

Cod Stock Structure Working Group Planning

The planning team discussed the possible timeline for incorporating the conclusions of the ACSSWG into science and management. Initial discussions focused on a May 1, 2024 target date for matching new assessment results with management changes. After discussion, however, a different timeline seems more realistic.

One issue that is unclear is how, and when, a decision on management units is made. Prior to the expansion of sectors in 2010, the U.S. management units were largely identical to the biological stock structure used in the assessments. Changes in this structure had little impact on management. With the advent of the sector system there are implications to management that need to be carefully considered.

Next steps for planning:

- 1) NEFSC to detail plans for the Science/Data Working Group
- 2) Discussion of membership for both working groups
- 3) Detail relationship between the two working groups
- 4) Identify dates for working group milestones
- 5) Brief Groundfish Committee and Council on plans

Science/Data Working Group

The science/data timeline is anchored by the cod research track assessment planned for spring 2023. The assessment working group for that meeting should be formed by late 2021/early 2022 to provide sufficient time for necessary research/modeling work to be completed. Ideally, the work group should focus on a single new assessment stock grouping in addition to the current two stock model. This means that a determination of the biological benefits of a different grouping would need to occur in 2021. The planning group believes this could be better explored through an MSE approach, but a qualitative approach might need to be considered.

With these considerations in mind, a rough schedule was outlined (see below).

Date	Action
February-June 2021	Science/data working group formed and meets. Goal is to identify quality of data inputs available to support cod stock assessments that are more consistent with the ACSSWG understanding of biological stock structure. Deliverable is an inventory of time series data available for each of the five stocks and the type of assessment model each could support.
June 2021	Cod Assessment Research Track Steering Committee formed. Cod stock assessment working group identified.
June-December 2021	Cod Assessment Working Group begins modelling efforts on existing two stock model.
June-December 2021	<p>(1) If funding available, MSE used to evaluate the biological benefits of alternative modelling frameworks that better reflect the revised understanding of stock structure. Modelling should consider results of the science/data working group. Goal is to identify the assessment stock framework(s) that provide more biological benefits than the existing two stock model.</p> <p>(2) Alternatively, if MSE funding is not available, the science/data work group identifies the assessment stock frameworks that can be supported by the available data.</p>
January 2022	The results of the previous step are presented to a review panel and a decision is made on the assessment stock framework(s) that will be modelled in the cod research track. The review panel will need to be identified, and could be the Research Track Steering Committee, a sub-panel of SSC members, the Assessment Oversight Panel, or independent experts.
January 2022-May 2023	Cod Assessment Working Group develops assessment models.
June 2023	Cod Research Track Assessment Meeting
August 2023	Cod Management Track Assessment (tentative). The timing if this assessment may depend on the assessment stock framework that is adopted. It is possible a framework different from the current two-stock model may require management changes that will not be ready for implementation by May 2024. In that case it may be better to conduct the management track assessments in 2024 and implement ACLs that result in May 2025.
May 2024	New ACLs based on Research Track Assessment (tentative)

Management Working Group

The Planning Group reviewed a task outline for this working group prepared by NEFMC staff. Over the course of the discussion, edits were suggested that are incorporated into the copy attached.

The complexity of the management issues caused by the change in the understanding of stock structure hinge on how the cod stocks are assessed in the future. Some measures are likely to be independent of the assessment framework and could be adopted before the assessments are conducted in 2023. Others, however, may be critically dependent on the framework. This is particularly the case for allocation decisions, which are presently closely linked to the ACL structure. Until the assessments are completed, it will be difficult to know with certainty if the allocation decisions will need to be revisited. This is the reason that the May 1, 2024 implementation of science and management changes may prove difficult. As a result, it may be that a phased management approach will be appropriate. The schedule below accounts for these alternate approaches.

Date	Action
February-June 2021	Management working group formed and meets to address actions detailed in the working group outline (attached).
May-June 2021	Working group updates Groundfish AP (GAP) and Committee on progress. Committee considers measures that could be adopted through the framework process (in either 2021 or a future year).
January 2022-June 2023	Once alternate stock assessment frameworks are identified, GAP and Committee discuss whether management changes would be necessary. This would include a discussion of options for management units under the possible frameworks, and an exploration of allocation issues. It may require scoping for an allocation amendment that would be initiated after the assessment is completed.
July 2023	GAP and Committee review research track assessment outcomes and recommend appropriate management response.