

Greater Atlantic Region

Best Scientific Information Available

Regional Framework

The *NOAA Fisheries Framework for Determining that Stock Status Determinations and Catch Specifications are Based on the Best Scientific Information Available* (BSIA) procedural directive requires each Region to develop a regional BSIA framework that describes how it applies the general NOAA Fisheries BSIA Framework below to ensure that management decisions are based on BSIA. The framework should include a general timeline, identify the roles for each partner, be publically available, and describe necessary modifications from the general NOAA Fisheries Framework. For the purposes of this framework, the partner organizations are the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (Center), the New England Fishery Management Council, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, the Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSC), the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office/NOAA Fisheries Headquarters.

This framework is intended to demonstrate that the entire process is ensuring management decisions are based on the best scientific information available, from the assessment (Center) to the management advice (Councils' SSCs) to recommendations (Councils/Commission) and finally implementation (GARFO/NOAA). While NOAA Fisheries officially certifies that a stock assessment and/or a management decision is based on the best available scientific information, it is helpful for each partner organization in the process to acknowledge BSIA at each step. The attached spreadsheet describes the roles and responsibilities of each partner organization for each step in the framework described in the policy directive. Those steps include: Stock Assessment; Peer Review; SSC and NOAA Fisheries Steps; Catch Specifications; and NOAA Fisheries Approval.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive or exclusive list of responsibilities of any of the member groups, nor is it intended to limit the abilities of the partner groups to address emergent or unusual circumstances using their collective best judgment. The document is intended to illustrate the general order of the flow of scientific information throughout the management process.

In summary, the "stock assessment" steps describe the process of developing a stock assessment, from prioritization to working group formation and model selection and completion. This includes the NRCC process for prioritization and then the Center process for developing stock assessments and the Assessment Oversight Panel (AOP), noting Council, Commission, and GARFO staff participation in working groups. This discussion acknowledges that SSC members may participate in the AOP and working groups, as appropriate. For assessments that are not led

by Center scientists, this section describes the Commission's role in conducting stock assessments independently.

The Peer Review section differentiates by assessment type, as there are slightly different responsibilities, particularly for the SSCs depending on the assessment type and level. The SSC as a whole serves as the peer review body for Level 1 Management Track Assessments. A member of the SSC typically chairs Level 2 or 3 Management Track Assessments and other members may participate on those panels. For Research Track Assessments, the framework notes that SSC members may participate in a review panel, but may recuse themselves from the discussion when the matter comes before the SSC.

The "SSC/NOAA Fisheries Steps" describes the process of an assessment report going from the Center to the SSC, through Council staff or Plan Development Teams, as appropriate. Importantly, this section describes the SSCs' work on developing an acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendation for the Council. The Mid-Atlantic Council typically includes a Term of Reference for the SSC to "certify" that the recommendations are based on BSIA. While NOAA Fisheries determines if an action complies with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the National Standards, including National Standard 2, it is helpful for the SSCs to include an acknowledgment that they consider their recommendations to be based on BSIA.

The "Catch Specifications" section describes the process and responsibilities of taking an ABC recommendation and turning that into annual catch limits (ACL) and other specifications and management measures. "NOAA Fisheries Approval" documents that there is a determination of BSIA on the assessment (Center) and Council recommendations (GARFO) on behalf of the Secretary.

Typical Timelines

Management Tracks - June

February - Assessment Oversight Panel (AOP) meets to review and approve the assessment plan and level of peer review required for the stock assessments that are being delivered in June.

June - Peer review meeting for stock assessments reviewed by the AOP in February.

July/August - Plan Development Team (PDT), Monitoring/Technical Committee, and/or Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) meet to make recommendations on ABCs and catch limits, as appropriate, based on June peer review results.

August/September - Council(s)/Commission meeting to receive specification recommendations and then recommend to NOAA Fisheries for implementation for stocks reviewed in June.

January of the new fishing year - Approval/implementation of the specifications

Management Tracks - September

May - Assessment Oversight Panel (AOP) meets to review and approve the assessment plan and level of peer review required for the stock assessments that are being delivered in September.

September - Peer review meeting for stock assessments reviewed by the AOP in May

September/October - Plan Development Team (PDT), Monitoring/Technical Committee, and/or Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) meet to make recommendations on ABCs and catch limits, as appropriate, based on September peer review results.

November/December - Council(s)/Commission meeting to receive specification recommendations and then recommend to NOAA Fisheries for implementation for stocks reviewed in September.

April/May of the new fishing year - Approval/implementation of the specifications

BSIA Framework Action		NEFSC	NEFMC	MAFMC	ASFMC	Council's SSC	NOAA Fisheries (GARFO or HQ)
1. Assessment prioritization		Center works with NRCC partners to prioritize and schedule stock assessments. This requires the Science Center and fishery managers to coordinate and agree on delivery dates of assessment products. See the following website for more details on the NEFSC stock assessment process (https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/population-assessments/northeast-region-stock-assessment-process)	Contribute to the selection, prioritization, and scheduling of stock assessments-	Contribute to the selection, prioritization, and scheduling of stock assessments-	Contribute to the selection, prioritization, and scheduling of stock assessments-	SSC Chairs participate in NRCC stock assessment prioritization and scheduling process.	(1) Contribute to the selection, prioritization, and scheduling of stock assessments- (GARFO) (2) Track the assessment schedule that has been developed by the region. (HQ)
	2. Overseeing research needed for Research Track assessments	Center coordinates outreach regarding research needs and compilation of data for assessments	Research Track Steering Committee process under development, but likely will include Council staff.	Research Track Steering Committee process under development, but likely will include Council staff.	Research Track Steering Committee process under development, but likely will include Commission staff.	Research Track Steering Committee process under development, but likely will include SSC members.	Research Track Steering Committee process under development, but likely will include GARFO staff.
	3. Conduct and complete assessment	(1) Assessment Oversight Panels (AOP) review the Management Track stock assessment plans (2) Center then takes the lead in conducting stock assessments for Management Track Assessments or through assessment working groups (WG) or steering committees for Research Track Assessments.	Council staff participated in developing standardized TORs for both Management and Research Track Stock assessments. Council staff review TORs for Research Track topic assessments.	Council staff participated in developing standardized TORs for both Management and Research Track Stock assessments. Council staff review TORs for Research Track topic assessments.	(1) Conducts stock assessments for state managed fisheries, including setting Terms of reference (TOR). Uses the best scientific information and established stock assessment techniques, similar to NEFSC-led assessments. (ASMFC Technical Guidance Document August 2019). (2) For jointly managed stocks, provide input into the draft TORs developed by the Steering Committee for peer reviews.	SSC members with expertise can participate on the AOP.	GARFO staff participated in developing standardized TORs for both Management and Research Track Stock assessments. GARFO staff review TORs for Research Track topic assessments.
Stock Assessment	a. Assessment working groups	Research Track (1) Center staff are members of every research track steering committee or WG; staff from other NRCC partners often participate as well (2) Research track steering committees identify and promote research to support Research Track assessments (3) Research track WG members carry out and consider analyses, and recommend analyses and outputs to be evaluated by peer review. Management Track (1) In almost all cases, Center staff conduct management track assessments (2) Although there are no formal working groups in the management track, stakeholders and external experts can contribute information and ideas to the process	Staff participate on assessment working groups, as appropriate.	Staff participate on assessment working groups, as appropriate.	Staff participate on assessment working groups, as appropriate.	SSC members with expertise can participate on WGs, but have to identify or recuse themselves from any SSC deliberations on WG recommendations.	Staff participate on assessment working groups, as appropriate.
	b. Assessment model selection	Research Track The research track WG determines appropriate model(s) for consideration, and the basis for biological references points and projection of short-term OFLs, consistent with the research track terms of reference. Management Track The previously reviewed and approved stock assessment model is applied in the management track. The Center's lead assessment scientists for a stock makes improvements to the model and prepares an alternative backup approach, consistent with the generic management track TORs.	Staff participate on assessment working groups, as appropriate.	Staff participate on assessment working groups, as appropriate.	Staff participate on assessment working groups, as appropriate.	SSC members participate on assessment working groups, as appropriate.	Staff participate on assessment working groups, as appropriate.
Peer Review	1. Management Track -- Level 1	(1) Center staff re-run approved models with updated data. (2) Center provides technical review and quality control.				SSCs review the outcomes of the previously approved model and updated data, focusing on the technical aspects of updated data, insofar as it provides insight into the sources of uncertainty in the assessment when recommending ABCs.	
	2. Management Track -- Levels 2/3	The Center has the lead on organizing the peer reviews of assessments that provide the scientific basis to make stock status determinations and OFLs. Processes used include the Assessment Peer Review Panel (for Management Track Assessments); and the Stock Assessment Review Committee often using a CIE assessment review panel (for Research Track Assessments). The Transboundary Resource Assessment Committee Committee (TRAC) for US-Canada shared stocks conducts reviews in a	Council staff attend the peer reviews and have a seat at the front table so they can provide expertise on fishery management topics that arise. They do not serve as reviewers.	Council staff attend the peer reviews and have a seat at the front table so they can provide expertise on fishery management topics that arise. They do not serve as reviewers.	(1) ASMFC staff attend peer reviews of Center-led assessments and have a seat at the table for ASMFC-managed stocks to provide expertise on fishery management topics that arise. They do not serve as reviewers. (2) ASMFC carries out peer reviews of assessments that provide stock status determinations for state-managed fisheries.	(1) SSC members typically chair and can serve as panelists for Management Track Assessment review panels for Levels 2 and 3. Additional outside experts may also be used. (2) SSCs consider the peer review panelist reports to understand how the assessment addressed the various TORs and to identify areas of future research or assessment approaches. The SSCs may also evaluate the final assessment reports to determine if prior review panel recommendations were appropriately addressed. The peer review panel reports also provide the SSC insight into the sources of uncertainty in the assessment when recommending ABCs.	(1) NOAA Fisheries HQ tracks the outcome of the peer review with respect to conclusions about stock status through briefings by NEFSC before and after the peer review. (2) GARFO staff attend peer reviews and are available to provide expertise on fishery management topics as they arrive. They do not serve as reviewers.

BSIA Framework Action	NEFSC	NEFMC	MAFMC	ASFMC	Council's SSC	NOAA Fisheries (GARFO or HQ)
3. Research Track	separate fashion.				SSC members may participate on Research Track Assessment Review Panels in their personal capacity. A representative of the SSC often chairs a Research Track Review Panel. Panel members often recuse themselves when the discussion is before the SSC.	
SSC/NOAA Fisheries Steps	(1) The Center provides peer reviewed assessment reports to the Councils' Committees, including their SSCs, and Center staff support the Committees, often in personal capacities as members of the PDT/FMAT, as they develop and recommend ABCs following a stock assessment. (2) The Center records the assessment results into a centralized repository (NOAA Fisheries' Species Information System).	(1) Utilizing the Council's ABC control rule for each species, the PDT calculates ABCs and catch specifications for SSC consideration. (2) Following guidance from the Council, the PDT informs catch specifications, including definition of the initial conditions in the interim year and basis for projections, and the duration of projections for setting OFL.	(1) Following guidance from the Council, Council staff, with technical support from the NEFSC assessment lead, inform catch specifications, including definition of the initial conditions in the interim year and basis for projections, and the duration of projections for setting OFL. (2) Utilizing the Council's ABC control rule and risk policy, Council staff provides ABC recommendations for each species and calculates ABCs and catch specifications for SSC consideration.	(1) The Center provides peer reviewed assessment reports for which it has the lead to Commission fishery management boards. (2) ASMFC Assessment leads provide peer-reviewed assessment reports to management boards for assessments that they lead.	(1) Utilizing the Councils' respective risk policy and ABC control rule, the SSCs provide recommendations to the Councils for OFLs, ABCs, and rebuilding targets. (2) If the peer review finds that the assessment does not provide sufficient basis to provide recommendations, the SSC should consider other sources of information to support those actions and provide sufficient justification for its recommendations. (3) The SSCs may also report on a variety of issues at the request of a Councils, such as stock status and health, bycatch, habitat status, social and economic impacts of management measures and sustainability of fishing practices. (4) When reviewing an assessment and making ABC recommendations, the Mid SSC has a standard TOR to "certify" that the recommendations made are based on scientific information that meets NS2 guidelines	(1) GARFO and NEFSC provide points of contact for each SSC meeting to address potential science and management concerns. The POCs participate in SSC meetings (either remotely or in person) in an advisory capacity in order to provide feedback on potential SSC decisions and recommendations that may be uncertain in regard to compliance with policies. <i>(Note, this process will be revisited by the NRCC at a later date to determine if the goals of all partners are being appropriately achieved.)</i> (2) NOAA Fisheries makes the final stock status determination based on the final assessment results, as described in BSIA policy section 4(d)(i)-(iv).
Catch specifications	Center staff participate on Council PDTs in their personal, expert capacity to provide technical support related to setting ACLs	PDT develops catch specifications to recommend to the Council, including ACLs that cannot exceed the ABC recommended by the SSC, with input by the FMP Committee and Advisory Panel. Council then meets publicly to approve specifications.	FMATs, Monitoring Committees, and Council staff leaders develop catch specifications to recommend to the Council, including ACLs that cannot exceed the ABC recommended by the SSC. Advisory Panels give input to the Council on the assessments and specifications contained in each FMP for each fishery within the council's geographical area of concern with particular regard to: capacity to harvest, effect on economies, conflicts, fish processors, enforcement. Council then meets publicly to approve catch specifications.	Jointly Managed: work within MAFMC process to set specs with Commission Committee and Fishery Management Board members. Complementary Managed: Council sets the overall ABC and ACL. Commission Technical Committees (TCs) review Council set specs and provide recommendations to Boards for measures to not exceed the approved quotas. Boards review Council set quotas and TC recommendations to then approve a quota, and set measures to not exceed the quota. ASMFC Managed: TCs develop advice to Boards to set specifications. Depending on the FMP, advice can be based on a specific model or other methods as specified in the FMP. Advisory Panels also give input to Boards on specs. The Board publicly debates spec options and pass motions to set specs.		NOAA Fisheries will inform the Council if there are concerns with the catch specifications during development. NOAA Fisheries will provide this notice in time for the Council to amend its recommendation. (1) Staff participate in PDTs/Monitoring Committees in the development of catch specification recommendations. (2) Supervisory staff participate on Oversight/FMP Committees and at Council meetings to provide guidance on the recommendations and any concerns.
NOAA Fisheries Approval						On behalf of the Secretary, NOAA Fisheries reviews Council recommendations, and, if appropriate, certifies that such recommendations are consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the National Standards, including National Standard 2 and BSIA, and other applicable laws.