previous assessment panels and produces more useful information on the topics that are addressed.*
- *It was noted that not having a TWG scheduled for a particular topic is not a rationale for not addressing an issue that arises while an assessment is underway. It may not be able to be resolved in the time available, but it should be discussed and documented in the assessment report. Similarly, issues that arise when the recommendations of TWGs are included in the assessment model need to be addressed to the extent practicable, even if they were not foreseen when the Scope of Work and Terms of Reference were developed.*
- *The Committee agreed that TWG discussions and recommendations need to be documented, but it may be topic specific as to whether that documentation is best as a working paper or as part of the SAR. The Committee agreed to allow the analytic team to document the findings as appropriate.*
- *The Committee supports the continued use of TWGs and did not recommend reverting to assessment panels.*

The Committee had a discussion regarding the SEFSC's recommendation to move away from the concept of including a terminal year (TY) of data in the Statements of Work or Terms of Reference.

- *There is a concern that it is difficult for data providers to plan workloads when there is not a minimum goal to reach. Additionally, it is possible that if there is no TY, some providers may not work as hard to deliver the most current data, and the different final years for different data sets may cause issues.*
 - *It was noted that the critical issue for the Cooperators is the length of time between the TY of the assessment and when management action begins, and it may be better for the management process to have a timely assessment rather than discuss every data and assessment issue in detail.*
 - *The Committee agreed that SEDAR and the Center should develop some terminology for inclusion in future SoWs/ToRs regarding a minimum TY and including information that any additional data available at the data deadline would be welcome.*
- SEDAR Review Process Discussion (Attachment 3)
Update on Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA) Framework for the Southeast Region: Chair Porch will provide an update on this topic.

MEETING OUTCOME

Jack McGovern provided a verbal update on the development of the BSIA Framework for the SE Region.

- *There is a nearly complete draft that is currently being edited by the SEFSC to include more plain language.*
- *It clarifies that the BSIA determination is the responsibility of the Agency, with advice from the SSCs and Councils.*
- *It also discusses National Standard 2 (NS2) which recognizes that while there may always be new information coming in, it does not prevent the Agency from acting on the information available in hand.*
- *HMS has its own finalized BSIA Framework which will be distributed to the Committee after the meeting.*
- *The updated version will be distributed to the SEDAR Steering Committee, and then the individual Cooperators can distribute it for comment as needed.*

Role of the SSC/Technical Committee in Reviewing Operational Assessment Reports: The Cooperator's Technical Committees are responsible for providing a review of the final Stock Assessment Report (SAR) that results from a SEDAR assessment process to determine whether it is consistent with BSIA, and useful for providing management advice. In the case of a Benchmark or Research Track (RT) assessment, there is a Review Workshop as part of the SEDAR process that is held to provide a detailed review, and a report from that review is included in the SAR. For an Operational Assessment (OA), the review is done by the Technical Committee. The SSC is the Technical Committee for Council Cooperators.

The SSCs have started receiving OAs conducted with Topical Working Groups (TWGs) rather than Assessment Panels and some unanticipated issues have arisen. One issue has been that an SSC may express concerns over data sets or analytic approaches which were not covered by a TWG, but which may have impacts on the model performance or outcomes. As those components of the model development were not reviewed by anyone outside the analytic team until the release of the SAR and presentation to the SSC, the SSCs questions/concerns are being identified very late in the process. How to manage those concerns is proving to be difficult.

The level of feedback and additional requests by the SSCs in reviewing recent OAs has suggested the need to clarify at what point has an SSC stopped acting as a review body, and instead is behaving as an assessment panel, developing the assessment product.

There is guidance in the SEDAR SOPPs for both Review Panels for Research Track/Benchmark assessments and SSC reviewing other types of assessments.

For Benchmarks and RT Review Panels:

- Review panels may not conduct alternative assessments. Panels may request additional sensitivity runs and minor corrections. Results of such runs should be documented in addenda to the assessment report.

For SSC Reviews:

- 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 an error or omission has been made in the assessment model or in any input datasets, and further determines that such issues 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 concerns, including appropriate documentation of the correct information; (2) possible impacts; (3) specific concerns related to the issues raised, including the estimated parameters that are affected; and (4) the recommended process and timeline for correction or revision, review, and reconsideration by the SSC.

The Committee is asked to discuss the role of the SSCs in reviewing OAs, specifically with regards to the extent of additional analyses requests. The current guidance on the role of the SSC from the SOPPs can be found in Attachment 3.

MEETING OUTCOME

The Committee had a thorough discussion regarding the role of the SSCs in reviewing Operational Assessment reports.

Managing expectations regarding the nature and intent of the SSC review is necessary to ensure and appropriate and robust review and avoid delays in providing advice to Cooperators. SSC review activities should be conducted consistent with MSA provisions, NS 1 and 2 guidelines, and NMFS policy directives.

Cooperators may provide guidance to their individual SSCs (and equivalents) regarding acceptable assessment modifications.

- *The SSC should consider if the available information and analysis is correct, consistent with BSIA, and the represents the best information available to them at the time for providing management advice.*
- *The review discussions should focus on how the ToRs were discussed within the TWGs and evaluate whether the TORs are adequately addressed within the OA process.*
- *It is likely that issues will be identified by the review body that may not be able to be addressed within the current assessment. If they are not critical errors, and do not prevent the SSC providing robust and appropriate stock status and fishing level recommendations, they should be documented for the next assessment and not used as a reason to delay action.*
- *The Steering Committee recognizes that considerable time and effort goes into each assessment project. The cost to the process as a whole is too great to have the entire stock assessment enterprise repeatedly held up for additional analyses over multiple meetings before an SSC will act.*

- *The Committee may wish to provide some guidance to the Cooperators, focusing on the tradeoffs between additional requests and their impact on workload and timing of assessments.*

An assessment may be useful as a historical record of what the stock has done in the past, but it also may have little predictive capability for providing management advice.

Simple sensitivities to gain additional insight on uncertainty may be acceptable requests but asking for changes to configurations or other significant modifications are outside the role of the review body.

- *The review body needs to examine the assessment provided to them and provide the managers a fishing level recommendation. If the review body (SSC) does not consider the assessment adequate for supporting fishing level recommendations, it should provide appropriate justification for its findings. The SSC may use alternative approaches to specify the ABC, as provided in their ABC Control Rules and NMFS guidance such as policy directives (e.g., 01-01-09, 01-10-10, 01-01-11), but must provide an explanation of why the alternative is more consistent with BSIA than the assessment.*

Once the updated BSIA Framework for the Southeast is available, the Committee will review the document and may make recommendations to updating the Role of the SSC section of the SEDAR SOPPs.

Discussion of Review Types (CIE vs Cooperator Level): There are two main types of review processes used for SEDAR products. For RTs and Benchmarks, there is usually a Review Workshop (RW) that is part of the SEDAR process. The Workshop Panel consists of both independently appointed reviewers from the Center for Independent Experts (CIE), and Cooperator-appointed reviewers, usually from the Cooperator's technical body, such as an SSC. The RW is usually held in-person. The Panel reviews all aspects of the process and produces a report of its findings which is included as part of the SAR for that project. The RW Panel does not offer management advice. While the intent is to convene a RW for each assessment, there are cases when a Desk Review is needed. In such cases, no workshop is held. Rather the assessment is usually reviewed by CIE reviewers in isolation, and reports of their findings are submitted to the SEDAR.

In the case of OAs, the review of SEDAR assessment products is handled by the Cooperator's Technical Bodies. This review is outside of the SEDAR process and directly handled by the Cooperator.

The SEDAR Review Process for RTs provides an independent peer review of SEDAR stock assessments. The intent of the review is to ensure that the assessment and results are scientifically sound and that decision makers are provided adequate advice that reflects uncertainties in the data and methods.

Operational Assessments are follow-up assessments to a Benchmark or RT that has undergone a rigorous peer review. The foundation of any OA is the previously approved assessment, thus the need for an external review panel may not be necessary.

The Committee should discuss if changes to these parameters should be considered.

MEETING OUTCOME

The Committee did not discuss this topic separately as it was covered within the discussions on the role of the SSC above. No additional guidance was provided.

- **Research Track – Operational Assessment Process Evaluation (Attachment 4-7)**

The Cooperators' need to receive more scientific information in a timelier fashion to support management decisions continues to be an issue. The SEDAR process underwent large programmatic changes in 2019 with the shift from the Benchmark-Standard- Update approach to the Research Track (RT) -Operational Assessment (OA) process that is currently in use. Unfortunately, the changes to the process have not produced the increases in productivity the Cooperators had hoped for. The SEFSC will present a proposal on possible modifications to the current SEDAR process (Attachment 4a-c). Attachments 5 and 6 provide a summary of how the process is currently structured for your reference.

To support this discussion, SEDAR Staff have gathered background information on the development of the RT – OA process for reference. Attachment 7a is a summary of the evolution of the process since 2019 when the process was approved for the pilot RT; SEDAR 68 Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Scamp. Attachments 7b and 7c are attachments from the May 2018 Steering Committee meeting which summarized the development of the process and contain reference materials to that time. Attachment 7d is the SEFSC detailed proposal provided for the May 2018 Steering Committee meeting, which served as the foundation for the existing process.

MEETING OUTCOME

The Committee received several presentations from the SEFSC on possible modifications to the Research Track (RT)/Operational Assessment (OA) approach. Only one RT/OA process has been fully completed through SEDAR (SA and Gulf Scamp) to date. Several RTs are currently underway (Gulf red snapper, SA gray triggerfish, and HMS hammerhead sharks).

The term “Research Track” has created an expectation that extensive new research and analyses will be conducted during the assessment process, and the bulk of the additional work falls on the lead analytic agencies to complete. This has in turn led to significant ‘mission creep’ in the RT process. Changing the terminology of this assessment type may be needed to clarify expectations.

Implementation of the RT process is proving to be very complex with many moving pieces. Most of the implementation issues are not items that the Steering Committee can resolve.

- *The SEFSC believed there would be specific, albeit limited, research questions identified and examined within a RT, however that is not what has happened.*
- *It was never the intent of the Committee to have the most up to date data included in the RT.*
- *Research Tracks were intended for first time assessments or for something that is significantly out of date, which may require considerable modification. In practice, Cooperators have requested RTs for species that do not meet this criterion, due largely to*

the current guidance on the limitations for OAs regarding the number of TWGs or model modifications that should be considered. Cooperators, led by their technical bodies (SSC's), see RTs as the only approach in the current process for providing extensive revision and peer review of an assessment.

- *The RT component of flexible schedules with no definitive deadlines for various stages of the process has been proven an impediment. Participants repeatedly requesting additional analyses before making decisions delays moving the assessment forward.*

The Committee agreed that it is too soon to abandon the RT approach, but clarification of expectations is needed for currently scheduled RT assessments through 2025:

- *Develop conceptual models that capture the essential dynamics of the system and provide a basis for stock status determinations and fishing level recommendations.*
 - *Completed during the data phase of the project*
 - *What are the important elements of the population dynamics of the stock?*
 - *Are there any environmental forcing factors that should be considered?*
- *Determine what models may be available to capture the essential dynamics given the available data*
- *No need for final, QAQC data. Data streams from previous assessments may be sufficient for developing a working model.*
- *Will not focus on model diagnostics.*
- *Produce a preliminary model for review.*

Procedural workshops may serve as a mechanism for addressing data or modeling issues that would impact multiple species. A Research Track may also be used to address a focused topic that is applicable to multiple species.

The Committee discussed the SEFSC's Portfolio approach to assessments and made the following suggestions:

- *The duration of an assessment process lies on a continuum, depending on requirements of a specific assessment. Better communication is needed to clearly explain the factors (for example the number of TWGs) that affect project schedules.*
- *The terminology used to describe the assessment categories is important and requires thought. Highlighting the benefits of the different categories, in relation to the three Ts (Timely, Thorough, Transparent) will help with the impression of "better".*
- *SEFSC should be very involved in the development of the SoWs for OAs. The SoWs are a list of issues the Cooperators would like to have examined, including items that the SSC discussed when reviewing the previous assessment. It is understood that completing everything requested may not be feasible, however every issue needs to be addressed in some form. Flexible language in the TORs should be considered to ensure consideration without express obligation to complete an exploratory TOR.*
- *As interim analyses and management procedure approaches are outside of the SEDAR process, their details will not be included in discussions for the Committee. However, their time and data demands may impact the ability to address other Cooperator requests.*

- *Not all species require a sophisticated model development process involving every available piece of data. Some stocks may be adequately served with simpler analyses and supported with a timely and consistent monitoring and management program.*
- *SEDAR Staff will work with SEFSC Staff to refine the suggested categories and provide an updated document for discussion at the next meeting. Inclusion of more details/metrics to understand how changing the approach will help with efficiency was requested.*

There was a request to examine the simpler assessment approaches to see if efficiencies may be gained there. The following statement was proposed:

Consensus Statement: The Steering Committee requests that the SEFSC develop and add to each type of assessment outlined in Table 1a-1e a list of potential simpler modeling approaches that could be applied including consideration of a list of data inputs and time/staff requirements for each potential model.

- *The Committee agreed that there is value in considering simpler approaches and making modeling decisions based on the data availability and time requirements.*
- *The SEFSC will produce a document to provide additional information on the costs and benefits of alternative approaches.*
 - *It would be useful to produce a summary of what the data needs, and time requirements are for different classes of models, so that the information may be considered when deciding what model options are appropriate.*
 - *Information on potential management options or constraints should be included.*
- *SEFSC Proposal on Management Procedures (MPs)/Management Strategy Evaluations (MSEs) (Attachment 8)*

During the May 2022 Steering Committee, the SEFSC introduced the concept of MPs/MSEs as an additional approach to increase the throughput of management advice. The Committee was interested in the potential of this process but was uncertain how it would work within the SEDAR process. They requested the following:

“The Committee requested that the Center produce a document outlining what the Center envisions as the path forward, specifically the role of SEDAR in the process, and including the separate roles of SEDAR, the SSCs, and the Cooperators. The document should be provided for the Fall 2022 SEDAR Steering Committee meeting.”

MEETING OUTCOME

The Committee received a presentation from John Walter (SEFSC) on MSEs/MPs/Interim analyses.

The Committee agreed that interim analysis should continue to be managed and scheduled between the SEFSC and Cooperators. The results of an interim analysis and SSC feedback could be posted on the SEDAR website for the appropriate assessment if desired.

The presentation indicated that MSE/MPs will not fall under SEDAR administration and the Committee supported this. It is unclear what role, if any, SEDAR will play in these processes in the future.

- Update on SEFSC COVID Travel Policy

It is unclear what the current policy/directive is regarding SEFSC personnel requirements to attend SEDAR meetings. The Committee would like to get clarification on the current policy and find a mechanism for changes to that policy to be communicated to the Cooperators in a timely fashion.

MEETING OUTCOME

Chair Porch informed the Committee that currently NOAA does not require staff to travel to or from locations of High COVID activity. When the status is Low or Medium, and the position requires travel, then the employees are generally expected to travel. If there are extenuating circumstances preventing travel, a NOAA employee will discuss that with their supervisor, who will decide on that employee's attendance.

- Discussion of SEDAR Policy on Hybrid Meetings (Attachment 9)

It is a long-standing policy that in-person SEDAR meetings are not broadcast, nor are there any provisions for hybrid meetings to be conducted. Data and Review Workshops are held in person, and the assessment process is conducted via webinars. In either case, all members participate in the same format, allowing all participants to interact in the same mode.

Many believe in-person workshops provide the most thorough and efficient way to review large volumes of data and make recommendations on its use. Gathering key personnel together for a designated task allows for a level of focus that is not present when all participants are not located in the same space. In-person workshops provide a feeling of urgency and a need to complete tasks by the end of the workshop. Additionally, the in-person format seems to promote far more discussion than a virtual-only or hybrid meeting.

The SEFSC has requested that the Committee discuss options for hybrid components for future in-person SEDAR processes. Travel budgets continue to decrease, and the flexibility some partners have regarding requiring travel to meetings is becoming increasingly difficult for SEDAR to manage. Hybrid meetings can be logistically complex to coordinate, particularly when there are multiple groups interacting at the same time, such as at a Data Workshop, but may prove useful for certain aspects of the process.

MEETING OUTCOME

The Committee received an update on the status of the Hybrid Proposal document, as it was not received in time for the meeting and discussed potential options regarding changes to the SEDAR policy on virtual participation/observing of in-person workshops.

- *A hybrid meeting is defined as a meeting where appointed participants would be able to choose whether to participate by attending the meeting in person, or by attending*

remotely. There would be no restrictions on their interactions within the group whether in-person or remote.

- *SEDAR currently does not provide for any remote access to in-person meetings.*
- *Hybrid meetings are difficult to convene, and conduct compared to in-person or virtual meetings. They create a 'meeting in a meeting' approach, are logistically complex and have financial implications for SEDAR and Cooperators that send administrative staff to facilitate these workshops.*
- *Hybrid meetings may allow for more individuals who do not wish to or cannot travel to participant during the in-person stages.*
- *Person-to-person communications among stakeholders, data providers, and analytic staff are critical to the development and acceptance of the assessment process and are very difficult to achieve using virtual approaches. This is particularly important during the data stage of the process, when interactions are had outside of the meeting times, and relationships are established which build trust with stakeholders and allow the process to move forward.*
- *Review Panel members should plan to participate in-person at the Review meeting but allowing certain individuals (such as DW Working Group leads) who fill a supportive, rather than direct presentation role, to be on call and react remotely to questions from the Review Panel is something to be considered moving forward.*
- *It was acknowledged that travel budgets are not unlimited, and it is assumed that Cooperators are now sending the most appropriate individuals to the meetings.*
- *The Committee agreed to broadcast future data and review workshop plenary sessions. This will be a broadcast-only feature and will not be configured for remote participation. This is a change to the current policy and would allow individuals not in attendance to observe the proceedings.*
- *The Committee recognized that emergencies occur and exceptions to remote participation may be allowed on a case-by-case basis. This is consistent with how most Cooperators now operate.*
- *The Committee did not support a hybrid option for SEDAR workshops without more discussion regarding details, best practices, and financial considerations.*
- *It was noted that there is a difference between a hybrid meeting and the informal communications that often happen at in-person meetings. Informal communications are allowed within in-person meetings, including, but not limited to, google meet and other software that allow multiple people to participate. Further guidance on informal communications may be offered by the Committee, and it was requested that materials be prepared for the briefing book for the Spring meeting.*

3.3 Action

- Discussion of the Research Track and Operational Assessment Process to determine if changes to the process need to be considered.
- Provide guidance on the role of SEDAR in Management Procedures/Management Strategy Evaluations
- Provide guidance on current SEFSC travel policies and discuss communication pathways

- Consider if hybrid meetings should be considered for future SEDAR Processes

4 Assessment Schedule Review

4.1 Documents

Attachment 10. SEDAR Projects List

Attachment 11. Project Scheduling Parameters and Guidelines

Attachment 12: Modifications to the Project Planning Grid from the September 2022 Steering Committee Summary

4.2 Summary

Review of 2024 Project Scheduling:

- Following the Fall 2022 Steering Committee a Master Scheduling webinar with SEDAR and SESFC was held on November 16, 2022, to implement the guidance provided by the Committee. SEFSC Staff took the lead in producing the discussion draft for the webinar. During the development of the 2024 schedule, Center Staff developed a variety of parameters and guidelines to aid in scheduling. These guidelines can be reviewed in Attachment 9.
- South Atlantic Project Schedule Updates: The Red Snapper RT will begin in late 2024. The shift in the timing of the Red Snapper RT allowed for the Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish OAs to be accomplished in 2024. The OAs will need to be staggered, with one occurring earlier in the year, and the other later.
- Gulf of Mexico Project Schedule Update: It was noted that the Gray Triggerfish RT scheduled for 2024 needs to be focused on the core issues for that species, such as ageing, and other conceptual aspects. The Terms of Reference developed will have to be specific. Additionally, the vermilion OA requested for 2024 was turned into an interim assessment and removed from the SEDAR schedule.

Discussion of Modifications to the Scheduling Process:

- There is a well-defined process for producing Statements of Work to describe the scope of work that will be involved with requested OAs not following a RT (Attachment 4). Cooperators spend considerable time and effort to produce those in accordance with the timeline requested. During the Fall 2022 Steering Committee meeting, the following was agreed upon:

“It was noted that the SEDAR/SEFSC Master Scheduling Call may need to be held before the Spring SEDAR Steering Committee meeting. A shift in timing would allow the SEFSC to have a more complete understanding of what might be accomplished for the discussion with the Cooperators at the Spring meeting. Holding the Scheduling Call earlier in the year may require a shift in deadlines for the SoW reviews and negotiations, which will be discussed at the next meeting.”

The Committee is asked to discuss the role of the Statements of Work, along with the timing of their production and that of the Master Scheduling Call.

4.3 Action

- Consider any needed modifications to the 2024 Projects
- Discuss if modifications are needed to the timing of Statements of Work and the Master Scheduling Call

MEETING OUTCOME

The Committee agreed that for the Gulf of Mexico Gray Triggerfish RT on the schedule for 2024 the goal will be to capture the essential dynamics of the stock in a preliminary model that will be reviewed. The most recent data will not be included, and there will be little focus on model diagnostics.

The timing of the development of the SoWs was modified to allow for the SEFSC-SEDAR Master Planning call to be held prior to the Spring Steering Committee meeting. This was needed to allow for the finalization of the SEDAR schedule during the Spring meeting. Specifically, the modification was to change the window for SEFSC-Cooperator SoW negotiations from February 1st – May 1st each year to February 1st – April 1st each year.

5 Other Business

- Update on the NMFS White Paper Revisions and Timing:

Chair Porch will provide the Committee with an update.

SEFSC Staffing Discussion, with Particular Focus on Reduced South Atlantic Assessment Staff

The Outcome Planning Grid from the May 2022 Steering Committee Meeting had five assessment team members listed for the South Atlantic, with one of those designated as an Analyst in Training for 2022 and 2023. The latest SEFSC Organizational Chart received by SEDAR January 2023 indicates that the SA Team has four analysts, with no indication that a fifth individual will be added. The South Atlantic Cooperator would like some clarification regarding the potential of adding a fifth analyst, particularly because one of the SA Team members is tasked to work on species the Council does not manage (Menhaden – both Gulf and Atlantic, and Atlantic migratory Cobia).

- Discussion Regarding When a SEDAR Project is Complete

The SEDAR Process for a particular project ends when SEDAR releases the Final Stock Assessment Report. That report is posted to the SEDAR website, and a Dissemination Memo is sent to the Cooperator and the Steering Committee. Once that happens, any additional requests, modifications, SSC review reports, etc. are handled by the Cooperator and are part of their Administrative Record. SEDAR does provide a location on the SEDAR Project Page

on the website (under Post-SEDAR Documentation) where materials related to, but not part of, the SEDAR process can be housed to provide ease of locating those materials.

In the last few years, several completed SEDAR Projects have, months after release, been determined to have mistakes or changes requested. The Committee is asked to discuss if the timing of when a SEDAR project is considered completed should be modified.

- SEDAR Website Update

The updated SEDAR website is now live. It was transitioned to a new platform (Word Press) and accessibility and navigation were improved. Currently, there is no way to have a “Download All” feature for ongoing projects, as it requires a manual consolidation of the documents on a continuing basis. This feature could be added once a project is complete and if a new method to compile the files for ongoing products is identified, its addition to the website will be evaluated.

The SEDAR Public Comment forms on the website have also been updated. The program has migrated from using Wufoo forms to Google forms.

5.1 Action

- The Committee should discuss the issues and provide recommendations if needed.

MEETING OUTCOME

The Committee was informed that there is not an intent to update the NMFS White Paper on recreational data previously produced. The Transition Team continues to work on the process overall. A presentation to the Gulf SSC to address the status of the ongoing work was suggested.

The SEFSC informed the Committee that an additional analyst for the SA Team is unlikely at this time and there should be four (4) analyst columns on the planning grid for future meetings.

The Committee did not recommend making changes to the current report dissemination practices. SEFSC Staff made recommendations to modify the information contained in the SEDAR SARs to help with this issue:

- *The final SARs should include a candidate base model, set of preliminary reference projections for diagnostic purposes, and stock status.*
- *Allow the SSC (or other technical body) to determine the projection settings used to produce the management advice.*
- *The analytic agency will produce a report documenting the final products used for management advice.*
- *SEDAR will archive those reports on the SEDAR website.*

6 Next Meeting

The Committee is asked to make scheduling recommendations and suggest topics for the next meeting. Based on past practices, the next meeting would be in May 2023.

Table 1: SEDAR Project Planning Grid – February 2023 SEDAR Steering Committee Discussion Draft

Table Color Legend:

Steering Committee Approved and SEFSC Scheduled Projects										FUTURE Requests							
Steering Committee Approved, SEFSC TENTITIVELY SCHEDULED										2024 Preliminary Projects – To Be Finalized at the Spring 2023 Meeting							
SEDAR SCHEDULE OVERVIEW – February 2023 SEDAR Steering Committee Discussion																	
YEAR	SA Team					Gulf Team					Caribbean Team	HMS Team		FL FWCC	Menhaden/ RW only	CMP	
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	1	2				
2022	Scamp OA		Spanish Mackerel OA		Analyst in Training?	Scamp OA	Gray Snapper OA				Queen Trigger PR-STX-STT OA	Hammerheads RT			ASFMC Menhaden OA		
		Gray Triggerfish RT	Black Sea Bass OA					Red Snapper RT	Red Snapper RT								
2023						Red Grouper OA					Gulf Spanish Mackerel OA						
											Yellowtail (PR); Stoplight Parrotfish (USVI) Benchmark			Mutton Snapper Benchmark			
2024			Tilefish OA			Red Grouper OA		Red Snapper OA	Red Snapper OA	Gulf Shrimp RT		HH OA			ASFMC Red Drum (RW)		
	Red snapper RT	Grey Triggerfish OA		Blueline Tilefish OA			Gray Triggerfish RT					Spiny Lobster OA (all islands)				Gulf Menhaden OA	
2025			Atlantic Migratory Cobia OA	Red Porgy OA				Cobia OA	Gag Grouper OA					Bull, Spinner, Tiger, Finetooth Sharks RT	Hogfish Benchmark		
		Gag Grouper OA				GAJ RT											Atl Menhaden (RW only)
2026		GAJ RT	Snowy Grouper OA	Dolphin (MP?)					Tilefish Complex (MP?)	Scamp OA		Shrimp OA	Hogfish (PR) Lane Snapper?				
2027	Red Snapper OA			White Grunt RT								Queen Snapper	Bull, Spinner, Tiger, Finetooth Sharks OA		Black Grouper Bench/MP?		
2028	Vermilion OA																

Timing of projects shown in this table is approximate and is intended for SEDAR Steering Committee workload planning purposes only. Please consult individual project schedules for specific start and end dates.