Introduction:

- In 2014, the SEFSC and others proposed a shift to research (RT) and operational assessments (OA).
- The RT was intended to produce a peer-reviewed stock assessment model that would be updated in subsequent OAs for management advice.
- This cycle would increase quality because RT assessments would not be rushed to completion under a strict project schedule.
- The RT/OA process was also expected to increase throughput because data providers would not have to recalculate data inputs multiple times as they did during the benchmark process.

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Issue: the current RT/OA process has not achieved the efficiencies we expected.

- Instead throughput has decreased.
- This document was prepared by SEFSC staff who identified problems and have offered recommendations to increase the throughput and timeliness of stock assessments.
- We propose a to use a portfolio approach and also recommend specific changes to current practices.

Problem #1: The expected product of the RT is inconsistent with reduced impact on data providers.

- The initial guidance defined the RT product as "a thoroughly documented, independently peer reviewed assessment and report." This cannot be achieved without full data provision.

Solution: When used for assessed species, the product of a RT assessment should be a report describing the evaluation of the specific issues addressed during the RT assessment process. **Note:** first time assessments will require data provision and a longer project calendar.

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Problem #2: Scope of the research track process is exhaustive and lacks specific defined goals and timelines

- Provisional data has been considered unsatisfactory, or not appropriately stratified to address questions that arise.
- Participants request multiple analyses before they are willing to make decisions.
- Center staff are expected to conduct all analytical work to inform decisions.
- Participants defer decisions and schedule additional unplanned meetings due to the lack of an end date.

Solution: Specific terms of reference (TORs) should be developed for each RT assessment that describe the relevant questions to be addressed during the RT process. The schedule should include fixed due dates for final decisions.

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Problem #3: The RT assessment process lacks technical leadership and coordination.

- Chair responsibilities are not clearly defined, and the duration of the obligation is unclear.
- There is no funding to support the chair.
- It has not been possible to identify volunteers.

Solution: The responsibilities of the chair must be further defined, and qualified candidates identified (e.g. CIE experts, SSC members). Proper funding for the chair should be established. Administrative tasks not assigned to the Chair should be executed by SEDAR staff.

Problem #4: OAs that follow RT assessments are extremely difficult to plan, and have not produced the expected gains in efficiency.

- TORs for OAs following a RT are not available until after the review phase.
- Issues not resolved by the RT process lead to additional TWGs.
- TWGs may require numerous informal meetings between SEDAR organized meetings. Guidance regarding membership and communications between participants and external members requires further clarification,
- Non-noticed meetings reduce efficiency as they require the Center to provide substantial administrative support (e.g. take attendance, provide notes, email doodle polls and reminders).

Solution: A specific statement of work must be developed for each TWG and a schedule with deadlines must be established. Non-noticed meetings should operate with this specific agenda and timeframe. The length of the project schedule must be scaled to the number of TWGs and the scope of the TORs.

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Problem #5: OA TORs (including those independent of RT processes) are often too vague, or too exhaustive and/or prescriptive, leading to separate but related issues.

- SSCs have requested substantial revisions (outside the accepted TORs) because they are not satisfied with the limitations of the OA TORs.
- OAs with exhaustive TORs and/or numerous TWGs are essentially benchmarks and greatly reduce potential assessment throughput.
- Increased throughput is highly dependent on the number of TWGs and the exhaustiveness of the OA TORs.

Solution: Allow the Center to draft statements of work. The Council should provide a prioritized species list and a list of research/assessment questions pertaining to each species. The Center will develop proposed statements of work based on Council priorities and Council/SSC input.

Key Recommendations:

- Transition to a portfolio approach. Allow the Center the discretion to propose the appropriate assessment tool, and develop appropriate TORs and project schedules.
- We recommend that each November, the Councils provide a prioritized species list and a list of research/assessment questions pertaining to each species. In response, the Center will develop proposed statements of work based on Council priorities and Council/SSC input.
- These will be finalized during the Spring SEDAR Steering Committee meeting.

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Portfolio Approaches

|	Type	Status	OFL/ABC	Requirements	Comment
1a	**Research Track**	no	no	Varies	Very time consuming, does not produce management advice. Should be used infrequently, and primarily for first time assessments. If used for an assessed species, TORs should be very specific
1b	**Operational Assessment - High**	yes	yes	Full and updated data provision. New information to be evaluated.	An operational assessment that requires several topical working groups, or requires extensive revisions to the previous model
1c	**Operational Assessment - Med**	yes	yes	Previous accepted assessment. Full and updated data provision. New information to be evaluated.	An operational assessment with 1-2 TWGs and moderate revisions to the previous model
1d	**Operational Assessment - Low**	yes	yes	Previous accepted assessment. Full and updated data provision. New information to be evaluated.	An operational assessment with 0-1 TWGs and minimal revisions to the previous model
1e	**Update assessment**	yes	yes	Previous accepted assessment. Full and updated data provision.	A strict update assessment

Portfolio Approaches (continued)

	Type	Status	OFL/ABC	Requirements	Comment
2a	**Interim Assessment – Model Based**	maybe	yes	assessment model, updated data	(e.g. SATL Yellowtail Snapper)
2b	**Interim Assessment – Indicator Based**	maybe	yes	Previous accepted assessment model, index or another indicator	(e.g. Gulf Red Grouper)
2c	**Interim Assessment - Custom**	no	yes	assessment model, unique data, e.g. Great Red Snapper Count	(e.g. Gulf Red Snapper with GRSC)
3	**MSE-tested Management Procedure**, e.g. ICCAT BFT, South Atl. Dolphinfish	maybe	yes	index, MSE-testing	Laborious to develop, but management advice that results can be updated quickly and efficiently

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Resources required to execute portfolio approaches
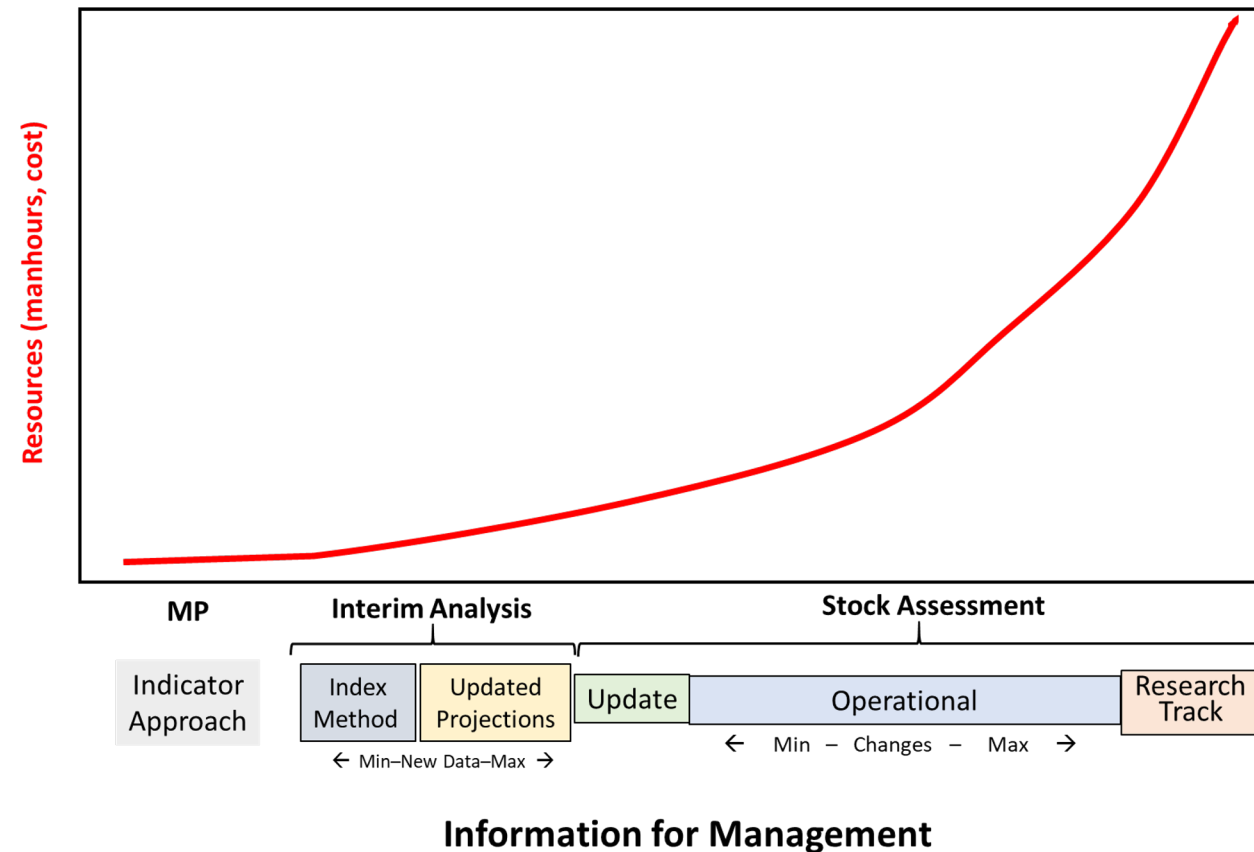
Relying primarily on more time-consuming processes will result in reduced assessment throughput, but is possible to significantly increase the frequency and timeliness of management advice by using the most efficient assessment tool that is appropriate.

Questions?

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