

Modifications to the SEDAR Approval Process

SEDAR changed the assessment process for most of its Cooperators (assessment requestors) from the “Benchmark, Standard, and Update Assessment” to the “Research Track (RT) and Operational Assessment (OA)” approach in 2019 with the start of SEDAR 68 Scamp Research Track Assessment. A RT assessment is designed to develop the tool to conduct future assessments and will only need minor modification when additional data are added. The RT assessment will not provide management advice or determine stock status. Once the tool has been reviewed through the SEDAR Process and approved for use by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), it is ready to be used in an OA to provide catch level advice and describe stock status. OAs are meant to be a streamlined assessment process. They may immediately follow a research track where only additional years of data are input into the model, or they may occur years after the research track and include one or two topical working groups to address issues in the model or add a new data stream. With this new method, species managed by the Council will be assessed on a more regular basis (target every 5 years or less) and allow for more timely assessments. Additional background information on the Research Track and Operational Assessment approach is available in Attachment 2b and timing of SEDAR milestones are provided in Appendix A.

Changes in the assessment process prompted consideration for changes in the SAFMC SEDAR Committee process for two issues; the level of review for SoWs which may require change when SEDAR Committee meets (Issue 1) and review of the project schedule (Issue 2).

Issue 1: The requirement for Statements of Work (SoWs) for Operational Assessments not associated with a Research Track Assessment

Statements of Works have been required for OAs not associated with a RT since 2019. They define the scope of the assessment request and are the starting point for negotiations between Cooperators and NMFS. Items up for negotiations include when the assessment will be completed, the timeframe for data to be included, and any changes to the current model configuration. SoWs are an opportunity for input by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) to ensure the next assessment is addressing issues identified by the Council and SSC. Additionally, SoWs help gauge the workload for the lead assessment agency during planning. Pre-negotiated SoWs are due three years before the start of an assessment (e.g., SoW for 2024 Tilefish Operational Assessment was submitted to SEDAR staff on Nov 1, 2021). The process is as follows:

- Cooperators produce draft SoWs that are submitted to the lead agency (e.g., SEFSC) for their review by November 1st. Pre-negotiated SoWs should provide enough detail for each item requested (data inputs, timing, and potential assessment modifications) to enable the lead agency to determine the resources required to complete the task for scheduling purposes, including the terminal year of data and any specifications relating to the need and nature of topical working groups, additional webinars or workshops.
- SEFSC provides feedback to Cooperators via memo February 1st.
- Cooperators/Technical review bodies review feedback and negotiate negotiated SoWs with SEFSC.
- Negotiated SoWs are provided to SEDAR Program Manager by May 1st.

- SEFSC informs Cooperators what can be accommodated during the Spring SEDAR Steering Committee discussions regarding project scheduling.
- Using the final SoW as the template, draft ToRs are produced by Cooperator and lead analytic agency; approval of ToRs follows existing Cooperator approval process.

Currently the SAFMC SEDAR Committee meets twice a year (typically at the June and December Council meetings). The SAFMC SSC currently meets in April and October of each year. Though the Committee may hold additional meetings to handle time-sensitive topics, it would be best to focus on the regular meeting schedule when discussing the review and approval process for SEDAR SoWs. In response to the process change described and the SoW timing, staff are requesting clarification on how the Council want to review and approve SoWs.

A range of options has been developed for consideration. Potential objectives for the review of the SoWs are provided in Table 1 and timing for the different options is provided in **Table 2**. The three potential options include:

- Option 1 – Council does not review SoWs.
- Option 2 – Council and SSC review pre-negotiated SoWs with the Committee meeting in June and December and the SSC meeting in April and October.
- Option 3 - Council and SSC review pre- and post- negotiated SoWs, Council changes SEDAR Committee meetings to the March and September Council meetings, and requests SSC to develop SoW working group.

Table 1. Potential objectives to consider when selecting which review option.

Objective	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Allows for Council review of SoW		✓	✓
Allows for multiple opportunities for SoW review			✓
Allows for SSC review of SoW		✓	✓
Requires two or less SEDAR Committee Meetings per year	✓	✓	✓

Review Option 1. Council does not review SoWs.

Under this option, the Council and SSC would not review SoWs. Council staff would work with the assessment agency to develop the SoWs.

- + No additional committee meetings are needed.
- + Reduced time during Council and SSC meetings talking about SoWs.
- Important issues identified by either SSC or Council may be missed.

Review Option 2. Council and SSC review pre-negotiated SoWs.

The Council and SSC would review the pre-negotiated SoWs. There is not a meeting in March to review the negotiated SoWs. This best matches the current process when the deadline for SoWs was created. Note: SSC review of pre-negotiated SoWs would be moved to April instead of October.

- + Council and SSC identified changes to an assessment are considered for a stock assessment.

- + Additional SEDAR Committee meeting in March is not necessary.
- + Discussions on changes to an assessment are negotiated early in the process and best ensures requested changes are discussed.
- SSC and Council would not have a chance to comment on negotiated SoWs.

Review Option 3. Council changes SEDAR Committee to March and September and requests SSC to develop a SoW working group.

The Council and SSC would review pre-negotiated and negotiated SoWs. This will create an SSC working group to aid in the development of SoWs. The SSC working group can aid in revising the SoWs based on comments during the negotiations, which can help in the review of the assessment. The SEDAR Committee meeting schedule would shift to March and September, which does not follow the SEDAR Steering Committee meeting.

- + Council and SSC identified changes to an assessment are discussed early in the SoW development process.
- + SSC Working Group created to aid in the development of the SoW.
- + SSC Working Group aids in refining the SoWs during the negotiations.
- + No additional SEDAR Committee meetings are necessary.
- + Negotiated SoWs are presented to Council.
- Council will review SoWs multiple times which may cause some confusion.
- Requires additional SSC Working Group.
- The timing for the SEDAR Committee would not follow the current SEDAR Steering Committee Meetings in April and October.

Table 2. Timing of assessment project milestones under five reviews levels by the Council and SSC. Filled cells represent milestones fixed outside of Council. All dates are based on a 2024 assessment start.

Project Milestone	Option 1 (No Review)	Option 2 (SSC and Council Review of Draft SoW)	Option 3 (Change SEDAR Com meeting timing and multiple reviews)
Council Recommends Species for Consideration during the SEDAR Committee meeting	December 2020	December 2020	March 2021
Pre-negotiated SoWs Reviewed by SSC		April 2021	April 2021
SSC Populates SoW Working Group			April 2021
Pre-negotiated SoW Reviewed by Council		June 2021	September 2021
SoW Sent to NMFS	November 2021	November 2021	November 2021
SEFSC response to SOWs	February 2022	February 2022	February 2022
SoW Negotiations	Feb to Mar 2022	Feb to Mar 2022	Feb to Mar 2022
SSC Team Reviews Negotiated SoW			Feb-Mar 2022
Council Review of Negotiated SoW			March 2022
Negotiated SoWs from Cooperators to SEDAR	May 2022	May 2022	May 2022
SEDAR Steering Committee Approval of Projects (two years prior to assessment start)	May 2022	May 2022	May 2022

Issue 2. Review of Assessment Project Schedules

Another issue that has been identified during the discussions between Council and SEDAR staff is the approval of the individual project schedules. The project schedule for a specific assessment is developed through discussions with the lead agency and SEDAR staff and is typically presented with the ToRs when they are presented for approved by the Council. The timing of most milestones for these assessments does not have much flexibility due to the limited availability of some data providers. SEDAR staff meet with agency staff to produce a Master Schedule for all stock assessments conducted through SEDAR. Balancing the schedule among multiple Cooperators limits the ability to change an individual project schedule.

There are essentially two options for the review of assessments project schedules: continue to approve individual project schedules or have the project schedules presented as informational material.

Schedule Option 1. Continue to Approve Assessment Project Schedule

- + No change to the current process.
- + The Council can ensure the assessment schedule is not conflicting with other priorities.
- Schedules do not have much flexibility to change due to data provider flexibility.
- Requests for schedule changes may result in a delay of the assessment.

Schedule Option 2. Schedules presented as informational during SEDAR Committee

- + The schedule is developed to best fit schedules of the assessment team, data providers, and SEDAR staff.
- + Reduces potential for assessment delays associated with the schedule change.
- Council cannot change the schedule for individual projects.

Appendix A.

Table A1. SEDAR milestone schedule for Standard and Update Assessment and Operational Assessments. Tan indicates a new milestone and brown indicates a milestone with a fixed deadline.

Previous Approach for Standards and Updates	New Process for an Operational Assessment Not Associated with a Research Track
Council Recommends Species for Consideration	Council Recommends Species for Consideration
STC Approval of Requested Species and Type of Assessment	STC Approval of Requested Species and Type of Assessment
	Draft SoWs produced by Council Staff
	SoWs Reviewed by SSC and Council
	SoW Sent to NMFS
	SEFSC response to SoWs
	SoW Negotiations between SEFSC and Council
	Final SoW Reviewed by Council and SSC
	Final SoWs from Cooperators to SEDAR
SEDAR Steering Committee Approval of Projects	SEDAR Steering Committee Approval of Projects
SEDAR Staff works with Center Staff to produce Terms of Reference and Project Schedule	SEDAR Staff works with Center Staff to produce Terms of Reference and Project Schedule
SSC ToR Approval/ SSC Participants Identified	SSC ToR Approval/ SSC Participants Identified
Council Approves ToRs and Reviews Project Schedule	Council Approves ToRs and Reviews Project Schedule
Council Appoint Participants (if needed)	Council Appoint Participants (if needed)
Assessment to SSC	Assessment to SSC
Assessment to Council	Assessment to Council