Standard Operating Policies and Procedures

SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review

Cooperative Stock Assessment Development and Review Program of:

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Gulf Fishery Management Council

Caribbean Fishery Management Council

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Division

SEDAR

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INTRODUCTION

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. SEDAR is managed by the three Regional Fishery Management Councils in the Southeast in coordination with NOAA Fisheries and the Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions (Atlantic States MFC and Gulf States MFC). SEDAR seeks to improve the quality and reliability of stock assessments, improve the quantitative basis of fishery management actions, and increase the relevance of research and monitoring programs in the Southeast Region.

The SEDAR process is a rigorous process that prioritizes thoroughness and transparency and can take significant time to complete. Given the number of species for which management advance is needed, it should not be considered the sole source of assessment information available to the Councils and other Cooperators.

This document describes SEDAR operating policies and procedures as determined by the SEDAR Steering Committee. Nothing in this document should be considered supersede the SOPPs of any program Cooperators.

Definitions

Advisory Panel (AP)	Designated advisors within the Federal fishery management system as specified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act.
Analytical Team	Scientists appointed by the lead assessment agency who are charged with preparing technical analysis required for an assessment.
Appointed Observer	Any individual appointed by a Cooperator to observe SEDAR assessment project meetings.
AR	Administrative Record, cumulative official proceedings and administrative documentation
ASMFC	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
Assessment	A quantitative evaluation of a population parameters for a fish stock
Assessment Project	The overall process of preparing an assessment through SEDAR. An assessment project may include multiple individual stock assessments.
Assessment Stage	Stage of the process where population modeling is conducted.
Attendees	Individuals who attend SEDAR meetings but are not appointed by any Cooperators to a specific role.
CFMC	Caribbean Fishery Management Council
CIE	Center for Independent Experts. An entity established by NOAA Fisheries in 1998 to provide external, independent expert reviews of science used for policy decisions.
Confidential Data	Data which are protected by the confidentiality rules of the collecting or compiling organization. Typically applies to commercial fishery information related to a business.
Consensus	A decision making process characterized by discussion of multiple viewpoints rather than voting, and generally described as reaching a position which all participants can "live with", even if it is not their preferred position. Within SEDAR, reaching consensus can include recommending alternatives or multiple values for an assessment parameter as opposed to a single position.
Cooperator	Agencies and organizations that participate in and provide oversight of SEDAR
CTB	Cooperator Technical Body, such as an SSC of a Council or Technical Committee of an Interstate Commission
Data Stage	Stage of the SEDAR process where data sets are reviewed and considered for use in the assessment.
Desk Review	A type of peer review where reviewers consider material on their own and submit individual written findings.
GFMC	Gulf Fishery Management Council
GSMFC	Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
HMS	NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Management Division

Lead Analyst	Scientist, appointed by the lead assessment agency, to lead the analytical team and conduct and oversee technical analyses required for the assessment.
Lead Assessment Agency	The agency which will conduct the primary assessment analyses required to address SEDAR assessment project Terms of Reference. For most assessments this is the SEFSC, but it can also include state marine fisheries agencies such as the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
MSA	Magnuson-Stevens Act. Federal law governing fisheries management.
NGO	Non-governmental organization.
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service, aka NOAA Fisheries
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
Panel	A group of individuals appointed by a SEDAR Cooperator that is charged with making decisions and recommendations to address assessment project TORs.
Project Schedule	Detailed list of the steps and timing for an assessment project.
Reference Documents	Published documents such as journal items or agency reports.
Review Panel	Group of individuals who review the products from data and assessment stages are scientifically sound.
SAFMC	South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
SAR	Stock Assessment Report
SEDAR	Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review
SEDAR Coordinator	SEDAR Staff who provide project management
SEFSC	NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center
SERO	NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office
SOPPs	Standard Operating Procedures and Policies
SSC	Scientific and Statistical Committee. Each Council is required by the MSA to have an SSC.
Stakeholders	Everyone interested in the assessment for a specific species.
Steering Committee	Administrative oversight body for the program
TORs	Terms of Reference, specifying the tasks and objectives for an assessment project
Webinar	A method of meeting which connects participants via the internet. Webinars allow all participants to hear each other as well as to see the same information on their computer screens.
Working Paper	Informal written documentation of data sets or analyses submitted during a SEDAR project to provide background or specific details.

1. Program Goals

- Provide robust and transparent assessments
- Provide stakeholder involvement in the assessment process
- Provide reliable and scientifically rigorous assessments
- Provide independent peer review of assessment products
- Provide timely assessment products
- Provide thorough documentation of methods, data, and review outcomes
- Provide repository for all assessment materials

2. Administration and Oversight

2.1 SEDAR Cooperators

- NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC)
- NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (SERO)
- South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC)
- Gulf Fishery Management Council (GFMC)
- Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC)
- NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Management Division (HMS)
- Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)
- Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC)

2.2 Oversight

- Oversight of the SEDAR process and operations schedule is provided by the SEDAR Steering Committee.
- The SEDAR Steering Committee shall be included as an official Council Advisory Panel (AP) in each Council's Standard Operating Policies and Procedures (SOPPs).
- The SEDAR Steering Committee shall meet at least once annually to review policies and establish the work plan.
- The Steering Committee is composed of representatives of the SEDAR Cooperators, including:
    - SEFSC Director
    - SERO Regional Administrator
    - Executive Directors of the SAFMC, GFMC and CFMC
    - Chairs of the SAFMC, GFMC and CFMC
    - HMS Division Chief
    - Executive Directors of the ASMFC and GSMFC.
- The SEDAR Steering Committee is supported by SEDAR Staff.

- SEDAR Steering Committee members may designate alternates.
- The SEFSC Director shall chair the Steering Committee.
- The SEDAR Steering Committee shall operate primarily by consensus. This does not preclude the use of motions when there is no clear consensus or for formal actions such as approving the SOPPs.

2.3 Administration

2.3.1 General

- SEDAR is administered through the SAFMC with funding provided by NOAA Fisheries.
- The SAFMC Executive Director, Administrative Officer, and SEDAR Program Manager shall develop an annual (calendar year) SEDAR activities schedule and budget.
- The SEDAR Program Manager will develop an annual (Calendar Year) SEDAR activity schedule based on the Steering Committee's approved project schedule and standard participant allowances. The activity schedule details workshop and travel expenses for each project or event and is used to estimate program costs. The Steering Committee will be asked to modify the number of projects and Coordinators will be asked to consider modifying the number of SEDAR-supported participants for their projects if costs exceed available funding.
- SAFMC provides primary program staffing and support. This includes the SEDAR Program Manager, SEDAR Coordinators as needed based on workload and funding, and general SEDAR administrative support.
- SAFMC maintains the SEDAR Administrative Record (AR).
- GFMC provides administrative support for SEDAR workshops involving GFMC managed species.
- The SEDAR Steering Committee may enter into alternative administrative arrangements, with Cooperators and other organizations, as deemed necessary for the program.
- If a policy or process issue arises that is not addressed by existing SEDAR policies stated in the existing SOPPS, the group where the issue arises may develop an interim consensus solution. In addition, the issue will be reported to the Steering Committee by the SEDAR Program Manager for final resolution and policy development.

2.3.2 Travel

- SAFMC administers travel and meeting arrangements for all Cooperators, except in special circumstances that will be determined by the Cooperators and Steering Committee during project planning.
- SEDAR travel orders and travel reimbursement will be provided for workshop panelists, AP representatives appointed to specific workshops by a Cooperator, and SEDAR staff supporting SEDAR workshops.
- Travel orders will be issued, and reimbursements provided, in accordance with applicable SAFMC polices, rules and regulations.
- SEDAR is prohibited from providing travel support for federal employees.

- For each SEDAR project, the SEDAR coordinator will inform the cooperator of the number of individuals that SEDAR can reimburse for travel expenses. Any additional participants will need to have their expenses covered by the cooperator making the appointment.

2.4 SEDAR Staff Responsibilities

The following is a general description of primary SEDAR staff responsibilities. The Steering Committee may approve other arrangements and assignments of these responsibilities as necessary to meet program objectives and address funding issues. Such arrangements may be described in grant documents, project plans, steering committee meeting summary, or memoranda as appropriate.

2.4.1 SEDAR Program Manager

- Ensure SEDAR SOPPS and Steering Committee policies are followed during assessment projects.
- Supervise SEDAR Staff.
- Provide staff support to the Steering Committee.
- Represent the SEDAR program at meetings and conferences as necessary.
- Ensure that SEDAR productivity analyses are maintained
- Ensure that Information Quality Act (IQA) is maintained for all assessments
- Provide annual activity schedules for SAFMC budgeting
- The SEDAR Program Manager may also serve as a SEDAR Coordinator for assessment projects.

2.4.2 SEDAR Coordinator

- Coordinate and manage SEDAR assessment projects.
- Serve as liaison between Cooperators, analytical agencies, data providers, and others involved in SEDAR projects to develop project plans and deadlines and manage progress.
- Ensure SEDAR guidelines and Steering Committee policies are followed during assessment projects.
- Represent SEDAR at Cooperator technical body (CTB, e.g., Council SSC) meetings when assessments are presented and at other times as necessary when SEDAR issues are on the agenda. Attendance at CTB meetings is contingent upon funding, scheduling and availability.
- Ensure technical and administrative documentation for the AR is complete and up to date for each project.
- Chair, as a facilitator, during data and assessment stages.
- SEDAR coordinators will monitor project deliverables (applied comprehensively, including working papers, data and report segments) to ensure items are provided as required in project schedule deadlines.
- Develop draft project schedules and Center for Independent Experts Performance Work Statements (CIE PWS) as needed in consultation with Cooperators and lead assessment agencies.

- May produce suggested participant lists in consultation with Cooperators and lead assessment agencies
- Notify Cooperators of their responsibilities under the SEDAR guidelines and Steering Committee policies, such as appointments and administrative approvals.
- Serve as the administrative contact for venue staff during SEDAR workshops.
- Provide initial point of contact for travel-related issues involving SEDAR appointees.
- May assist with set-up and manage AV and recording equipment during SEDAR workshops.
- Distribute Travel Orders, meeting notices and reminders to workshop participants.
- Manage SEDAR website postings.

2.5 Cooperator Obligations

- Each Cooperator shall draft the terms of reference in collaboration with the lead analytic agency. The Cooperator may include review of such documents by their technical and advisory bodies as part of their approval process. Once finalized, the Cooperator will provide to the SEDAR Coordinator, via a memo, a copy for posting to the SEDAR website.
- Each Cooperator will appoint workshop participants following their appointment processes.
- Each Cooperator may provide notices of workshops and SEDAR activities, through press releases, mailing lists, or newsletter notices, as they deem appropriate.
- Each Cooperator shall identify a designated staff contact to serve as a lead contact and liaison between their organization and SEDAR Staff for all SEDAR projects involving their organization. This designee shall be responsible for:
  - Ensuring Cooperator administrative responsibilities, such as TOR approvals and panel appointments, are addressed as specified in the project schedule.
  - Notifying the SEDAR Coordinator in writing of completion of administrative tasks.
  - Assisting the SEDAR Coordinator in ensuring their organization's appointees meet deadlines for data and document submissions.
  - Assisting SEDAR staff in preparing for SEDAR workshops and ensuring designated workshop roles are filled.
- Each SEDAR Cooperator shall establish guidelines and procedures for approving terms of reference and panel appointments.
- Invitations to appointed participants shall be issued by the Cooperator so it is clear which organization is responsible for the appointment.
- Cooperators shall provide written notification to the SEDAR Coordinator of TOR approval and a list of appointed participants and contact information.
- Each Cooperator may determine how SEDAR assessment products are presented to the Cooperator and its technical and advisory bodies, and the involvement of its representatives to SEDAR panels in such presentations.
- SEDAR expects lead analysts to present assessment findings to the CTB; Coordinators will maintain contact with the lead analyst and provide meeting locations and times. Cooperator Liaisons will inform SEDAR Cooperators of meeting details.

- Cooperators should work directly with the lead assessment agency to coordinate any additional presentations desired. Such requests should be made to the appropriate representative of the lead assessment agency in accordance with normal agency and Cooperator procedures and do not require any SEDAR involvement.

3. SEDAR Panel Participant and Appointment Process

- Workshop participants and attendees include:
  - Panelists: Individuals appointed by a Cooperator to a workshop panel or process group. Responsible for participating in workshop discussions, deliberations, consensus building, and documentation. May also be responsible for submitting data and analyses in support of the assessment.
  - Appointed Observers: Individuals appointed by a Cooperator to observe a workshop/process and provide guidance as requested by the workshop panel. This group may include Council members, Cooperator staff, and AP representatives. These individuals do not contribute to consensus building or workshop reports.
  - Staff: Individuals providing support to a SEDAR project, often includes SEDAR staff and Cooperator's SEDAR liaison.
  - Attendees: Any individual who attends a workshop on their own initiative without any Cooperator appointment.
- Each Council and HMS shall establish a SEDAR Advisory Panel (AP) from which participants (panelists and appointed observers) shall be selected for each workshop. Note: provisions related to the SEDAR AP do not apply to the Interstate Fisheries Commissions.
- The SEDAR AP is governed by the same requirements as other Council APs and should be included in each Council's SOPPs. Each Council and HMS shall establish a process for making SEDAR AP appointments.
- Each Cooperator shall establish a process for making SEDAR workshop appointments.
- The Cooperator requesting the assessment and having jurisdiction over the species assessed is responsible for appointing those panelists and observers it deems necessary to fulfill the Terms of Reference.
- Each Cooperator shall ensure that all panelists and appointed observers are members of the Cooperator's SEDAR AP and therefore eligible to participate in SEDAR.
- The SEFSC Director and SERO Administrator are responsible for designating agency employees to participate in SEDAR projects to provide expertise, data, and analyses, and represent their offices as appropriate.
- In the event of joint jurisdiction, each Cooperator with an interest makes appointments from within its SEDAR Advisory Panel.

4. Public Participation

- SEDAR is a Council process, with public participation during workshops and other meetings governed by Council policies and practices.
- SEDAR workshops and other meetings are open and accessible to the public, subject to the standards and procedures of the Cooperators and provisions contained this document.

- Members of the public who attend workshops or meetings are noted in workshop reports as attendees and are expected to sign-in on the roll each day of attendance. All written comment submitted during the SEDAR process will become part of the SEDAR Administrative Record.
- In person oral public comment will be taken during SEDAR workshops and webinars and Steering Committee meetings at specific times indicated on workshop and meeting agendas, or at an appropriate time determined by the workshop Chair.
- Written comment will be accepted using the online form found on the SEDAR website. Comments received later than 1 week prior to the workshop, until the close of the meeting on the next to last day of the workshop, will be provided to the panel at the workshop. Comments received after the conclusion of a project stage (e.g. data or assessment) will become part of the AR component for the next workshop in the project.
- After the conclusion of the SEDAR project, written comments should be submitted to the appropriate Cooperator in accordance with the stated policies of the Cooperators involved with the project. Those interested in submitting written comment are directed to contact the Cooperator involved in an assessment project for policies regarding written comment.

5. SEDAR Approach

5.1 General Process

- SEDAR assessments are developed through an open and transparent process which may consist of up to 4 separate stages. A report documenting findings and recommendations shall be developed at each stage within the process; all reports shall be compiled to create the overall Stock Assessment Report.
- The charge for each assessment project is specified in Terms of Reference (TORs).
    - Framework TORs may be provided by SEDAR Coordinators.
    - The lead assessment agency should work with the Cooperator to develop the TORs as necessary for each project.
- Prior to developing the ToRs, the cooperator is responsible for negotiating the assessment components with the lead analytic agency.
    - The Cooperator will submit the final version of the TORs to the SEDAR Coordinator for posting on the SEDAR website.
- The SEDAR coordinator will draft the project schedule based on the lead analytic agency's data deadlines and will work with the lead agency to finalize the schedule.
- SEDAR coordinators will monitor project deliverables (applied comprehensively, including working papers, data and report segments) to ensure items are provided as required by project schedule deadlines.
- Council Members attending as official representatives are considered appointed observers and may not serve as panelists.
- The SEFSC Director may appoint additional experts (such as university researchers, international experts, and NOAA Fisheries employees from outside the SE Region) for data and assessment stages as necessary to complete assigned Terms of Reference and ensure adequate expertise is available at each step of the process. Travel expenses for additional experts will be covered by the SEFSC.

5.2 Project Documentation and Dissemination

- All submitted materials are subject to public distribution and internet posting, except draft reports as stated below, and data sets.
- Documentation consists of working papers prepared for each project stage, reference documents selected from published literature, and project reports.
- Documentation will be distributed electronically.
- Preliminary working papers will be identified as such, with language included on a cover page providing the date, submitter or author, and statement that the information is pre-decisional. Subsequent revisions should include the date of the revision and retain the original submission date.
- SEDAR does not specify the format or content of working papers.
- SEDAR is not a repository for data sets used in the assessment.
- Assessment and review stage presentations, prepared in advance of a meeting shall be posted to the SEDAR website. “Working” presentations developed during a meeting are not posted to the website due to their pre-decisional and informal nature.
- Draft reports shall not be distributed to non-panelists.
- Panelists are individually responsible for ensuring that their viewpoints and opinions are reflected in the panel report.
- Reports should provide clear rationale for panel decisions and recommendations, and note associated uncertainties.
- The names and affiliations of all who attend meetings, including panelists, appointed observers, attendees and staff, will be disclosed in workshop documents.
- SEDAR panels are not approved for viewing confidential information. Confidentiality will be maintained in accordance with agency and data collector requirements for all submitted datasets, working papers, and workshop reports. Each author or data provider is personally responsible for maintaining confidentiality.
- The final Stock Assessment Report, including the reports of all SEDAR processes and any necessary addenda, shall be disseminated to the Cooperators involved in the project and the SEDAR Steering Committee through memorandum from the SEDAR Coordinator following completion of the project.
- Notice of the availability of the final Stock Assessment Report shall also be distributed to all individuals on the email distribution lists for all stages of the project.
- SEDAR involvement is complete once the final Stock Assessment Report is finalized and disseminated to the Cooperator.
- Cooperator Technical Body and Lead Analytical Agency staff may produce summary reports regarding a SEDAR assessment. Those reports should be forwarded to the appropriate SEDAR Coordinator for inclusion on the SEDAR website.
- Each Cooperator is responsible for subsequent distribution of SEDAR documentation to its panels and committees.

5.3 Science Based Decision Making

- SEDAR recommendations shall be achieved through consensus of the panel in attendance at the meeting, rather than formal votes. Consensus recommendations shall be structured to ensure that the full range of opinions, variability and uncertainty is reflected in the report.
    - SEDAR recommendations are advisory in nature. The lead analytic agency makes a final determination regarding incorporation of recommendation into the assessment.
- SEDAR panels shall consider biological and technical aspects of datasets and stock assessments and base recommendations upon the scientific merit of the alternatives proposed.
- SEDAR panel decisions are not to be based on possible management outcomes or regulatory impacts. At no point should a SEDAR panel consider such concerns.
    - Participants, whether panelists or observers, who embark upon discussions of management implications or regulatory consequences beyond those needed to address the Terms of Reference will be notified by the chair that such deliberations are beyond the scope of SEDAR and explicitly and intentionally prohibited.
    - If such issues continue to be raised and notices to the contrary are ignored, the Chair, Council staff, and Council members present are authorized by the Steering Committee to ask the offending individual to leave the meeting.
    - If the individual refuses to leave upon such a request, the Chair shall be under no obligation to recognize them during further panel discussions.

5.4 Meeting Policies

- SEDAR assessment projects may be completed through in-person workshops, webinars, conference calls, or a combination of all these approaches.
- SEDAR meetings will be noticed by SEDAR Coordinators in the Federal Register in accordance with the noticing requirements of the Magnuson Act. .
- All SEDAR meetings are recorded. Recordings are retained for the Administrative Record. Preparation of written transcripts of SEDAR projects and Steering Committee meetings may be requested in writing by any SEDAR Steering Committee member.
- All panelists are expected to actively contribute to the process by reviewing documentation, preparing supporting analyses, contributing documents and datasets, participating in discussions, and producing report text.
- Participants are expected to provide alternative solutions along with any criticisms and work toward consensus while conducting themselves with respectful and professional behavior. No personal attacks or aggressive behavior will be tolerated from any participants, and those who persist in such actions will be asked to leave.
- SEDAR panels are expected to reach consensus decisions, which may include acknowledging multiple approaches for addressing issues and unknowns. Voting is not conducted.
- Panelists and appointed observers are expected to sign-in daily during meetings.
- In-person participation is preferred at workshops, especially for key personnel such as the lead analyst, working group leads (at Data Workshops) and members of the Review Panel.

  - SEDAR will broadcast data and review workshop plenary sessions for in=person workshops. This will be a broadcast-only feature and allows individuals not in attendance to observe the proceedings.
  - It is recognized that emergencies occur and exceptions to remote participation may be accommodated on a case-by-case basis.

- If an individual Cooperator is interested in holding a hybrid meeting, they may work with SEDAR Staff to address the logistical requirements. The Cooperator is required to provide the logistical and financial support needed for a hybrid meeting that exceeds the regular meeting needs.
  - A hybrid meeting is defined as a meeting where the expectation for in-person participation is removed. Appointed participants are able to individually choose whether to participate by attending the meeting in person, or by attending remotely.
  - Hybrid meetings should be identified and planned for during initial project planning steps.
  - In the event a need arises for a hybrid meeting that was not considered in advance, requests for a hybrid approach should be provided to the SEDAR Coordinator with ample advance notice to ensure they can be accommodated prior to the workshop.

6. SEDAR Assessment Components

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. The determination of which components to include is based on the information available for consideration. All SEDAR projects are intended to provide reliable and robust assessment products.

6.1 Data Stage Components

Highlights:

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

6.1.1 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

6.1.2 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.

6.1.3 Data Topical Working Groups (TWGs)

Highlights:

- Small working groups assembled to discuss specific data topics identified in the Terms of Reference for a given SEDAR project
- Intended to be used to review and provide recommendations on the use of new data streams or data analysis approaches not used in the previously approved assessment
- 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.
  - 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 other collaborators (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 will finalize their recommendations to the Analytic Team after evaluating how their scoping-webinar guidance was applied to the relevant data or assessment issues.
  - 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.

6.1.4 Data Webinars:

Highlights:

- Conducted when there are multiple data streams that would benefit from more structured public discussions and recommendations than provided using the Topical Working Group approach.

- Intended to be used to review and provide recommendations on the use of new data streams or data analysis approaches not used in the previously approved assessment
- Only select data sets up for discussion and consideration (previously utilized, new)
- 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)
- Discussions and recommendations will be documented

Data Webinar Process Details:

- Data webinars 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 for a given assessment, following their approved SEDAR appointment procedures.
- 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 Panel.
  - 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 the Panel discussions.
- 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.
- Webinars will be chaired by SEFSC or SEDAR staff, though Cooperators may choose to appoint another individual to serve in that role for a specific assessment/topic.
- Panel discussions and recommendations will be documented, either as a separate data report, working papers or within the assessment report.

6.1.5 Data Workshop:

Highlights:

- In-person or virtual 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 or 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 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 Workshop. 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.
- 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.

6.2 Assessment Stage Components

Highlights:

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

6.2.1 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
- Intended to be used to review and provide recommendations on the use of new modeling approaches not used in the previously approved assessment
- Discussion of other modeling topics not specifically identified is limited
- Groups are comprised of members of the analytic team, SSC members, and other technical experts

- Industry representatives and other non-technical stakeholders may be appointed as observers
- 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 assessment topics identified in the Terms of Reference.
- Comprised of SSC members, 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, recommendations, date updates, assessment modeling efforts and results 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 lead analytic agency 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 other collaborators (data providers and analytic team representation) will be involved in TWG discussions.

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.
  - Analytic team and data providers will be available to answer questions/provide data or additional analysis.
- ***Recommendations Webinar:*** TWG members will finalize their recommendations to the Analytic Team after evaluating how their scoping-webinar guidance was applied the relevant data or assessment issues.
  - 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.

6.2.2 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 Panel 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.
- A group of industry stakeholders may be appointed by the appropriate Cooperator to provide guidance on fishery practices as requested by the Assessment Panel. The appointed observers must be chosen from the Cooperator SEDAR Advisory Panel unless the Cooperator is exempt from that requirement as specified elsewhere in this document.
- 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 appointed observers 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.

6.2.3 Agency-Led Internal Assessment Development

Highlights: (Approach 1)

- Lead analytic agency develops the assessment without structured input from an assessment panel or topical working group.
- Limited noticed SEDAR-led webinars.
- Technical Team with the relevant expertise would be available to provide feedback as needed during model development.
- 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 with limited SEDAR webinars.

Agency-Led Internal Assessment Development Process:

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.
  - Cooperators will provide the lead analytic agency via memo a list of appointed Technical Team members, along with their contact information, for each assessment project. SEDAR Cooperators should receive a copy of the memo for the Administrative Record.
  - At least one publicly noticed SEDAR-led webinar will be held to review Technical Team recommendations.

- 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.

Pre-decisional Briefing to CTB:

- For the Council Cooperators, the lead analytic agency would deliver an assessment development update 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.

Highlights: (Approach 2)

- Lead analytic agency develops the assessment without structured input from an assessment panel or topical working group.
- No noticed SEDAR-led workshops or webinars.
- Individuals with the relevant expertise would be available to provide feedback as needed during model development.
- 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 workshop or webinars.
- A report documenting data updates, assessment modeling efforts, and results shall be produced.

Pre-decisional Briefing to CTB:

- For the Council Cooperators, the lead analytic agency would deliver an assessment development update 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.

6.3 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 in-person or virtual Review Workshops, 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 precludes an in-person or virtual 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.
    - Desk reviews are not recommended due to the lack of interaction between reviewers and those who prepared the material under review.
- All reviewers shall be independent from the assessments under review. 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.

6.3.1 <u>Review Workshop Process:</u>

- The review workshop may be conducted in person or virtually.
- Review Workshop Panels shall typically be composed of:
  - 3 reviewers appointed by the CIE (Center for Independent Experts).
  - 2 reviewers 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 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, unless otherwise requested by the Cooperator.
- 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.

6.3.2 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.

6.3.3 Hybrid Desk Review Process:

- Review panel and analytic team will convene via webinar for a presentation of the assessment.
  - This will allow for clarifying questions regarding the assessment prior to the reviewers conducting their independent peer reviews.
  - There will be no communication between the reviewers and analytic team after this webinar concludes.
- 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 assists its technical bodies in addressing desk review findings and recommendations.

7. Role of the SSCs

- The SSC is expected to provide guidance on structure of the assessment process, specifically regarding which process components are needed.
- The SSC is responsible for recommending data and/or assessment topics to be included in the process through review of Terms of Reference.
- SSC members will participate in the SEDAR process as appointed by the cooperator.
- The SSC is not expected to provide duplicative peer review of completed external independent peer reviews conducted through SEDAR. SSC members are included in the review panel to provide context during the review process.
- SSCs may provide the peer review of a SEDAR project if a review process is not part of the project structure.
- SSCs will make a recommendation as to whether the assessment is consistent with Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA) and determine whether assessment findings and outputs are adequate for supporting SSC fishing level recommendations to the management body.
- 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 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 SSC is responsible for presenting to their Council their evaluation of the adequacy of the assessment, their interpretation and summary of the assessment methods and findings, and their recommendations regarding appropriate actions.

8. Relation to State Agencies

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

9. NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Division

- For the HMS Management Division, NMFS staff shall review the report and process and determine whether the assessment findings are adequate for management.
- Staff may request further evaluation of assessment uncertainties and alternative projection scenarios if deemed necessary for management.
- All assessments conducted on behalf of HMS will be reviewed through an external peer review process, as HMS does not have a CTB to provide a review.
- If designated HMS staff determine that an error or omission has been made in the assessment model or in any input datasets, determine that such issues significantly impact the assessment results, and upon consideration of the magnitude and direction of required management actions that may be impacted by the error or omission, said staff shall prepare a written report for submission to the lead analytic agency that 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 NMFS.
- Upon completion of its review, NMFS shall consider the SEDAR assessment findings and the results of any additional supplementary analyses requested in developing specific management recommendations as the best scientific information available.
- Members of the analytic team will assist the HMS Management Division in making a presentation of the assessment to the HMS Advisory Panel either during or after the NMFS review and recommendations phase.