

SAFMC SSC Peer Review Process

Approved by the SSC: April 11, 2013

Approved by the Council: June 14, 2013

Highlighted Modifications: June 2014

Background

The South Atlantic Scientific and Statistical Committee proposes that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council adopt a policy that specifies a process for the SSC to provide scientific peer review. Such a process is authorized by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and National Standard Guidelines provide principles for a peer review process.

National Standard 2 in the Act mandates that “*Conservation and management measures shall be based upon the best scientific information available.*” The Act also states that “*Each Council shall establish, maintain, and appoint the members of a scientific and statistical committee to assist it in the development, collection, evaluation, and **peer review of such statistical, biological, economic, social, and other scientific information as is relevant to such Council’s development and amendment of any fishery management plan**”; and “*Each scientific and statistical committee shall provide its Council ongoing scientific advice for fishery management decisions, including recommendations for acceptable biological catch, preventing overfishing, maximum sustainable yield, and achieving rebuilding targets, and reports on stock status and health, bycatch, habitat status, social and economic impacts of management measures, and sustainability of fishing practices*” (emphasis added).*

Draft guidelines for National Standard 2 list “*widely accepted principles for evaluating BSIA: **relevance, inclusiveness, objectivity, transparency, timeliness, verification, validation, and peer review.***” The guidelines recognize that “*the time available to review scientific information and the importance of that information to fishery management decisions are also variable... However, the development of such scientific information should be in accordance with the principles of transparency and openness... The proposed NS2 guidelines provide guidance that is fundamental for the reliability and integrity of scientific information to be used by NMFS and the Councils to effectively manage and conserve our nation’s living marine resources.*”

The **draft** National Standard 2 guidelines specify that Best Scientific Information Available is determined through regional peer review process (e.g., SEDAR), but SSC recommendations can deviate from regional peer review process recommendations if justification is provided. The SSC recognizes that SEDAR is the preferred process for determining Best Scientific Information Available when time and resources are available. However, the SSC also recognizes that the Council may wish to consider scientific information that has not been reviewed by SEDAR. Therefore, the Council and SSC should develop a review process for topics of limited scope that maintain principles of Best Scientific Information Available and are consistent with National Standard 2 guidelines. Ideally, the process would be recognized by SEFSC and SERO so that SSC recommendations are consistent with status determination.

Proposed Review Process

The intention of this document is to describe an SSC Review Process that is responsive to new and relevant scientific information, promotes responsible scientific advice, provides rationale for deciding to initiate a SSC review (or not), encourages scientific advancements, improves the scientific basis of fishery management, complements the SEDAR process, and adds value to the science and management system.

This document provides proposed standards and a process for SSC Review of stock assessment information that is prepared outside of the regular Council and agency channels (e.g., SEDAR, or Agency analyses). These are commonly known as “3rd party” stock assessments. Analyses proposed for SSC review under this process should address Council priorities.

The following provides general instructions and process guidance for those considering preparing and submitting assessment analyses for council consideration.

- I. A proposal shall be submitted to the SSC addressing methods and sources for obtaining data and methods of analysis. Such proposals should be submitted to the SSC in advance, ideally before starting work to ensure data and analytical standards are met. Proposals shall be submitted to the Council office for distribution to SSC.

Items to address in the proposal include:

1. Indicate how the proposed work addresses Council priorities and the reasoning for the work to be conducted outside of existing assessment procedures.
2. Data providers, sources, and means of validation.
 - a. data or data protocols should ideally be previously peer reviewed and validated (e.g., through a SEDAR-type process),
 - b. If prior peer reviewed data are not available, data shall be otherwise validated in a way appropriate to the analysis that satisfies SSC (methods to be addressed in the proposal; may be specific to the analytical needs; and could include written documentation from data providers, or *a priori* SSC review, or convening of a SEDAR style data workshop)
3. Scope of Work and documentation of the general analytical method.
 - a. Ideally, methods used should be based on previously peer reviewed techniques (e.g., published, applied successfully to other stocks, and supported by peer review application to other stocks).
4. Acknowledgement of SSC peer review process, and a commitment to participate in the review according to the process described here, and to complete supplemental work as necessary.
 - a. supplemental work includes

- i. those additional assessment runs deemed necessary by the review body
 - ii. Projections and evaluations of uncertainty as necessary to develop fishing level recommendations through the ABC control rule.
5. Project Timeline and expected date of distribution of completed report.
 - a. This will allow the SSC and Council to adequately plan for a timely review of the completed work.
 - b. Project personnel are responsible for informing the Council and SSC of any significant delays or difficulties anticipated in meeting the proposed delivery schedule.

II. Proposal review:

1. Proposals will be reviewed by the SSC.
2. Proposals will be distributed to the SSC membership, via mail or electronic means, as received at the Council office.
3. Proposal review will be conducted through conference call, webinar, or as part of an otherwise scheduled SSC meeting.
 - a. An SSC conference call or webinar, as determined by the SSC chair in consultation with Council Staff, will be scheduled not sooner than 6 weeks following receipt of a proposal for review.
 - b. If a regularly scheduled SSC meeting falls near the timing of a possible proposal review conference call or webinar, there is time on the SSC agenda, and the item can be added to that agenda without violating notification policies, the proposal review will be included in the SSC agenda.
4. The SSC will provide a written memorandum detailing their review of the proposal.

Items to consider and address in the review include:

- a. Does the project address Council priorities and is the reasoning for pursuing this review approach justified?
- b. Is the data validation approach appropriate and satisfactory?
- c. Is the scope of work adequately defined and documented, and suitable for the project objectives?
- d. Is the project timeline reasonable and coordinated to the extent practicable with scheduled SSC and Council meetings? The SSC may recommend changes in the project timeline if necessary to avoid requiring additional SSC meetings to comply with this process.
- e. Provide guidance on the peer review approach that is appropriate for this project (Section IV). Depending on project timing and SSC meeting schedules, the SSC may consider reviewers, review timing, and review TORs at this time.

- f. Any deficiencies noted shall be clearly stated along with proposed methods of resolution.

III. Submission of completed analysis

1. Once the work is completed, the complete documentation of the data, methods, results, routine diagnostics and interpretations shall be submitted through the Council to the SSC for review and consideration. Note that the SSC requires a minimum of 2 weeks review time for materials.

IV. The Peer Review Process ~~for completed work~~(Seems confusing)

1. The Peer Review will be conducted by a panel of reviewers appointed by the Council.
 - a. The appointment process shall be similar to that used to appoint participants to SEDAR Review Workshop Panels. Reviewers need (not?) be members of the Council SEDAR AP.
 - b. The SSC will provide the Peer Review Panel Chair.
 - c. Participants may include SSC members, State and Federal agency scientists, university researchers, or other experts as deemed appropriate and qualified.
 - d. Participants may include independent experts, such as those provided by the CIE.
 - i. Comments of outside experts may be obtained through written (desk) review rather than by their participation in the review panel.
2. The Peer Review will be guided by Terms of Reference approved by the Council.
 - a. The SSC will provide the Council recommended Terms of Reference.
3. The Peer Review will be conducted as an open meeting, either in-person or through electronic meeting methods.
 - a. The SSC will provide the Council a recommendation on the timing of the review, the specific method of convening the panel (in person or electronic), the time necessary to complete the review work, and Terms of Reference for the Review.
 - b. Public notice of the review will be provided through the Federal Register and by posting to the Council website.
4. Peer Review Timing
 - a. Peer Reviews must be conducted no less than 5 weeks before the SSC meeting where the topic is to be discussed and recommendations made.
 - b. Timing of the Peer Review will be determined by the Council, based on recommendations of the SSC and Council Staff.
5. Peer Review Process Administration

- a. The preceding process for arranging the peer review may be conducted simultaneously to the analytical work, to ensure prompt review of completed work.
6. Product of the review panel
 - a. The Review Panel will prepare a written report documenting the review activities, findings, and addressing the Terms of Reference.
 - b. The Peer Review Report will be provided by the Chair to Council Staff for distribution to SSC.
 - c. Additional work requested by the review panel is to be completed by the project personnel, and submitted to the SSC in accordance with standard documentation guidelines.