



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 27, 2017
TO: Research Steering Committee
FROM: Mark Alexander, Committee Chairman
SUBJECT: **Charge to Committee for its January 17, 2018 meeting**

Our next Research Steering Committee (RSC) meeting will be at the Hilton Garden Inn near Boston Logan Airport on **Wednesday January 17 starting at 9:00 AM**. This meeting provides an opportunity to discuss: potential improvements to the NEFMC research priority setting process, updates on the implementation of program review recommendations for the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) Northeast Cooperative Research Program, and recently completed research projects. Dr. Rachel Feeney is the staff coordinator of the RSC (rfeeney@nefmc.org; 978-465-0492 ext. 110); please feel free to contact her at any time. We look forward to meeting with you in the New Year.

Meeting Materials

As they become available, the documents listed below are being posted to the Council's website (www.nefmc.org). Paper copies will be provided at the meeting.

1. Meeting cover memo (this document)
2. Meeting agenda
3. RSC meeting summary, July 19, 2017
4. Research Priorities
 - a. Staff memo re the research priority setting process, January 2, 2018
 - b. *NEFMC Research Priorities and Data Needs for 2017-2021*
 - c. Presentation slides
5. NEFSC/Northeast Cooperative Research Program
 - a. *Northeast Cooperative Research Program Review, Northeast Fisheries Science Center Summary and Response*, March 2017
 - b. Presentation slides
6. Management reviews
 - a. RSC-related excerpts of the Council's *Operations Handbook*
 - b. RSC management review worksheet
 - c. Staff memo re peer-reviewed publications, January 2, 2018
7. Project: *Seasonal Scallop Bycatch Survey*
 - a. 2013 Scallop RSA project final report, *Seasonal Bycatch Survey of the Georges Bank Scallop Fishery*, May 2015
 - b. Technical evaluation

- c. 2015 Scallop RSA project final report, *Optimizing the Georges Bank Scallop Fishery by Maximizing Meat Yield and Minimizing Bycatch* revised October 2017
- d. Technical evaluation and PI response, October 11, 2017
- e. Presentation slides
- f. RSC meeting summary, June 25, 2012
- g. RSC meeting summary, April 8, 2015
- 8. Project: *River Herring Bycatch Avoidance*
 - a. 2014 Herring RSA project final report, December 31, 2016
 - b. Technical evaluation, April 19, 2017
 - c. PI response to technical evaluation, September 22, 2017
 - d. Presentation slides
- 9. Project: *Effects of Fishing on Herring Aggregations*
 - a. 2008 Herring RSA project final report, May 31, 2011
 - b. Technical evaluation, October 2011
 - c. Presentation slides

Research Priority Setting Process

Prior activity. At its July 2017 meeting, the RSC discussed how the NEFMC’s research priority setting process may be improved in the future. To better inform the discussion, the RSC asked that staff provide information about how other fishery management councils set their research priorities. Subsequently, staff has reviewed the research priorities of most of the other councils and have discussed their priority setting processes with staff members. Also, the NEFMC technical staff have been consulted for input on potential process improvements. A staff memo has been prepared summarizing the results of this inquiry (Document #4a).

Next steps. On January 17, after a staff presentation, the RSC will develop any recommendations for improving or structuring the NEFMC’s research priority setting process. The NEFMC is expected to consider any recommendations at its January 2017 meeting.

NEFSC/Northeast Cooperative Research Program

Prior activity. At its July 2017 meeting, the RSC had a discussion with Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) staff regarding a recent programmatic review of its Northeast Cooperative Research Program (NCRP; Document #5a).

Next steps. On January 17, the RSC will receive an update from NEFSC on steps taken to implement the recommendations of the program review, particularly on: integrating cooperative research across the NEFSC, the potential expansion of Study Fleet technologies for fishery reporting, and the longline survey and uses of its data. The RSC may develop any recommendations for the future direction of the program, including how it may help address Council research priorities (Document #4b). The NEFMC is expected to consider any recommendations at its January 2017 meeting.

Management Review of Research Final Reports

On January 17, the RSC will conduct a management review of three projects. For each, the project leader and/or partners have been invited to attend to present an overview of the project and its findings and be available for questions. Each RSC member is asked to serve as a lead reviewer for one project, as assigned below. Please let Dr. Feeney know immediately if your

assignment should be revised (e.g., you are a close collaborator with a project participant). Please familiarize yourself with all projects, but come prepared to discuss your lead project in detail. The Research Review Policy in the Council’s *Operations Handbook* contains guidance for conducting a management review (Document #6a, pages 51-52). The RSC is asked to submit preliminary comments in advance using the management review worksheet (Document #6b). Please email comments to Dr. Feeney by **January 12** if possible. Comments will be compiled and appended to the meeting summary.

Final Report	Project Leaders	RSC Lead Reviewers
<i>Seasonal Scallop Bycatch Survey</i>	Smolowitz, Siemann	Kaelin, McBride, McGuire, Sissenwine, Sherwood
<i>River Herring Bycatch Avoidance</i>	Stokesbury, Bethoney	Balzano, DuPaul, McKenzie, Moore, Pol
<i>Effects of Fishing on Herring Aggregations</i>	Stockwell, Baukus	Alexander, Gerencer, Silva, Tooley

Seasonal Scallop Bycatch Survey

Prior activity. A seasonal bycatch survey was first funded through the Scallop Research-Set-Aside (RSA) program in 2011. The final report for the 2011 project, titled *Optimizing the Georges Bank Scallop Fishery by Maximizing Meat Yield and Minimizing Bycatch* was reviewed by the RSC in June 2012 (Document #7f). The RSC reviewed the follow-on 2012 project *Seasonal Bycatch Survey of the Georges Bank Scallop Fishery* in April 2015 (Document #7g). Funding was received in 2013 for the project *Seasonal Bycatch Survey of the Georges Bank Scallop Fishery*, and its final report is available for review (Document #7a). The project, *Optimizing the Georges Bank Scallop Fishery by Maximizing Meat Yield and Minimizing Bycatch*, was again funded in 2015 and 2016, and the 2015 final report is available for review (Document #7c). Although there have been two different titles used for this survey, it is essentially the same project. The Scallop PDT has used the survey data, along with federal observer data, to help identify the timing of flatfish AMs for the scallop fishery on Georges Banks, most recently for developing Framework 29. The topic of bycatch in the scallop fishery remains a NEFMC research priority, and is a high priority for the 2018-2019 Scallop RSA.

Next steps. On January 17, the RSC will conduct a management review of the 2013 and 2015 project reports (Documents #7a and 7c). Over time, the sampling stations have changed, with just a few that have been consistently surveyed. The Scallop PDT has requested that the RSC focus on the utility of this survey as a time series and the potential for using data on a range of species, data that is not otherwise collected by the federal observer program (e.g., spawning condition of flatfish). It could also be helpful to have the RSC suggest any modifications to the survey to enhance its utility.

River Herring Bycatch Avoidance

Prior Activity. With funding from a variety of sources, portside sampling of the Atlantic herring and mackerel fisheries has been conducted by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries since 2008. The 2014 Herring RSA project, *River Herring Bycatch Avoidance*, was funded to help improve the accuracy and precision of incidental river herring catch estimates, to reduce bycatch through avoidance, and to test net sensors to help determine any associations between environmental conditions and river herring bycatch. The Herring Plan Development Team has used portside sampling data to help characterize river herring bycatch and develop bycatch caps

for the 2013-2015 and 2016-2018 Atlantic herring specifications. The National Marine Fisheries Service has been examining whether portside sampling data are comparable to that of federal fisheries observers for monitoring catch. The topic of portside sampling and bycatch avoidance remains a NEFMC research priority, and was recently identified as a priority for the 2018-2020 Herring RSA.

Next Steps. On January 17, the RSC will conduct a management review of the 2014 project report (Document #8a). Since the catch data have already been used by the PDT for management purposes, the RSC should focus its review on other aspects of the project, such as the bycatch avoidance network and use of net sensors. It would be helpful to have the RSC comment on the potential for using project information in a task the NEFMC expects to complete in 2018: developing a white paper on the consideration of river herring and shad as stocks in the Atlantic herring fishery.

Effects of Fishing on Herring Aggregations

Prior Activity. In 2007, Amendment 1 to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan established the Herring RSA program. Through Amendment 1, a seasonal closure for midwater trawl gear was established in the Gulf of Maine (Area 1A). The rationale for this closure included that it may provide an opportunity for research to determine the impact of this gear type on local aggregations of the herring resource. In 2008, the first and only project to be funded that year was titled, *Effects of Fishing on Herring Aggregations*. Although the project aimed to study the impact of midwater trawling, funding limitations required that the project focus solely on methods development – the use of acoustics on herring fishing vessels to identify herring aggregations. The topic of localized depletion remains a NEFMC research priority, and was recently identified as a priority for the 2018-2020 Herring RSA.

Next Steps. On January 17, the RSC will conduct a management review of the 2008 project report (Document #9a). Although it has been some time since this project was completed, and the project was limited in scope, it would be helpful to have the RSC comment on the potential for using the methods developed in future research.