

## Council Tiering of Amendments White Paper

September 2018

At their June 2018 meeting, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) asked Council staff to help them devise a method to provide a way to tier work on amendments so they can determine which ones the Council needs to work on at subsequent meetings. These decisions will also guide Council and NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staffs on where to focus their efforts.

The Council requested assistance in summarizing information they could use to prioritize continued work on amendments. The accompanying spreadsheet lists the amendments the Council is currently working on or are inactive. It indicates when the Council began work and major Council milestones along the way up to the point the Council votes to send an amendment in for formal review. The purpose of this is to show the Council how far along each amendment is in its development in relation to the other amendments.

Council staff developed the following list of criteria (not in any order) that could be used to help determine priority rankings:

1. Difficulty in preparing data analyses
2. Number of actions in the document
3. Number of species affected
4. Number of fishery participants affected
5. Type of plan amendment (regular, framework, abbreviated, etc.)
6. Type of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis require (Environmental Assessment - EA, Environmental Impact Statement - EIS, Categorical Exclusion - CE, etc.)
7. Potential for negative outcomes, if not implemented quickly
8. Need for an Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation
9. Level of controversy among Council members
10. Level of controversy among fishing constituents
11. Whether or not this is a joint amendment with the Gulf, Mid-Atlantic, and/or New England Councils
12. Number of fishing sectors/components affected

The Council may have additional criteria they want to use in determining amendment priority.

The approach for applying these criteria could be done quantitatively and the results objectively applied to rank order amendments in terms of importance for further development. Each criterion would have to be evaluated in terms of its possible range of values and there would be a need to weigh the importance of the criteria against each other. Conceivably, a numeric score could be derived, and the amendments could be ranked. Some of the criteria in the list could be evaluated objectively (e.g., applied value based on the number of species

affected), while values assigned to other criteria would be quite subjective (e.g., potential negative impact caused by not acting quickly enough).

While a quantitative analysis is quite possible, it may not be practicable in terms of quick decision making at a Council meeting. The determination of amendments that need to be worked on and brought back to the Council for further consideration is something that needs to occur between the end of committee meetings and Full Council deliberations all in the same meeting week.

An alternative approach would be to use an online survey approach like Survey Monkey. Council staff can keep track of continuing amendments and any new amendments that surface during the meeting week. A survey could be put together that would ask the Council to rate the amendments using a slider for each amendment going from “not important” to “extremely important”. Based on where the Council member moves the slider along the scale, a numeric value will be assigned. An email with a link to the survey listing all the amendments would be sent to Council members as soon as it is ready after the committees have completed their business on Thursday of a Council meeting. Ideally, Council members would have overnight in which to fill out the survey online. The survey results could be projected when the Executive Finance Committee report is discussed at Full Council. At that point, the Council could decide how many of the amendments they wish to work on at the next Council meeting.