

**Scientific and Statistical Committees  
Action Guide**

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**Agenda Item II:** Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

**Action:** Elect new officers

**SSC input:** The Standing SSC will elect a new Chair and Vice-Chair. The current SSC policy was implemented at the May 2013 SSC meeting and specifies that the election of Chair and Vice-chair of the Standing SSC be held annually with a 2-year consecutive term limit. Council staff facilitate the election process. The new officers will immediately assume their respective roles.

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**Agenda Item III:** Approval of SSC Minutes

**Action:** Review, modify (if necessary), and approve minutes via a motion

**SSC input:** The SSC will review, modify if necessary, and approve the minutes from the March 26-27, 2018 Standing, Shrimp, Socioeconomic, and Reef Fish SSC meeting and the August 2, 2018 Standing, Reef Fish, Mackerel, and Shrimp SSC meeting. The March 26-27, 2018 minutes are included since the Special Socioeconomic Committee has not been convened with the Standing SSC since that time.

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**Agenda Item IV:** Selection of SSC representative for October 22-25, 2018 Council meeting in Mobile, Alabama

**Action:** Select SSC representative

**SSC input:** The SSC will select a member of the SSC to attend the October 2018 Council meeting. The representative will attend the meeting, provide a summary presentation, answer questions and provide insight into the SSC deliberations.

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**Agenda Item V:** Discussion of “Best Scientific Information Available”

**Action:** Education and information

**SSC input:** The SSC has requested continued discussion of “Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA)” as it relates to the SSC’s role in providing scientific advice to the Council. The SSC separates BSIA into two concepts; 1) whether the information presented is the best

available, and 2) whether the information is adequate for management advice. Ms. Levy (NOAA General Counsel) will provide a presentation describing the respective role of the SSC and the obligation to use BSIA when providing management advice.

The SSC should request materials or expertise necessary to satisfy their needs to complete its deliberations about BSIA. Council staff and the SSC have previously reviewed the draft “Framework for Determining that Stock Status Determinations and Harvest Specifications are based on the Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA)” and the Council has provided feedback to NMFS on this draft document. The draft framework and the Council’s comments are provided as background information.

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#### **Agenda Item VI:     SSC Best Practices and Procedures**

**Action:** Education and information

**SSC input:** Dr. Anderson will give a presentation to facilitate discussion on the best practices and procedures of the SSC. The objective is to improve understanding of the role of the SSC when reviewing scientific information and making recommendations to the Council about the applicability of this information to inform decisions about management actions. This discussion should help the Council clarify its requests for review and guidance from the SSC and give the SSC guidance in how to frame the advice within the boundaries of scientific advice.

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#### **Agenda item VII:     Update on Red Grouper Interim Analysis**

**Action:** Review analyses and provide recommendations to Council via a motion

**SSC input:** The SSC will review the red grouper interim analyses conducted by the SEFSC. This is the first use of an interim analysis on Gulf species based on new SEDAR procedures. This analysis is intended to provide updated management advice on stocks in years between assessments.

The most recent red grouper stock assessment was completed in 2015 but there is concern that the stock condition has declined since that assessment. At the January 2018 SSC meeting, the SEFSC updated the red group indices of abundance through 2016. The results of this analysis indicated that, after a reduction following the 2005 red tide event, catch indices peaked at about 2011 and have been declining since then. The SSC agreed that the indices have been declining, but could not determine why without a stock assessment. SSC members also noted that, even with the decline, the most recent indices were close to the historical levels. Without having more information from a stock assessment, the SSC felt that it had no basis for recommending a change in the ABC. The Council and fishermen concerns remained regarding the health of the red grouper stock based on low landings and potential high mortality due to red tide.

The SEFSC was requested to complete an interim analysis on Gulf red grouper at the May 2018 SEDAR Steering Committee meeting. The SSC will review the materials provided and, if appropriate, provide an updated ABC recommendation for 2019. The results of the current red grouper assessment (SEDAR 61) are not scheduled to be complete until June 24, 2019. Staff anticipates the SSC would review the assessment results of SEDAR 61 at the July 2019 SSC meeting. The SSC may also provide guidance about how this process could be improved as interim analyses are completed for additional stocks.

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**Agenda item VIII:** Briefing on MRIP Transition to Improved Survey Designs

**Action:** Education and information

**SSC input:** In response to a 2006 NRC review, NOAA Fisheries has been working on ways to improve fishing effort estimates on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. To improve estimates of effort, the MRIP survey has transitioned from a telephone to a mail-based survey. This change has prompted revised estimates of current and historical recreational harvest for many species and a transition plan has been developed to address potentially significant impacts to the science and management process as a result of the new effort survey. The SSC will review the methods used in the updated survey and calibration with historical data. The SSC will also review comparisons of harvest from select species estimated from the previous telephone and current mail-based survey. The SSC will identify potential significant scientific or management issues that should be considered while implementing the transition plan.

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**Agenda item IX:** Presentation: The Great Red Snapper Count

**Action:** Education and information

**SSC input:** Dr. Drymon will give a presentation summarizing the status, preliminary findings, and timeline for a comprehensive effort to estimate red snapper abundance in the Gulf of Mexico. The Council has requested that the SSC remain aware of the status of this on-going project as the results will be a key component to the next red snapper stock assessment. The SSC is requested to provide feedback about science and management needs as well as potential challenges or limitations with incorporating the results of this project into management advice.

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**Agenda Item X:** Discussion on “right-sizing” Stock Assessments

**Action:** Review proposed process and provide recommendations via a motion

**SSC Input:** The quality and quantity of scientific information available to inform stock assessments varies widely among stocks in the Gulf of Mexico. The SEFSC is considering approaches that more closely match the sophistication of the stock assessment model with the available data. This could lead to increased quality of results and efficiency of the stock assessment process. The SSC is requested to provide feedback to the SEFSC about potential

models or species that could warrant a different approach than the current age-structured assessments using Stock Synthesis. The SSC should also identify challenges or opportunities that could result from changes in the stock assessment modeling approach as it relates to the overall modifications to the SEDAR Stock Assessment process.

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#### **Agenda Item XI: Summary of the SEDAR Steering Committee Meeting**

**Action:** Education and information

**SSC input:** Dr. Simmons will provide a summary of the September 24, 2018 SEDAR Steering Committee meeting including revisions to the SEDAR stock assessment schedule. The SSC will review the schedule and provide recommendations for the scheduling of future stock assessments.

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#### **Agenda Item XII: Review Gulf SEDAR Stock Assessment Schedule**

**Action:** Review, modify (as necessary), the Stock Assessment Schedule

**SSC Input:** The SSC will review the schedule and provide recommendations for the scheduling and prioritization of future stock assessments.

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#### **Agenda Item XIII: Gulf of Mexico Allocation Review Triggers**

**Action:** Review policy and provide recommendations to Council via a motion

**SSC Input:** Dr. Diagne will present a discussion paper summarizing NMFS Fisheries Allocation Review Policy (NMFS Policy Directive 01-119) and the accompanying procedural directive addressing criteria for initiating allocation reviews (NMFS Procedural Directive 01-119-01). The presentation will emphasize Gulf of Mexico fisheries allocations subject to the policy and types of allocation review triggers suggested by the policy. The SSC should review the allocation triggers presented and provide recommendations to the Council about triggers or sets of triggers most suitable to Gulf allocations.

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#### **Agenda Item XIV: Specify the TORs for the 2020 Operational Assessments for Gag and Greater Amberjack**

**Action:** Review, modify (as necessary), and approve the terms of reference via a motion

**SSC Input:** The purpose of the terms of reference (TOR) is to aid the SEFSC in planning and scheduling the assessments with SEDAR staff and Council staff. The TORs for gag and greater amberjack will be the first TORs developed for Operational Assessments. The SEFSC has proposed that Operational Assessments immediately follow a Research Track Assessment under

the new process. However, the last assessment for both of these stocks were update assessments in 2016 after benchmark assessments were completed in 2013. The SSC should review the draft TOR for the Operational Assessments of gag and greater amberjack. If there are additional items that could be considered, they should be identified and added. Council staff has suggested different terminal years of data for each of these stock because of management changes to greater amberjack (i.e., the recreational fishing year changed in April 2018). If there are items requested in the DRAFT TORs that may not be possible for an Operational Assessment they should be modified or removed at this time.

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**Agenda Item XV:** Discussion on Gulf Council Fishery Monitoring and Research Priorities for 2020-2025

**Action:** Review provide feedback on current versus proposed approach for Gulf research priorities

**SSC Input:** The Council is responsible, in conjunction with the SSC, for developing a 5 year research plan. The next 5 year plan is due in October 2019. Staff will provide the SSC with a brief overview of the previous 5 year Research and Monitoring Plan 2014-2019 priorities, and comments received on the plan as well as an overview of what other regional Councils have completed. Staff requests guidance on overarching research and monitoring themes and format from the SSC. Staff would also like to discuss the timeline, outline a process for updating the research priorities, and identify a mechanism for the SSC to provide input in the upcoming research and monitoring priorities for the next 5-years.

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**Agenda Item XVI:** Discussion of “Something’s Fishy” Red Grouper Questionnaire

**Action:** Education and information

**SSC Input:** Ms. Muehlstein will provide a summary of the “Somethings Fishy” survey developed to solicit stakeholder input on the status of the red grouper stock. She will provide an overview of the survey and summarize the results. These results have been provided for consideration in the on-going red grouper stock assessment (SEDAR 61). The SSC should review the survey and provide recommendations about the continued use or methods to improve the survey for use in future stock assessments.

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**Agenda Item XVII:** Other Business

**Action:** Discussion

**SSC Input:** Additional items may be brought up for discussion by SSC members, time permitting. If the SSC wishes to pursue action, then action can be scheduled at a future SSC meeting.