

Discussion of Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council SSC Operating Procedures

March 5, 2019

At the October 2018 SSC meeting, a presentation was made addressing some possible shortcomings in the procedures utilized by the SSC with a recent example. That presentation made a number of constructive suggestions which are listed below:

- 1) Move beyond the mindset of a 30 minute around the table group writing session to come up with recommendations
- 2) Staff can continue to work toward developing a better more clearly defined scope of work for the SSC
- 3) Ask the SSC Chair and Council Chair to review the scope of work and provide feedback
- 4) If the Council asks for a specific recommendation, request that staff provide the description of the goals or objectives of the management action, if developed
- 5) Provide Policy advice in terms of describing the likely biological and economic effects and how those effects are related to stated or implicit objectives
- 6) More discussion on the “if” “then” related to the scientific and biological aspects of the proposed actions may help inform the Council
- 7) Appoint a staff assisted subcommittee to write a draft recommendation prior to the meeting.
- 8) After detailed discussion at SSC meeting, appoint a staff assisted subcommittee (or single person) to write a draft statement to be approved by SSC by email or webinar

The underlying objectives laid out through these suggestions are to promote the efficiency and efficacy of the SSC through a more routine process of developing SSC actions. These principles are expected to be generally acceptable to the SSC. However, the mechanisms by which these may be achieved need to be discussed, as are the limitations and/or alternatives to implementing the action items.

Scope of Work

Recently, Council staff has provided a document (scope of work) prior to the SSC meeting which briefly outlines the issues of each agenda item and the expected SSC actions. This approach has been favorably received. The items above suggest that there be some specific modifications to the scope of work and its development. The SSC Chair and Vice Chair should continue to review the scope of work, and it would be useful for the Council Chair to do the same. In particular, this additional review would be informative when the Council asks for a specific recommendation. Staff could then state the description of the goals or objectives of the management action to be elucidated, or the recommendation to be provided.

Appoint a Subcommittee

Some agenda items are pertinent to established Special SSCs that could serve as subcommittees, such as the Special Socioeconomic or Reef Fish SSCs. Currently, there are eight Special SSCs

(<http://gulfcouncil.org/committee-panel-membership/scientific-and-statistical/>), and one or more are typically convened along with the Standing SSC at each meeting. However, not all items fall under the purview of a single existing Special SSC. Additionally, the Special SSCs do not presently have an internal organization, i.e. a chair. Also, it is unlikely that Council resources (human and otherwise) can presently be expended for separate meetings, either in-person or via webinar. An alternative is for the SSC Chair to assign a “discussion leader” for relevant agenda items. The discussion leader for a particular agenda item would be known to all SSC members, and could then present and solicit input from SSC members about the agenda item. *Should there be an ad hoc approach through “discussion leaders” or should there be a more formal subcommittee?*

Role of a Subcommittee and/or a “Discussion Leader”

The discussion leader would lead the debate on the particular agenda item, presenting the issues and options. In preparation for the meeting the leader should develop draft recommendations and, if appropriate, draft motions to be considered by the SSC. Any motion introduced by the discussion leader would carry no more weight than any other SSC members’ motion and would only be meant to make the motion development less *ad hoc*. Additionally, alternative motions could be introduced at any time. Draft recommendations made by the discussion leader would be submitted to the SSC for their approval, rejection, or modification.

In preparation for the SSC meeting, the discussion leader should include advice about likely biological and socioeconomic effects and the relationships to stated or implicit objectives. If applicable, likely consequences of alternative actions of these effects could be presented and discussed as well. Highlighting any potential consequence of alternative actions is especially important when addressing socioeconomic effects where the management objectives are less well defined than the status of stocks determinations required of the FMP.

Reporting

Currently, Council staff prepare a summary of the discussions and recommendations of an SSC meeting, which is reviewed by the SSC by email and, when completed, presented to the Council. It is expected that this will continue. However, if a subcommittee/discussion leader structure is implemented, then presumably that “leader” would provide assistance to staff on a specific agenda item, either by providing to staff the first draft or by being responsible for edits. The summary should include relevant recommendations and policy considerations, and any rationale and important caveats for the motion.

Logistics

The procedures suggested above will require some consideration of the timing and availability of staff and SSC members. If the SSC Chair assigns agenda items on an *ad hoc* basis, then it will have to be assured that someone is available and agreeable to the assignment. That person would have to be allowed sufficient time to review documents related to the agenda item and solicit/accept input on that item from SSC members, and then to summarize findings for general presentation to the SSC. There are likely other internal Council staff requirements which would have to be considered.

The above discussion outlines some possible procedures to assure that SSC actions are as complete and efficient as possible. To achieve this goal, it is suggested that more effort be focused on pre-SSC meeting preparation of options and consequences, and post-meeting reporting to the Council. The above discussion is a first attempt to develop modifications to SSC operations to meet that goal.