

Sustainable Fisheries Committee Report
August 19, 2024
Dr. CJ Sweetman, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab E, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab E, No. 2**) of the June 2024 meeting.

Research and Monitoring Priorities for 2025-2028 and SSC Recommendations
(Tab E, No. 4)

Staff provided an overview of research and monitoring priorities for 2025-2028 presented to the SSC during its July 31-August 1, 2024 meeting. Staff noted that these priorities are updated at the beginning of every grant cycle and noted that because the SSC requested additional time to discuss the priorities, the 2025-2028 research and monitoring priorities and SSC recommendations will be brought to the Council during the November 2024 meeting.

Dr. Paul Mickle (SSC Representative) summarized the SSC recommendations. The SSC noted the difficulty in reviewing the extensive priority list quickly and expressed concerns over too many items marked as “Priority A.” The SSC suggested that streamlining and categorizing the list could increase its usefulness to funding agencies. The SSC recommended emphasizing high-impact priorities and breaking down priorities further with specific codes to improve the clarity and effectiveness of the document. The SSC recommended an evaluation of how often priorities secure funding. Dr. Mickle indicated that the SSC would recommend a refined priority list for the November Council meeting.

A Committee member asked whether the research and monitoring priorities list serves purposes other than fulfilling an administrative mandate. Andy Strelcheck of the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) replied that SERO has a regional strategic plan and that the Council’s research and monitoring priorities list provides guidance to the agency and funding partners. He also recommended that the Council consider consistency between the priority list and the regional strategic plan. Staff will work to restructure and better define the 2025-2028 research and monitoring priorities based on the SSC recommendations and feedback from the Committee for the November Council meeting. The Committee noted that members could suggest changes to the prioritization of research and monitoring items during full Council.

SSC Recommendations on Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rule
(Tab E, No. 5)

Council staff reviewed the impetus for revising the current ABC Control Rule, specifically highlighting the mismatch of increasing information leading to increasing buffers, and vice versa, with the latter under accounting for scientific uncertainty. The SSC has not been using the current ABC Control Rule as prescribed to avoid recommending catch limits which misrepresent this uncertainty. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) has proposed a revision to this rule, in a manner that better reflects stock status and the amount of information known and considered in a stock assessment. To evaluate the performance of this new approach, the SEFSC

has recommended conducting a management strategy evaluation to test the proposed rule, which the SSC endorsed. This simulation approach is expected to take about two years and is not expected to affect the completion of the current stock assessment calendar. The SEFSC expects to be able to pursue this work, if directed by the Council, once it completes other current work evaluating the potential effects of lower precision in the recreational landings data. In the meantime, the SSC is likely to continue with current practices based on peer-reviewed literature and set the ABC at 75% of the yield equivalent to the fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield, as it has for many of the recent stock assessments for the last five years.

The Committee recommends, and I so **move**, that the Council send a letter to the SEFSC to proceed with the MSE analysis proposed to assess management impacts of different ABC control rules for Tier 1 stocks.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.