

# Discussion document to consider revising the name of the Socio-Economic Panel

Socio-Economic Panel, April 2024

## *Background*

Meriam Webster dictionary defines the term “socio-economic” as *of, relating to, or involving a combination of social and economic factors*. The somewhat ambiguous nature of the term and use in federal fisheries management rule making recently came under scrutiny in the U.S. Federal court system. In February 2023, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled in favor of plaintiffs challenging the final rule covering a federal electronic for-hire logbook and vessel monitoring requirement recently implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service for the U.S. Gulf of Mexico (*Mexican Gulf Fishing Company v. United States Department of Commerce*; No. 22-30105).

Discussion and critique of the use of the term “socio-economic” is captured in pages 26 through 29 of the Court’s findings (***Attachment 9b***). In summary, the Court took issue with the term encompassing both social and economic topics, while only economic questions were asked through the federal for-hire logbook and included in the proposed rule. Additionally, the Court noted that there is a common association of the term with demographics or societal status rather than purely economic or social topics. The Court noted that “the Final Rule did not provide “fair notice” because it required the reporting of an entirely different category of data than the data described in the Proposed Rule.”

Aside from the recent court ruling, there is also the notion that the term “socio-economic” may not encompass or properly categorize all social and economic topics that often come before the Panel as well as the Council. These topics can be very distinct and focused on a specific specialty. While there is overlap in the disciplines of the social sciences, there are clear distinctions in the skillsets and focus of these disciplines. For example the subject matter of sociology is often very different than economics. Additionally, there is the previously noted common association of the term “socio-economic” strictly with demographic information rather than the practice of the social sciences.

## *Requested SEP action*

John Hadley and Christina Wiegand, SAFMC staff, will brief the SEP on the topic. The SEP will be asked to provide feedback on the name of the panel and whether revising the name should be considered.

## *Discussion questions*

- 1) Given recent legal scrutiny of the term “socio-economic” and the potential narrow association of the term with demographic information, does the SEP think that the name of the Panel should be revised?
  - a. If so, what should be the new name? Social and Economic Panel?