

Update on Operational Assessments (OAs) Process

- 1) SSC was presented overview of the proposed modifications for conducting operational assessments (OAs)
- 2) Goal is to increase efficacy (particularly throughput), recognizing that this comes to some extent at the expense of some transparency.
- 3) If a more transparent and thorough assessment is needed, the research track process is designed to deliver that type of assessment, which is always followed by an OA to generate management advice.
- 4) To the extent practical, and to ensure timeliness, the OA should be limited to updating new years of data as already used in the previous assessment.
- 5) SEFSC recommends eliminating assessment panels for all future OAs. Unclear whether this includes all Workshop Panels (Data/Assessment/Review)

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- 6) Instead, will use “topical working groups” (TWGs) to address very specific facets of an assessment (e.g., selectivity, discard mortality). These TWGs would work only on their specific topic and would not review the assessment in total.
- 7) TWGs would be appointed by the SEDAR cooperators (Councils, Commissions); be comprised of SSC members, academia, and stakeholders; and would operate using prescribed statements of work through a team-style approach with webinars and/or conference calls.
- 8) TWGs would produce documentation detailing their discussions and recommendations for inclusion in the assessment materials, which would then be reviewed during plenary sessions during the assessment. SEDAR would be responsible for organizing scheduling and participation for TWGs.
- 9) SSC members should expect to provide guidance on which issues require a TWG, TWG statements of work, participate in TWGs for assessments, and review TWG findings during formal OA reviews.

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10) The number of TWGs for an assessment will vary. If a topic is not covered by a TWG, and needs further review, the SSC will have to request such work as part of the formal assessment review. Statements of work (SOWs) for TWGs will need to be developed two years in advance of the OA; no guidance was presented on how to resolve discovering a need for a TWG during the assessment process

11) These modifications to the OA process, specifically the TWG approach, would begin in 2022. The process is evolving

SSC and SSC Chair's Comments/Questions/Reactions

The SSC is receptive to changes in the SEDAR process and will work with the SEFSC to implement changes that might be made

The SSC noted that cooperators have encouraged SEDAR to increase transparency and participation, while also trying to increase throughput. Thus far, modifications to SEDAR have occurred every 3-5 years. But these have been minor with incremental changes actually being made to stated shortcomings.

SSC noted that prior to SEDAR the Gulf Council used stock assessment panels for coastal migratory pelagics, red drum and reef fish species. That approach exhibited some efficiencies, but at the expense of transparency.

Some SSC members felt that it was unlikely that the goals of quality, throughput and transparency could be all be met simultaneously, given current availability of human resources, the demand for assessments and data limitations,

SSC Comments/Questions/Reactions

The SSC agrees that trying to find efficiencies wherever possible is an important goal. The SOWs will be important to planning workflow as that is when the various TWGs should be identified.

Including new items once a stock assessment begins is detrimental to the timeliness of any assessment. Strict adherence to the SOWs for TWGs will be critical to achieving better throughput and timeliness.

Nevertheless, it is recognized that a TWG may be needed after a stock assessment has been started and that could in fact slow the process down. No guidance was presented on how to resolve discovering a need for a TWG during the assessment process

The SSC notes that the proposed protocol can be implemented within the SSC framework, but that the Council should recognize the limitations and shifts in priorities that the changes imply.