

June 2009 Scientific and Statistical Committee Report

Agenda Item 1: Introduction

Agenda and minutes were approved.

Agenda Item 2: SEDAR Steering Committee Report

Council staff discussed the proposed changes to the SEDAR process, including the staggering of benchmarks and assessments between the Beaufort and Miami labs, and the collapsed review, which would bring the SSC review of the SEDAR in with the CIE review.

The issue of improved coordination of species across regions was raised as a result of the continuing comparisons between SA and GOM decisions and approaches. Concern is this could become more problematic if, for example, the Gulf of Mexico does a tilefish benchmark in same year SA does tilefish update.

The SSC discussed how SEDAR changes would affect SSC workload, acknowledging that the combined review would essentially add another meeting. This possibility already existed as a means to address heavy agendas and time lag issues between assessments and meetings.

Workload discussion led to a side comment on the recent and growing practice of individuals contacting SSC members directly and personally, with the intent of lobbying or persuading or intimidating SSC members with regard to particular issues.

The SSC again discussed having greater influence over the agenda, questioned how presentations from lobbyists, environmental NGOs or industry reps are added to the agenda, and whether there should be a more rigorous vetting process to prevent being inundated with opinion pieces. The SSC agreed with the need to focus comments. The SSC discussed pending changes to the SOPPS, and ongoing discussion of the Selection committee on procedures.

SSC members believe it is inappropriate to receive comment to the SSC as a body from individual fishermen or constituent representatives seeking to gain influence. It was discussed that such correspondence needs to go through the Council before coming to the SSC as a group. Specifically, the SSC felt that such correspondence should go through the proper peer-review channels (SEDAR, Science Center, then SSC). The SSC felt that its role is the final stage in the peer-review process, and challenges to the science should first be vetted through those who performed the actual analysis. If the Council is seeking a response to a specific piece of public comment, it is recommended that it first be addressed by

Council staff or the region science center, then reviewed by the SSC. The SSC felt that it should not be lobbied.

The SSC also noted that Council intent is for SSC to provide peer review of all science to come before Council, and that the Council will not receive any scientific comment unless first vetted through SSC.

Again, the suggestion was made for the SSC chair, vice, maybe 1-2 others on committee to comment and help manage agenda, serve to determine what is brought forward, and identify priority items. It was also suggested that any items coming from an individual requesting to present to SSC be submitted as a written report prior to the meeting. A suggested deadline was 2 months prior. The SSC chair and vice chair would decide whether a personal presentation is desired on the topic.

Agenda Item 3: SSC Selection Committee Report

Council staff informed the group that the SSC Selection Committee would be meeting to discuss the reappointment of four members under the new term policy along with the selection of three new members to fill the seats left vacant by Ken Pollock, Doug Gregory, and Pat Harris. Staff also indicated that the SSC is strongly being directed towards providing consensus statements in their reports rather than providing motions. The SSC was also informed that the Selection Committee supported the suggestion to hold the SSC meetings separate from the Council meeting, which will begin in 2010. Staff also indicated that the Selection Committee would be populating a Socio-economic Subpanel at this meeting.

Agenda Item 4: FMP and Amendment Updates

The SSC received a report from Council staff on the status of new FMPs and the Amendments currently in the system. Staff also supplied the group with a spreadsheet showing the overlap of management measures.

Agenda Item 5: SAFMC Monitoring Plan

The SSC suggested enhancing fishery independent needs. Elevate to appear earlier and more prominent in the plan, and stress the importance as a primary preferred source of information.

Agenda Item 6: ABC Control Rule

The SSC reviewed the draft ABC control rule formulated during the March 2009 meeting. The main issue to be resolved was which PSA formulation (MRAG or

NMFS workgroup) would be incorporated into the ABC control rule. The SSC received presentations on the two formulations.

After discussion about key differences between the two approaches, the SSC decided to incorporate the MRAG formulation of PSA into the ABC control rule, as it was considered more applicable to the ABC approach developed by the SSC. Applicability is based on treatment of unknown information and the particular suite of attributes included.

Supporting Points for use of the MRAG formulation include:

- Some characteristics incorporated in the NMFS formulation are believed more appropriate for deciding separation between ABC and ACL, and should be considered by the Council in setting ACL.
- The fishery-based approaches developed in the NMFS formulation may prove helpful to the Council in setting fishery-based ACL or ACTs
- The SSC prefers to account for unknown information directly in setting the level of risk associated with a given PSA criterion
- The SSC does not intend this decision to in any way be viewed as either rejecting or supporting one formulation over another; rather the decision reflects selection of the formulation for PSA that is most consistent with the ABC framework proposed for SAFMC
- The SSC notes that the NMFS formulation of the PSA approach is flexible and could be configured to duplicate the MRAG working group formulation.
- There is likely greater uncertainty in estimates of FMSY and Abundance in low productivity vs. High productivity stocks, and for high susceptibility vs. low susceptibility stocks; therefore PSA should be considered in establishing the ABC buffer.

An inconsistency was noted in the draft relative to assigning classifications for the PSA risk scores. After discussion on how the MRAG formulation defined its classification structure, the SSC decided to use their risk score groupings which resulted in three groupings. As presented in the MRAG March 2009 Report, overall risk scores are classified as follows: High (> 3.18), Medium ($2.64 - 3.18$) and Low (< 2.64) (Hobday *et al.*, 2007).

The SSC discussed the issue of a depletion threshold in the ABC Control Rule. The NS1 guidelines state that an 'ABC control rule...may establish a stock abundance level below which fishing would not be allowed.' Currently the Pacific Fishery Management Council uses a 10% threshold. Specifically if biomass is estimated below 10% of the virgin condition, then directed fishing is not allowed. In ABC control rule, the SSC recommended to use the same 10% of virgin rule.

The SSC discussed the baseline 50% probability of overfishing proposed in the ABC control rule and if it should be set to 40% as previously determined by the Council. The SSC acknowledged that Council may choose to select the lower probability of overfishing; however the SSC recommended that Council consider shifting the 50% baseline to address specific situations where less risk is desired.

The SSC discussed the inclusion/exclusion of stock status. The SSC agreed that dynamics of the population are more uncertain when overfishing is occurring or it is overfished. It was noted that process error may be greater when depleted, which is supported by studies, and as such justified the retention of stock status as a legitimate uncertainty factor. The additional process error is a function of the predicted dynamics of declining stock, as often observed, proving to be different than the dynamics of recovery, which are typically predicted. This is seen in some stocks that stay low, and do not recover.

The assumption of equal weighting of the dimensions between and within tiers was discussed. The SSC acknowledged that although the tiers and levels within tiers may have disproportionate affects, there is currently no way to know this until the rule is applied and its performance evaluated. Future refinement is possible with more information.

Agenda Item 7: ABC Control Rule Application

The SSC applied the ABC control to those species still missing values under Amendment 17 and discussed its application to wreckfish and golden crab. For Gag, the ABC for 2010 includes 805,000 pounds for landings and 18,000 in numbers for dead discards, corresponding to a $P^* = 0.30$ from “A probability-based approach to setting annual catch limits: Gag, *Mycteroperca microlepis*, off the Southeastern United States (Report to SSC 2007). For vermilion snapper, the ABC level for 2010 is 1,109,000 pounds inclusive of landings and discards. This values was interpolated from Tables 3.19 and 3.20 of vermilion assessment workshop report to obtain the P^* value of 0.275. Given stock assessments have been scheduled for both black and red grouper, the SSC requested that estimates of the OFLs come from the Science Center. The SSC did not provide an ABC value for golden tilefish because of the age of the assessment and lack of a current estimate of abundance.

Request that the Council ask the Science Center to provide measures of OFL and the associated uncertainty. In the case of tilefish, wreckfish, golden crab and all other assessed stocks (except those already addressed in Amendment 17) this would consist of projections from the last assessment, based on known landings projected to the current year and through the next assessment based

on a P of 15 to 35 in 5% increments, similar to the tables generated in the vermilion snapper assessment.*

For unassessed stocks, the SSC requests the Council ask the Science Center to apply “best available science”, and provide estimates of OFL and the associated uncertainty through 2015. It is strongly recommended that these estimates be developed through a peer-reviewed process. The SSC also requests that the report summarizing the results include a detailed description of the methodology used to calculate the estimates and uncertainty. PSA values as performed under the MRAG approach are needed for all stocks not included in the MRAG report dated March 2009.

Agenda Item 8: Snapper Grouper Amendment 17

The SSC received an update on Amendment 17 and its current timeline. At the Council’s request, the SSC discussed the overarching use of an SPR40% as a proxy for establishing Fmsy. Although current literature establishes a precedent for using SPR40% when working with long-lived species, after general discussion the SSC recommended against a default proxy for Fmsy. The SSC indicated that the appropriate level should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

The SSC heard numerous presentations about the impacts of recent regulations and those proposed in Amendment 17 with respect to economics and changes in fishing mortality. The comments from the SSC mostly centered on how to treat changes in the spatial distribution of effort as a result of area closures. It was suggested that sensitivity analyses be used to explore the degree to which the predicted success of meeting the necessary reduction in fishing mortality for the proposed measures depends upon the assumption of no redistribution of effort. Overall, the methods appear sound, and presenters were thanked for their hard work.

Erik Williams presented a report describing two options for monitoring red snapper. Given the proposed regulations, there will be a lack of red snapper catch data for upcoming assessments. Thus, a monitoring program is necessary in order to assess red snapper in the future. The two options were (1) an expansion of the fishery-independent program (a combination of MARMAP and new sampling by the NOAA Beaufort lab) and (2) a headboat sampling program. Given issues with the headboat sampling program (mortality too high, change in behavior of fishers; see Attachment 25), Dr. Williams recommended the expanded fishery-independent sampling program. The SSC agreed with this conclusion.

Dr. Frank Hester gave a presentation to the SSC on his report outlining issues he found with the red snapper stock assessment. No discussion or comments were made by the SSC.

As discussed on the first day, the SSC feels that comments and critiques of a stock assessment that has been through the SEDAR process and fully reviewed and approved by the SSC should be held and included for discussion in the next assessment of that stock. The SSC feels that it is inappropriate to re-open the debate of decisions long since made when there is a formal process to deal with such issues, namely the SEDAR process. This opinion is in-line with those made by the SSC regarding comments on previous assessments for other species, such as those by made by Dr. Kentchington with regard to the gag grouper assessment.