

Fall 2017 Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC) Meeting Summary
November 15-16, 2017
Hyatt Place Inner Harbor – Baltimore, MD

Attendees, by group affiliation:

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC):

Bob Beal, Executive Director
Toni Kerns, Interstate Fishery Management Program Director
Pat Campfield, Fisheries Science Program Director

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC):

Michael Luisi, Chairman
G. Warren Elliot, Vice-Chairman
Dr. John Boreman, Chair, Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)
Dr. Chris Moore, Executive Director
Brandon Muffley, Staff

New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC):

Dr. John Quinn, Chairman
Terry Stockwell, Vice-chairman
Tom Nies, Executive Director
Chris Kellogg, Deputy Director
Jason McNamee, Chair, SSC

NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)

Dr. Jon Hare, Science and Research Director
Dr. Jim Weinberg, Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW) Chairman
Dr. Michael Simpkins, Chief, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division
Dr. Russ Brown, Chief, Population Dynamics Branch

NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO)

John Bullard, Regional Administrator
Mike Pentony, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries
Gene Martin, Northeast General Counsel Section Chief
Emily Gilbert, Sustainable Fisheries Division (*NRCC staff support*)
Shannah Jaburek, Sustainable Fisheries Division (*NRCC staff support*)
Dr. Michael Lanning, Analysis and Program Support Division - *Day 2 only*
Mark Murray-Brown, Protected Resources Division - *Day 2 only*

NOAA Fisheries Office of Sustainable Fisheries (OSF), Domestic Fisheries Policy and Guidance Branch

Stephanie Hunt, Chief – *Day 1 only*
Karen Greene, Staff – *Day 1 only*

NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology, Fisheries Statistics Division

Dr. Dave Van Voorhees, Chief– *Day 1 only*

South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council

Gregg Waugh, Executive Director
Charlie Phillips, Chair

- Day 1 -

1. Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Update

Dr. Dave Van Voorhees (NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology, Fisheries Statistic Division) reviewed the timeline for MRIP calibrations and revising historical time series of recreational catch statistics for different stocks. The next steps in the MRIP transition are to complete the Fishing Effort Survey (FHS)/Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) calibration model review, finish evaluating the three calibration models proposed in 2014 for the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) design change, and subsequently conduct the final APAIS calibration model peer review (March 2018). Then both models will be applied to produce the final calibrated effort and catch statistics by July 1, 2018.

Dr. Van Voorhees addressed concerns over a slip in the current schedule and assured NRCC members that final data will be available by July 1, 2018, for use by stock assessment scientists. The MRIP Transition team is working on having the information publically available on their website that would show the old and revised estimates of catch based on the new methodology, but this may occur after July 1st. Dr. Van Voorhees also noted that MRIP staff continue to work with partners to develop a good communications plan to hopefully alleviate constituent concerns and questions about how and why these changes to various MRIP models are occurring.

There was a general discussion about electronic technologies and how they can be better incorporated into data collection. Dr. Van Voorhees noted that there are currently a number of studies investigating various electronic technologies and how they can be used to collect accurate data.

2. Long-term Assessment Prioritization Progress and Other General Assessment Topics

Status of work of Cod Stock Structure working group

Dr. Michael Simpkins provided a brief update on the status of the Cod Stock Structure Working Group. Dr. Rich McBride took over leading the group from Dr. Jon Hare. The NEFSC will finalize membership for the working group by January 2018 (Action Item #1).

Status of Plan B Working Group

Dr. Brown provided an update on the status of the Plan B Working Group. In his presentation, he noted the various roles and responsibilities that the Plan B Working Group has identified for the assessment working group chair and lead assessment scientists, peer reviewers, Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs), Management Boards, and Technical Committees. These roles and responsibilities outlined what various groups would and would not be responsible for when considering if an assessment should be rejected, and developing and evaluating alternate empirical approaches. Dr. Brown also reviewed examples of empirical approaches that are currently utilized in situations where assessments have been rejected (i.e., area swept approach,

survey change approach, and data limited toolkit). Following his presentation, Dr. Brown welcomed comments and feedback from the NRCC. The next step would be to review and finalize the process outlined in the policy document included in the NRCC briefing book.

The NRCC discussed how the use of a Plan B evolved mainly from operational assessments and there is a difference in opinion among working group members on whether or not to always develop an empirical approach for benchmark assessments, regardless of whether there is a feeling that the analytical approach will likely fail. Some NRCC members shared those concerns, noting that cherry picking may occur for the best results of an assessment if a Plan B approach is always provided. However, some NRCC members also felt that it would be most beneficial, given benchmark assessment schedules, to have the benchmark assessment working groups develop empirical approaches. Dr. Jim Weinberg reminded the NRCC that if we want to move to have the Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW)/Stock Assessment Review Committee (SARC) and benchmark assessments to incorporate Plan B, we need to update the SAW/SARC process. The current process is that if Plan A fails, we accept the previously approved model with updated data, so that statement of work would need to be changed.

Update on the two-track (management and research) assessment process and progress of the NRCC Assessment Working Group

Dr. Michael Simpkins reviewed the progress of the Assessment Working Group and discussed next steps. Dr. Simpkins presented the working group's drafted ranking approach and was interested in the NRCC's thoughts on moving forward with a long-term schedule based on this ranking.

The NRCC generally discussed how much flexibility would be possible in a schedule based on the rankings to handle emerging issues. Dr. Simpkins stated that flexibility can be built into the scheduling process and there are many specifics that still need to be addressed. The NEFSC recognizes that the NRCC will want to adjust the prioritization list and can provide rationale for why.

There was also confusion amongst NRCC members regarding what exactly is included in a management or research track. Dr. Simpkins noted that the research track refers to a benchmark assessment, but could pertain to other research needs, while the management track could include update-type assessments that are just used for management (i.e., specifications setting). The NRCC agreed that the working group should draft language for NRCC review that defines these two tracks (Action Item #2)

The NRCC noted concerns with the ranking system in terms of some species being ranked with higher importance than some members felt they should. Ultimately, the rankings are non-binding and should be viewed as informative, but not necessarily directive.

The NRCC agreed to have the working group move forward to develop a draft schedule, informed, but not directed or limited, by information from the prioritization work. The working group was tasked with developing a 5-year schedule and providing a draft with rationale for

assessment selections for NRCC review two weeks in advance of the next NRCC meeting (Action Item #2).

Biological Reference Point (BRP) re-estimation: Discussion of consistency in assessment updates between NEFMC and MAFMC

Dr. Weinberg discussed improving consistency in methods that are used in NEFSC assessment updates which are then provided to the NEFMC and MAFMC. Specifically, the NEFSC wants to be more consistent in the analytical treatment of biological reference point (BRPs) values in the assessment updates and operational assessments for the two Councils. Based on scientific reasons, it would be preferable to update the values of BRPs in assessment updates, rather than retaining older estimates of BRPs. In recent years, the values of BRPs in assessment updates have been updated for NEFMC stocks, but not so for MAFMC stocks. At the NRCC meeting the MAFMC representatives agreed to have the values of BRPs be updated in future assessment updates. This change will result in greater consistency in scientific methods used to produce information for to the two Councils. There was some discussion about whether updating the BRP values will result in any stock status changes. While that is a possibility, the NEFSC does not know if this will result in any changes in stock status.

Operational Assessments: Discussion of recent experiences and interface with SSC

Mr. Tom Nies discussed a recent issue with the groundfish operational assessments where the SSC made some decisions that were not consistent with the peer review. There was a general discussion of the roles and responsibilities of these two groups. Ultimately, if there is a situation where the stock determination criteria that came out of the SSC was different than that developed through the SAW/SAR, Mr. Gene Martin noted that NMFS would have to justify why it chose one over the other. Mr. Nies requested having NMFS representation at the SSC. Dr. Weinberg noted that an SSC member chairs peer reviews in order to provide information about what the peer reviewers discussed back to the SSC, with the intent of minimizing these kinds of issues.

3. Development of Status Determination Criteria (SDC) for Stocks Assessed with Empirical Assessments

Ms. Stephanie Hunt and Ms. Karen Greene (NOAA Fisheries Office of Sustainable Fisheries, Domestic Fisheries Policy and Guidance Branch) provided an update on the national guidance on SDCs for stocks that do not have numerical reference points and updated the NRCC on efforts they are undertaking this year. Ms. Hunt noted that Ms. Greene is in the early stages of taking inventory on all of the SDC issues that have arisen around the country to see if there is a need to put together a list of best practices. Additionally, there is a National Standard 1 (NS1) technical working group looking at technical issues of the NS1 guidance that published in 2016, including types of SDCs that are appropriate for data-limited stocks. This work is also in its early stages. Ms. Hunt noted that staff is also developing a white paper on how NMFS determines and documents that our decisions are based on the best scientific information available (BSIA). This work came at the request of a number of Councils interested in more transparency on how these decisions are made, and is related to SDC because the current draft of this white paper recommends that peer reviewers more explicitly say whether the assessment provides BSIA for

the different management aspects including overfishing/overfished recommendations and whether the SDC are appropriate or if there are suggestions to change it. Ms. Hunt discussed the issue of what to do with stock status when a peer review rejects an assessment. She noted that the current practice (note: it is not a formal policy) in these instances is to use the status determination from the previously approved assessment, but is aware that NEFMC has concerns about this approach. A working group will be formed (organized by the Office of Sustainable Fisheries) to review this practice and see if a different approach is possible.

Following Ms. Hunt's update, Mr. Tom Nies mentioned concerns over legal advice that is at odds with scientific advice. For example, comparing catch to OFL to determine SDC is simple advice that cannot be utilized when a stock has no OFL. Ms. Hunt noted that the solution would ideally be found at the regional level, but we are required to develop SDCs regardless of the available scientific information. Mr. Gene Martin noted that, from a legalistic perspective, you could make a management call on selecting appropriate SDC and identify proxies. Mr. Nies was concerned of the management implications of taking this proxy approach, rather than relying on scientific advice. Mr. Martin discussed the importance of each Council outlining the thought process that goes into setting SDCs in these situations to show that you are doing the best that you can to comply with the national guidelines, even when it is a difficult exercise for data poor fisheries. Being as transparent as you can about the proxies you are using and why you are resorting to using them is justifiable from a legal standpoint. Ms. Hunt mentioned examples from other regions that are dealing with similar situations. Other NRCC members requested that NMFS should provide overarching guidance at the national level for consistency. While waiting for any national guidance to be developed, Ms. Hunt reminded the NRCC that discussions should still happen at the regional level and she can provide examples from other regions.

4. Management and science challenges associated with climate change and shifting stocks

The NRCC, along with Mr. Gregg Waugh and Mr. Charlie Phillips of the SAFMC, discussed general shared concerns stemming from stocks shifting across jurisdictional boundaries. Mr. Waugh presented five specific points of concern for their region:

- What changes need to be made to ongoing data collection programs to collect data on new species as they show up in catches (e.g., blueline tilefish, groupers, and king mackerel)?
- How do we ensure such data are made available for stock assessments conducted in the southeast?
- How does the Southeast Region gain some participation by northeast assessment scientists in assessments conducted in the southeast?
- Is there a potential for some assessments for typically "southern" species to be conducted by northeast assessment scientists?
- How do we ensure recreational and commercial catches in the Mid-Atlantic and New England areas are reported in a timely manner for annual catch limit accounting?

These questions highlighted the importance for continued communication between all groups. Additionally, Dr. Hare noted the issue of stock identification (e.g., blueline tilefish) as a jurisdictional issue to keep in mind. Dr. Hare also discussed that the NEFSC and the Southeast

Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) do contribute to each other's assessments, but this happens through communication between the stock assessment scientists, rather than a more formal process. However, the plan is to come up with a more formalized plan through the NMFS Climate Strategy. The NRCC discussed that the Climate Workshop scheduled to occur sometime in 2018 would be another good opportunity to discuss these cross cutting issues. The NEFSC will continue development of this workshop and will involve South Atlantic counterparts in discussions (Action Item #6). An update will be provided at the next NRCC meeting. As for concerns over how to ensure vessels are able to report all species landed, the NRCC discussed the need to review the current list of species captured in vessel trip reports (VTRs) and see which species are specifically missing. GARFO, in coordination with the SAFMC, will review the current VTR reporting instructions to make sure they include species codes for species that are being landed but not reported (Action Item #3).

The NRCC also discussed the potential for the NEFSC to add a coastwide deepwater species longline survey to its priorities in the future in order to provide data on blueline and golden tilefish. Dr. Hare mentioned that there is currently no funding for a dedicated deepwater longline survey, but will work with Dr. Moore to identify potential funding opportunities (Action Item #7).

The NRCC also briefly noted the possibility for the SAFMC to have voting seat on various MAFMC and NEFMC Committees to potentially address governance issues of shifting stocks. Members noted the importance of understanding the specific governance issues at hand. For example, Mr. Brandon Muffley noted that for some states like New Jersey, they are only able to implement the requirements of the MAFMC and the ASMFC. Mr. Waugh noted that the SAFMC currently has no legal authority above North Carolina. To continue these discussions, the NEFMC and MAFMC will form a standing committee between all three councils to discuss straddling and moving stocks through the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) (Action Item #5).

5. NMFS Allocation Policy Guidance

Mr. Michael Pentony briefly reminded the NRCC of the NMFS Allocation Policy Guidance developed jointly by NMFS and the CCC. The policy discusses under what conditions should Councils look at any allocations in an FMP and, if they do review allocations, what factors should be considered. The CCC set a target of three years from publication (July 2016) for when Councils would take steps to identify triggers for when an allocation should be reviewed. Because the NRCC was discussing priorities, Mr. Pentony wanted to make sure this policy was on NRCC members' radar.

6. Survey Topics

Update on NEFSC fall bottom trawl survey

Dr. Hare discussed the recent mechanical issues with the Research Vessel *Bigelow*. The R/V *Bigelow* broke down and is expected to be back in service in mid-February 2018. The hope is to

have the vessel back in service for the spring survey, but there is still a possibility that a different vessel (R/V *Pisces*) will have to be used.

Due to the breakdown of the Bigelow, the R/V *Pisces* has been retrofit to match the Bigelow trawls. The R/V *Pisces* was used to complete half the fall bottom trawl surveys at full station density in Georges Bank and the Gulf of Maine, although the weather has been difficult. The NEFSC will continue to work with the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel to explore options for using industry vessels to support or enhance the survey.

Mr. Bob Beal noted that the cost of the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) survey continues to rise, and, if there are gaps in the fall survey, it is important that the spring NEAMAP survey is fully operational so we do not have multiple holes in back-to-back surveys. Both NMFS and the Commission are seeking additional funding for NEAMAP.

Fishery Independent Survey Design Reviews

Dr. Moore briefly discussed that there are a number of fishery independent survey design reviews underway and no standard process for how the SSCs and Councils are to engage. He suggested that it might make sense to have all survey redesign considerations addressed by one single working group to allow for consistent Council engagement. He noted that MAFMC staff feel left out of the process at critical points and anything that could be done by the NEFSC to improve communication and the transfer of information would be appreciated. In particular, he requested that any survey changes for the clam survey be presented to the SSC and to either the Council or the Surf Clam Ocean Quahog committee.

7. Fisheries Monitoring: How the various regional fisheries monitoring activities can be coordinated
Discussion leader: Hare

The NRCC discussed that there are a number of fishery monitoring programs, projects, or improvements (i.e., FDDV, MAFMC's eVTR for recreational fisheries, electronic monitoring, dockside monitoring pilot programs, etc.) currently underway and thought of ideas for how to collectively keep track of all of these activities.

The NRCC first focused its discussions on FDDV and its current timeline. Mr. Bullard noted that a work plan is still underway, and Mr. Michael Pentony reminded the NRCC that once that plan is complete, GARFO would need to work with the Councils to develop a regulatory amendment to incorporate certain new requirements into all fishery management plans (FMPs). Mr. Waugh of the SAFMC expressed interest in being kept in the loop on the progress of FDDV, as it may have implications for their region as well. The NRCC discussed that although the FDDV project involves a number of partners, in particular, GARFO, the NEFSC, and the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), there is need for greater coordination and communication so that the Councils and the Commission understand the regulatory implications as progress continues. This led to a broader discussion of developing a single data warehouse to store all monitoring programs, potentially through the ACCSP. As a next step, the ASMFC agreed to take the lead, coordinating with GARFO and the NEFSC, to develop a joint

presentation for the next NRCC meeting outlining where various datasets are stored and the feasibility of developing a single data warehouse (Action Item #4).

- Day 2 -

8. Update on Discard and Landings Methodologies Comparison

Discussion leader: Simpkins/Lanning

Dr. Michael Lanning from GARFO's Analysis and Program Support Division (APSD) joined the NRCC to continue to discuss comparisons between APSD's and the NEFSC's discard and landings methodologies. Dr. Lanning initially discussed some of the discard methodology differences that resulted in differences between black sea bass discard estimates for the 2016 fishing year, which was the issue that originally began this general discussion at the NRCC. Notably, APSD had used a stratification to align with the Standard Bycatch Reduction Methodology and has since determined that was not necessary and will not use that stratification in the future. Dr. Lanning assured the NRCC that APSD will do whatever it can to ensure that its methodology is more closely aligned with how the black sea bass assessment scientist calculates discards in the future.

Dr. Lanning provided the NRCC with a paper describing why discard estimates differ between the NEFSC stock assessments and GARFO APSD quota monitoring, noting that because the stock assessments and quota monitoring systems are processes built to meet different objectives, one should expect some differences in the discard estimates. Additionally, this paper discussed the specifics of how APSD matches data records to determine landings information (i.e., via a trip level matching system) and how this process differs from the NEFSC's allocation method, which is an area/effort based matching process.

Dr. Lanning mentioned that his team is currently rebuilding the quota monitoring system over the next year and will document everything they do for transparency. He suggested that they might develop a working group to review and develop consistent plans. Those details are currently being discussed with the NEFSC, but the Councils could be involved as well if there is interest. Ultimately, estimates between the NEFSC and GARFO may not match, but this will demonstrate why there are differences. There is not an expectation that one single system or methodology will be used. Dr. Lanning will report out to the NRCC on the progress GARFO and the NEFSC have made on this topic at the next NRCC meeting (Action Item # 10).

9. 2018 and 2019 Assessment Scheduling

The NRCC reviewed and updated the stock assessment schedule. This summary outlines only the significant changes from the previous schedule, as well as any notable discussions.

MRIP Operational Assessment

Members agreed to move the MRIP operational assessment from the second half of 2018 to the first half of 2019 and any relevant data updates in 2019 following the assessment will include the updated MRIP information. Therefore, the 2018 data updates (for use in 2019 specification

settings) for species such as summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish will not include updated MRIP data.

The current species identified for the MRIP operational assessment include black sea bass, bluefish, and scup. Specific groundfish stocks to include in the assessment, as well as any other species, will be identified later.

SAW/SARC 66 (scheduled for the second half of 2018)

The NRCC agreed that SARC 66 will include both summer flounder and striped bass and that these benchmarks will use updated MRIP data when it becomes available. The SAW/SARC review is currently scheduled for late November 2018. If the MRIP transition data are not available to NEFSC analysts by around July 1, 2018, the NRCC agreed that the SAW/SARC 66 assessment peer review would be pushed back to January or February 2019. The NEFSC will consider the current schedule to see how a delay in the MRIP schedule would affect the rest of the assessment schedule and will follow up with the NRCC later this winter.

Groundfish Operational Assessments

The groundfish operational assessments will occur in the second half of 2019 and will involve many NEFSC resources.

2019 Assessment Schedule

The NRCC was concerned about overcommitting to too many assessments in 2019 without knowing the full extent of the MRIP transition. The NRCC agreed to a draft 2019 schedule that includes MRIP operational assessments in the first half of the year, groundfish operational assessments in the second half of the year, and a suite of data and assessment updates.

10. 2018 Priorities Discussions

All NRCC members outlined their top priorities for 2018. The MAFMC outlined a number of actions underway for the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass FMP and the Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish FMP. Additionally, there are a number of actions under development for river herring and shad, bluefish, golden and blueline tilefish, surf clams and ocean quahogs, and spiny dogfish. Work continues on the MAFMC's ecosystem and ocean planning/habitat initiatives, as well as other non-FMP specific activities. The MAFMC's priorities will be finalized at its December 2017 meeting. During the MAFMC's priorities discussion, Mr. Pentony noted that there is a staffing bottleneck for the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass FMP at GARFO that may affect ongoing work of the MAFMC and ASMFC.

The ASMFC discussed a number of priorities covering most of their FMPs, particularly with lobster, menhaden, and summer flounder/scup/black sea bass. The ASMFC assessment scientists are busy with weakfish, dogfish, and black sea bass. The ASMFC continues to sort out issues with the Secretary of Commerce regarding its summer flounder compliance finding this past summer, noting that recreational fishing is a priority for the current administration. The ASMFC

also continues to work on incorporating climate change into its FMPs, as well as continued work with the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership and updating its 5-year strategic plan.

The NEFMC will approve its 2018 priorities at their November 2017 meeting. One overall priority is to address the SDC issue when analytical assessments fail. Another important priority is addressing commercial and recreational allocations, as well as other recreational issues, based on the outcome of the MRIP transition. There are a number of actions for the majority of NEFMC FMPs, including modifications to the scallop access areas following the final outcome of the Omnibus Habitat Amendment, localized depletion in the herring fishery, and work on the deep-sea coral amendment, to name a few.

The NEFSC reviewed their annual guidance memo for fiscal year 2018, noting top priorities for the following categories: Organizational excellence, monitoring, assessments, science advice and services, research, new technologies and approaches, and operations and administration. The NEFSC is facing budget constraints as costs increase and is focused on prioritizing their work and improving the workplace.

GARFO noted its annual goals, including facilitating change in leadership as GARFO prepares for a number of retirements and staffing adjustments, including Mr. Bullard's retirement. Other goals include finalizing three major NEFMC actions (Habitat, deep-sea coral, and the industry-funded amendments), continued coordination of catch monitoring efforts, promoting sustainable aquaculture in the region, addressing fish passage issues for Atlantic salmon, and working with Canada to develop a joint strategy in addressing North Atlantic right whale mortalities.

The NRCC also discussed topic of aquaculture. Although there is a push from the current administration to move forward with aquaculture initiatives as a way to fix the trade imbalance, with the exception of GARFO, aquaculture has not been a priority topic for NRCC members due to a number of other priorities.

11. Reinitiation of Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 Biological Opinions

Mr. Bullard and Mr. Mark Murray-Brown (GARFO's Protected Species Division (PRD)) discussed the background of the current critical situation with right whales and the reinitiation of the ESA Section 7 Biological Opinions for the lobster fishery and the "batched fisheries" (i.e., Northeast multispecies, monkfish, spiny dogfish, Northeast skate complex, Atlantic mackerel/squid/butterfish, Atlantic bluefish, and summer flounder/scup/black sea bass). Mr. Murray-Brown noted that although the reinitiation is mostly driven by right whales, PRD will also review the latest information on sea turtles, sturgeon, and salmon. He noted that this reinitiation will extend beyond 135 days, but it is too early to know the exact timeline. Mr. Murray-Brown noted that PRD is working closely with the NEFSC and do not need any information from the Commission and the Council at this time. The best way for the NEFMC, MAFMC, and ASMFC to stay involved is to be active participants on the Large Whale Take Reduction Team.

Ms. Toni Kerns requested someone from PRD to provide an update on this issue at the Lobster Board at the ASMFC's next meeting. Mr. Murray-Brown confirmed that someone will attend.

12. Long-term maintenance and improvement of analytic tools and data sets

Mr. Nies discussed the issue of developing analytic tools to address one problem and then not using them again. The result is that it is at times difficult to update a previous analysis because a model may not be in use anymore and there are not staff or resources to update that information in a timely manner. The NRCC discussed the possibility of developing an inventory for these tools and determine a way to keep them up to date so that they are available for use in the future when needed. Members also discussed the importance of standardizing such tools so that everyone is utilizing a similar method (e.g., a single definition of how many VMS pings define a fishing trip). This discussion about standardizing tools in some sort of toolbox and streamlining availability connects to the previous discussions earlier in the meeting regarding differences in discard methodologies and creating a single data warehouse.

The NEFSC will develop an initial list of analytical tools in the region and distribute that to the NRCC for review (Action Item #9).

13. Section 508 Legal Requirements of the Rehabilitation Act

The NRCC discussed how to comply with the Rehabilitation Act's Section 508 requirements that all Federal website content must be accessible to people with disabilities, including any pdf documents posted to such websites. NOAA has pushed for compliance with this requirement by January 1, 2018, and GARFO and NEFSC are working hard to figure out how to best comply with these requirements while also making information available to the general public as quickly as possible. Although it is clear that GARFO and the NEFSC are required to ensure all PDFs are compliant, it remains unclear if these requirements extend to the Councils. At this time, we assume they do not and will continue that assumption until the Councils hear otherwise.

The 508 compliance requires that all tables and figures need a description, and this process, particularly for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation and NEFSC assessment reports, will be very time consuming. For now, the NRCC agrees that GARFO will provide links in rules to the Councils' websites where documents can be made available, rather than posting EAs and EISs on its own site. The Councils agreed to do this, but Dr. Moore mentioned the importance of being in agreement about posting drafts of such documents during the proposed rule stage (i.e., be clear on ownership and version control).

The NEFSC will know more in May, following the upcoming scallop assessment, to see if they are able to post their assessment reports on their own website. They may also need help from the Councils. NRCC members discussed creating an official NRCC webpage, similar that created for Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR). This could potentially provide an alternative avenue for posting large documents. Dr. Hare mentioned he could look into this possibility.

The NEFSC and GARFO will provide an update at the spring NRCC meeting regarding any further 508-compliance guidance they have received (Action Item #8). In the meantime, the Councils and GARFO will work together to post documents to the Councils' websites.

14. Scheduling the Spring 2018 NRCC Meeting

The NRCC identified May 15-16, 2018, as the spring meeting date. The NEFSC is hosting and the location will likely be Providence, RI.

Attachment: Fall 2017 Action Items

NRCC Fall Meeting 2017 Action Items

November 15-16, 2017 Hyatt Place Inner Harbor, Baltimore, MD

1. Finalize membership for the Cod Stock Structure Working Group
Lead: **NEFSC**
Appointees needed: working group members
Next step(s): working group formation process
Due date(s): Decision by NRCC Deputies January 2018
2. Develop a 5 year assessment schedule and draft language to define research and management tracks for assessments
Lead: **NRCC** Assessment Working Group
Appointees needed from
Next step(s): Provide draft schedule, rationale behind schedule, and definitions two weeks prior to Spring NRCC meeting
Due date(s): Spring 2018 NRCC meeting
3. Review VTR reporting instructions to make sure they include species codes for species that are being landed but not reported
Lead: **GARFO**
Appointees needed from
Next step(s): send to SAFMC counterparts for review
Due date(s): ASAP
4. Joint presentation to explain where the various datasets are stored and the feasibility of developing a single data warehouse
Lead: **ASMFC**
Appointees needed from **GARFO**, **NEFSC**
Next step(s): Include discard data
Due date(s): Presentation at Spring NRCC meeting
5. Form a standing committee between the NEFMC, MAFMC, and SAFMC to discuss straddling and moving stocks
Lead: **NEFMC**, **MAFMC**
Appointees needed from
Next step(s): Being handled in the CCC process
Due date(s): TBD

6. Continue development on the 2018 Climate Workshop
Lead: **NEFSC**
Appointees needed from
Next step(s): involve South Atlantic counterparts in discussions
Due date(s): Hopefully provide update at next NRCC meeting
7. Identify funding opportunities for a coastwide deepwater species longline survey
Lead: **NEFSC**
Appointees needed from **MAFMC**; Dr. Moore will work with Dr. Hare
Next step(s):
Due date(s): TBD
8. Provide update on 508 compliance
Lead: **GARFO, NEFSC**
Appointees needed from
Next step(s):
Due date(s): Spring 2018 NRCC Meeting
9. Put together an initial list of analytical tools in the region
Lead: **NEFSC**
Appointees needed from
Next step(s): distribute list to group for review
Due date(s): TBD
10. Report out to NRCC explaining the differences in the discard and landing estimates
Lead: **GARFO working with the NEFSC**
Appointees needed from
Next step(s):
Due date(s): Next NRCC meeting

Spring 2018 NRCC (**NEFSC host**) –May 15-16, 2018
Fall 2018 NRCC (**NEFMC host**) – TBD