

# SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL



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Dr. Bonnie Ponwith  
Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
75 Virginia Beach Drive  
Miami, FL 33149

Dear Bonnie,

I am writing to you with concern over the role of Council SSC representatives in the upcoming Peer Review of the SEFSC Stock Assessment Program. As you know the SSCs are fully integrated into the stock assessment process. This is especially important in the Southeast where the SEDAR assessments are conducted in a partnership between the Councils, Commissions, HMS and the SEFSC.

I believe that it is critical that the Council SSC Chairs be invited to provide input, not necessarily serving as panelists, but to make sure the reviewers receive the SSC perspective first hand, not filtered by outside observers. In reviewing the draft agenda, I noticed that there are a number of "themes" currently listed that will drive the review process. Several of these are referenced below that are pertinent to SSC member participation:

*Theme 2: Overview of the Assessment Process*

*Efficacy of the assessment process regarding clarity of terms of reference, transparency to stakeholders, throughput, documentation and reproducibility of results?*

The SSCs recommend the terms of reference, know what documentation is necessary to support their review and receive first hand feedback from stakeholders.

*Theme 2: (continued)*

*What is the efficacy of the assessment process from an SSC perspective?*

This question is framed directly to the SSCs and is seemingly impossible to answer without their direct input. Multiple SSC members participate in all stages of the SEDAR assessment process, all who may have differing perspectives. It will be difficult for a single SEFSC staff person to have adequate knowledge of all three of the SSCs. Realistically, no one person can answer for all three of our SSCs. The dilemma presented is how can you address an SSC perspective for a process serving three SSCs without having SSC representatives from each Council at the review?

*Theme 3: Peer review process*

*What is the adequacy of the Center and SEDAR assessment peer review process, taking into consideration the participation of other entities such as the Council's SSC?*

This theme also focuses directly on the SSC. In the southeast under the SEDAR process the SSCs are the sole peer reviewers for update and standard assessments and SSC members also serve on the review panel for benchmark assessments. How can the adequacy of the peer review process be evaluated without interaction with SSC members that are the primary, experienced peer reviewers?

*Theme 4: Communication*

*Does the assessment program adequately communicate research, methods, results and data needs to the councils, state commissions and stakeholders?*

The SSCs are the primary recipient of the communication listed. Another question is how can this theme be addressed without reaching out to councils, commissions and stakeholders explicitly? There have been problems in the recent past concerning communication on multiple levels. This cannot be addressed sufficiently without the SSC's input.

I'm not sure how the TORs for the review are developed, but a national process with a "one size fits all approach" may work well for situations where the Center runs the assessment process, however, as you are aware in the Southeast the SEDAR process is a Council coordinated system in conjunction with SEFSC. It is a partnership and any suggested changes that stem from the review will take the support of all SEDAR partners to implement. I believe that in the interest of transparency and function that it is critical particularly in the Southeast that the SSC Chairs have the opportunity to provide appropriate input during the upcoming Stock Assessment Peer Review.

I can't speak for the Chairmen of the Gulf and Caribbean Councils, but I am requesting that the South Atlantic Council's SSC Chairman be invited to participate at an appropriate level in the upcoming Stock Assessment Peer Review. We will cover the costs associated with our SSC Chairman's travel and other expenses.

Thank you for your consideration of my request. I look forward to seeing you at the Council meeting next week. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Ben Hartig  
Chairman

CC: SAFMC Members and Staff  
Theo Brainerd and Tomas Jamir  
Miguel Rolon and Carlos Farchette  
Doug Boyd and Doug Gregory  
SSC Members