

SEDAR PROCESS COMPONENTS DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

(Prepared for the Summer 2025 SEDAR Steering Committee Meeting)

Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) is a cooperative Regional 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, and US Caribbean.

Once a species or stock is selected for an assessment through the SEDAR process, the specifics of the project must be negotiated and agreed to by the lead analytical agency and the Cooperator who has jurisdiction over the species/stock to be assessed.

This document describes the SEDAR Process components that are available for consideration when designing the structure of the project.

SEDAR Process Components

Data Stage Options

1. Stock Identification
2. Data Scoping
3. Data Topical Working Groups
4. Data Panel Webinars
5. Data Workshop

Assessment Stage Options

1. Assessment Topical Working Groups
 - SSC Check In
 - Technical Team
2. Assessment Panel Webinars
 - SSC Check In
3. Agency In-house Assessment
 - SSC Check In
 - Technical Team

External Peer Review Stage Options

1. Review Workshop
2. Desk Review

DATA STAGE COMPONENTS

Highlights:

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- Key role of SEDAR
- Cooperator appoints individuals to participate in the process
- Level of participation varies depending on project structure
- Any individual requesting to be kept informed will be added to the assessment's Interested Parties list

1. Stock Identification:

Highlights:

- Identify stock boundaries for given assessment
- To be completed before the data component begins
- Webinar-based process – noticed in the Federal Register, open to the public
- Panel of appointed individuals with relevant expertise

2. Data Scoping:

Highlights:

- Initial step to identify potential data sets available for consideration during the assessment process and determine who will be responsible for data analysis
- Scope of data to be discussed depends on process structure (further details below)
- Webinar-based process – noticed in the Federal Register, open to the public
- SEDAR coordinates this stage for all SEDAR assessment projects

Data Scoping Process Details:

- Data panelists shall assemble virtually to discuss potential data streams for consideration in the process.
- Data used in previous assessment, as well as new sources of information, should be presented.
- Participants who will be responsible for analysis of individual data sources will be identified.
- Parameters for the assessment that may impact data provisioning are discussed and agreed to. Examples include areas, years to include, or size bins.

3. Data Topical Working Groups (TWGs)

Highlights:

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- Small working groups assembled to discuss specific data topics identified in the Terms of Reference for a given SEDAR project
- Discussion of other data topics not specifically identified is limited
- Groups are comprised of members of the analytic team, SSC members, stakeholders, and other technical experts
- Group meets through a short series of publicly noticed webinars. These webinars are open to the public and follow standard SEDAR procedures.
- Provide feedback and recommendations to the analytic team conducting the assessment

Data Topical Working Group Details:

- Topical Working Groups will be organized within the SEDAR Process and follow standard SEDAR procedures.
- Tasked to review and make recommendations on specific data topics identified in the Terms of Reference.
- Comprised of SSC members, stakeholders, analysts, and other technical experts.
 - Cooperators will appoint individuals to serve on specific TWGs for a given assessment, following their approved SEDAR appointment procedures.
 - Multiple groups may be needed if expertise does not overlap topics being discussed.
- May utilize an IPT-style approach (free discussions amongst appointed participants and preliminary decisions by telephone, email, or virtual meetings) to facilitate discussions, with final decisions reviewed during the public webinars or workshops.
 - While anyone can attend the publicly noticed webinars hosted by SEDAR, to participate in the IPT-style discussions, participants must be appointed to the TWG by a Cooperator.
- Timing of the TWG needs to be such that the report documenting the discussions and recommendations is available in time for the analytical teams to incorporate the information into the assessment. Timing will need to be considered when Project Schedule is developed.
- Discussions and recommendations need to be documented.

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- Writing responsibilities will depend on the topic, and in most cases, an expert on the topic will take the lead on producing the documentation, with support from other members of the TWG.
- Documentation may be as a working paper or as part of the stock assessment report.
- Additional working papers and reference documents may be provided as needed in support of TWG discussions.
- Meetings or webinars will be chaired by SEFSC staff, though they may choose to appoint another Technical Chair to serve in that role for a specific assessment/topic.
- Process will be organized via webinars. Webinars are noticed in the Federal Register and open to the public, serving as part of the public record for decision making.
- It is expected that personnel from the Lead analytical agency and Cooperators (data providers and analytic team representation) will be involved in TWG discussions.

Data Topical Working Group Process:

- *Scoping Webinar:* TWG members and data providers discuss issues that were identified when the TWG was proposed, potential data that may be available, and possible approaches to consider while evaluating the issue.
 - Analytic team and data providers will be available to answer questions/provide data or additional analysis.
 - Analytic team will apply the approach recommended from the TWG Scoping Webinar and provide feedback on that recommendation at the Recommendations webinar
- *Recommendations Webinar:* TWG members finalize their recommendations to the Analytic Team regarding the data or assessment issues they reviewed.
 - Gives TWG chance to see utility of their recommendation.
 - Gives analysts a chance to present any issues that may have arisen from recommendation and provide guidance moving forward.

4. Data Panel webinars:

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Highlights:

- Panel meets through via webinars - noticed in the Federal Register, open to the public
- Panel of appointed individuals (agency scientists, academics, data subject matter experts, stakeholders)
- All data sets up for consideration (previously utilized, new)
- Process report produced to document discussions and recommendations

Data Panel Webinars Process Details:

- Data panelists shall assemble virtually and critique all available fishery data, monitoring programs, and life history information.
- Data panelists should compile necessary data and working papers per project deadlines so that meeting time can be spent reviewing and revising datasets. Papers and initial data summaries are desired at least 2 weeks prior to the initial data meeting.
- Data workshops and webinars may be chaired (as facilitator) by the SEDAR Coordinator. A Cooperator may choose to contract an individual other than the SEDAR Coordinator to serve as the Chair for the Data, components of the process. Should they choose to do so, the Cooperator would be responsible for any stipend required.
- Data panelists may 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 advisory panel (commercial, recreational, and/or NGO) representatives.
- The data stage will be structured around working groups devoted to primary data areas. Working groups shall review data, working papers, reference documents, and other information to develop recommendations for consideration by the data panel on analyses, assumptions and data for inclusion in the assessment. Working group examples include indices, commercial, recreational, life history, ad hoc discard mortality.
- Each working group shall select a rapporteur from among its members to take notes during workgroup and plenary sessions.
- All decisions of the data panel are made during the publicly noticed data webinars by consensus of the entire membership.

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- A report documenting the discussions and recommendations of the Panel shall be produced.

5. Data Workshop:

Highlights:

- In-person workshop - noticed in the Federal Register, open to the public
- Panel of appointed individuals (agency scientists, academics, data subject matter experts, stakeholders)
- All data sets up for consideration
- Workshop report produced to document discussions and recommendations

Data Workshop Process Details:

- Data panelists shall assemble in person and critique all available fishery data, monitoring programs, and life history information.
- Data panelists should compile necessary data and working papers per project deadlines so that meeting time can be spent reviewing and revising datasets. Papers and initial data summaries are desired at least 2 weeks prior to the data workshop.
- Data workshops and webinars may be chaired (as facilitator) by the SEDAR Coordinator. A Cooperator may choose to contract an individual other than the SEDAR Coordinator to serve as the Chair for the Data, components of the process. Should they choose to do so, the Cooperator would be responsible for any stipend required.
- Data panelists may 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 advisory panel (commercial, recreational, and/or NGO) representatives.
- The data stage will be structured around working groups devoted to primary data areas. Working groups shall review data, working papers, reference documents, and other information to develop recommendations for consideration by the data panel on analyses, assumptions and data for inclusion in the assessment.

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- Each working group shall select a rapporteur to take notes during workgroup and plenary sessions.
- All decisions of the data panel are made during the plenary sessions by consensus of the entire membership.
- A workshop report documenting the discussions and recommendations of the Panel shall be produced.

ASSESSMENT STAGE COMPONENTS

Highlights:

- Cooperator appoints individuals to participate in the assessment
- Categories of participants and level of participation varies depending on process structure
- Individuals requesting to be kept informed will be added to the assessment's Interested Parties list

1. Assessment Topical Working Groups (TWGs)

Highlights:

- Small working groups assembled to discuss specific modeling topics identified in the Terms of Reference for a given SEDAR project
- Discussion of other modeling topics not specifically identified is limited
- Groups are comprised of members of the analytic team, SSC members, stakeholders, and other technical experts
- Provide feedback and recommendations to the analytic team conducting the assessment
- Group meets through a short series of publicly noticed webinars. These webinars are open to the public and follow standard SEDAR procedures.

Assessment Topical Working Group Details:

- Topical Working Groups will be organized within the SEDAR Process and follow standard SEDAR procedures.
- Tasked to review and make recommendations on specific data topics identified in the Terms of Reference.

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- Comprised of SSC members, stakeholders, analysts, and other technical experts.
 - Cooperators will appoint individuals to serve on specific TWGs for a given assessment, following their approved SEDAR appointment procedures.
 - Multiple groups may be needed if expertise does not overlap topics being discussed.
- May utilize an IPT-style approach (free discussions amongst appointed participants and preliminary decisions by telephone, email, or virtual meetings) to facilitate discussions, with final decisions reviewed during the public webinars or workshops.
 - While anyone can attend the publicly noticed webinars hosted by SEDAR, to participate in the IPT-style discussions, participants must be appointed to the TWG by a Cooperator.
- Timing of the TWG needs to be such that the report documenting the discussions and recommendations is available in time for the analytical teams to incorporate the information into the assessment. Timing will need to be considered when Project Schedule is developed.
- Discussions and recommendations need to be documented.
 - Writing responsibilities will depend on the topic, and in most cases, an expert on the topic will take the lead on producing the documentation, with support from other members of the TWG.
 - Documentation may be as a working paper or as part of the stock assessment report.
 - Additional working papers and reference documents may be provided as needed in support of TWG discussions.
- Meetings or webinars will be chaired by SEFSC staff, though they may choose to appoint another Technical Chair to serve in that role for a specific assessment/topic.
- Process will be organized via webinars. Webinars are open to the public, serving as part of the public record for decision making.
- It is expected that personnel from the Lead analytical agency and Cooperators (data providers and analytic team representation) will be involved in TWG discussions.

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- A report documenting data updates, assessment modeling efforts, and results shall be produced.

SSC Check In:

- For the Council Cooperators, the lead analytic agency would present an assessment development “check-in” to the SSC. This presentation will highlight key decision points, and the SSC will be asked for feedback prior to the completion of the assessment. The lead analytic agency will work with Council Cooperators to schedule this check-in several months in advance.
- Technical feedback from SSC members may be needed before the check-in for certain assessments but not needed for others.

Technical Team:

- Cooperators should appoint a Technical Team with the relevant scientific expertise and fishing experience who would be available to provide feedback to the analytical agency as needed during model development.
 - This team may be a standing group that covers multiple assessments or may be developed for a specific stock or group of stocks (e.g., tilefishes or mackerel).
 - The lead analytic agency may reach out to members of the team as needed, either as individuals or as the whole.
 - Appointed individuals will need to be in the respective Cooperator’s SEDAR Advisory Panel.
 - Technical Teams may not be needed for all assessments.
 - Fisherman input may be helpful for model development and Cooperators may pursue their own approaches to provide such input.
- The analytical agency will provide a record of communications with the Technical Team for inclusion in the assessment report. Technical Team meetings could focus on technical issues, or on stakeholder input/outreach.

Assessment Topical Working Group Process:

- ***Scoping Webinar:*** TWG members and data providers discuss issues that were identified when the TWG was proposed, potential data that may be available, and possible approaches to consider while evaluating the issue.

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- Analytic team and data providers will be available to answer questions/provide data or additional analysis.
- **Recommendations Webinar:** TWG members finalize their recommendations to the Analytic Team regarding the data or assessment issues they reviewed.
 - 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 moving forward.

2. Assessment Panel Webinars

Highlights:

- Panel of appointed individuals (agency scientists, academics, other technical experts)
- Panel meets through a series of webinars - noticed in the Federal Register, open to the public
- All aspects of the modeling are up for consideration
- Process report produced by analytic team to document discussions, data update, and final model recommendations, diagnostics, and results.

Assessment Webinar Details:

- An Assessment Panel will be appointed that includes representatives of the appropriate Cooperator and lead assessment agency. The Assessment Panel is a technical body and therefore composed of scientists qualified to evaluate and provide recommendations on stock assessments.
- An Analytical Team will be appointed by the lead assessment agency, to include a designated lead analyst and other support staff as deemed necessary by the agency. The Analytical Team is part of the Assessment Panel.
- An Assessment Advisory Panel will be appointed by the appropriate Cooperator to provide guidance on fishery practices as requested by the Assessment Panel. Members of the Assessment Advisory Panel must be chosen from the Cooperator SEDAR Advisory Panel unless the Cooperator is exempt from that requirement as specified elsewhere in this document.

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- The Assessment Panel shall provide guidance to the Analytical Team on assessment models, model configuration, and uncertainty evaluation. The Assessment Panel is expected to identify a preferred model configuration that meets the TORs and is appropriate for providing management advice.
- Assessment decisions will be approved by consensus of the Assessment Panel. The Panel should consider input of the Assessment Advisory Panel as appropriate.
- The assessment stage of the process may be conducted through workshops, webinars or teleconference. The timing and types of meetings will be determined through negotiations with the Cooperator and lead analytic agency and specified in the project schedule.
- The Assessment Panel are expected to compile necessary data and working papers in advance of the panel meetings so that time can be spent discussing and evaluating progress toward milestones.
- Assessment Stage meetings may be facilitated by the SEDAR Coordinator or an individual appointed by the Cooperator.

SSC Check In:

- For the Council Cooperators, the lead analytic agency would present an assessment development “check-in” to the SSC. This presentation will highlight key decision points, and the SSC will be asked for feedback prior to the completion of the assessment. The lead analytic agency will work with Council Cooperators to schedule this check-in several months in advance.
- Technical feedback from SSC members may be needed before the check-in for certain assessments but not needed for others.

3. Agency-Led Internal Assessment Development

Highlights:

- Lead analytic agency develops the assessment without structured input from an assessment panel or topical working group.
- No noticed SEDAR-led workshops or webinars.
- Technical Team with the relevant expertise would be available to provide feedback as needed during model development.

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- Processes for technical body feedback prior to completion of the assessment are available.

Agency-Led Internal Assessment Development Details:

- The lead analytical agency takes full responsibility for producing the assessment using the data streams recommended through the data stage of the project.
- The assessment will be developed without any structured input from SEDAR noticed meetings or webinars.
- Publicly noticed meetings where discussions of the models and potential decision points prior the completion of the assessment would aid in transparency and provide a mechanism for public input.

○ ***Agency-Led Internal Assessment Development Process:***

- ***SSC Check In:***
 - For the Council Cooperators, the lead analytic agency would present an assessment development “check-in” to the SSC. This presentation will highlight key decision points, and the SSC will be asked for feedback prior to the completion of the assessment. The lead analytic agency will work with Council Cooperators to schedule this check-in several months in advance.
 - For HMS assessments, the agency will develop a candidate model internally for consideration at an in-person or hybrid assessment workshop. The model will be reviewed, and modifications suggested before the completion of the assessment.
- ***Technical Team:***
 - Cooperators should appoint a Technical Team with the relevant scientific expertise and fishing experience who would be available to provide feedback to the analytical agency as needed during model development.
 - This team may be a standing group that covers multiple assessments or may be developed for a specific stock or group of stocks (e.g., tilefishes or mackerel).
 - The lead analytic agency may reach out to members of the team as needed, either as individuals or as the whole.
 - Appointed individuals will need to be in the respective Cooperator’s SEDAR Advisory Panel.

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- Technical Teams may not be needed for all assessments.
- Fisherman input may be helpful for model development and Cooperators may pursue their own approaches to provide such input.
- The analytical agency will provide a record of communications with the Technical Team for inclusion in the assessment report. Technical Team meetings could focus on technical issues, or on stakeholder input/outreach.
- A report documenting data updates, assessment modeling efforts, and results shall be produced.

EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW STAGE COMPONENTS

Highlights:

- The review process shall provide 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.
- Peer reviews may be conducted through Review Workshops or webinars, or through a desk review process.
- The reviewers shall not provide specific management advice and recommendations are advisory in nature.
- Reviewers may not conduct alternative assessments.

External Peer Review Details:

- The review process shall provide 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.
- Peer reviews may be conducted through Review Workshops or through a desk review process. Specific guidelines for each type of review are provided in the next section.
- Desk Reviews may be considered if a project falls behind and convening a Peer Review Workshop will add additional delay, where the nature and scope of the assessment are conducive to a desk review approach, or where funding

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precludes an in-person review workshop. Desk reviews may be requested through the initial TORs for a project or during a project if the analysis progresses such that a desk review is considered appropriate by the Cooperator and lead analytic agency.

- All reviewers shall be independent from the assessments under review and must submit to the SEDAR program manager a completed OMB Conflict of Interest form. Conflict of Interest forms for reviewers appointed by the CIE are handled by NOAA Fisheries CIE project managers.
- 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.
- Assessment findings will be presented to the review panel 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.

1. Review Workshop Process:

- Review Workshop Panels shall typically be composed of:
 - 3 reviewers appointed by the CIE (Center for Independent Experts).
 - 2 reviewers from the CTB of from each Cooperator having jurisdiction over the stocks under review, if desired by the Cooperator.
 - Optionally, 1 reviewer appointed by each Cooperator having jurisdiction over the stocks under review.
- The Review Workshop Chair will be appointed by the Project Cooperator. If there are multiple Cooperators involved, they shall decide which will appoint the Chair when the SEDAR Steering Committee reviews the annual SEDAR Project Plan. It is recommended that a member of the Cooperator's SSC or other scientific body be appointed as Chair.
- Review Panels involving multiple Cooperators should be composed of equal Cooperator appointees. For a typical project involving two Cooperators, one will appoint a chair and reviewer and one will appoint two reviewers.
- Review Workshop Chairs are facilitators, not reviewers. Chairs are responsible for conducting the workshop, compiling the Review Panel report, providing an executive summary of review activities for the report, arranging for panel review

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of the report and submitting the final review panel report to the SEDAR Coordinator once it is approved by the Review Panel.

- Only the Review Panel and Review Workshop Chair participate in report development and review.
- Each Cooperator may appoint observers to a review workshop. These may include representatives of the Council, additional scientists, or constituent representatives. All appointed observers must be members of the Council's SEDAR AP. Observers do not participate in deliberations during the review. However, Panelists and the Chair may direct questions to them as necessary.
- If a 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.

2. Desk Review Process:

- Desk reviews refer to written reviews conducted by individuals, working on their own outside of any workshop process and without any presentation of methods and results beyond that contained in the assessment reports.
- Desk reviews shall be conducted by 3 reviewers appointed by the CIE (Center for Independent Experts), if possible. The Cooperator may appoint an additional reviewer at its discretion.
- Each Cooperator shall develop a process and guidelines to assist its technical bodies in addressing desk review findings and recommendations.