

**Gulf SEDAR Committee Report
April 8, 2024
Kevin Anson, Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab I, No. 1**). The Committee approved the minutes (**Tab I, No. 2**) of the June 2022 meeting as written.

SSC Initial Discussions about the Current SEDAR Process (Tab I, No. 5)

Dr. Nance discussed SSC recommendations for the SEDAR process in response to its review of the SEDAR 74 research track assessment of red snapper. The SSC thought that more flexibility was needed in the SEDAR process, with key stocks assessed at regular intervals. The SSC recommended against the continued use of the research track assessment process, as it did not achieve the intended gains in efficiency and other process improvements. Further, the SSC thought the use of independent CIE peer-review and other working groups could be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The SSC will continue to evaluate the SEDAR process as requested and provide any recommendations to the Council.

March 2024 SEDAR Steering Committee Meeting Report (Tab I, No. 6)

Council staff summarized the proceedings from the March 2024 SEDAR Steering Committee meeting, including the SEDAR project reports, schedule, and key stocks for SEDAR assessment. Regarding process modifications, the SEDAR Steering Committee reviewed a presentation from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), which proposed assessing key stocks regularly, allowing capacity for addressing emergent concerns, improvements to timeliness, and implications for the assessment schedule beyond 2026. SEFSC recommendations also proposed eliminating the research track concept and assessment nomenclature (e.g., operational, benchmark, standard, update), and employing more efficient assessment methods for improved timeliness.

A Council member noted the need for the Councils to simplify the assessment process to increase throughput and timeliness, thereby allowing the Councils to address management needs more nimbly. They added that increasing degrees of complexity result in additional costs in terms of time, which affects the difference between the terminal year of the assessment advice and when a management change using that advice might be implemented. A Committee member asked how a rotating schedule might improve assessment capacity. The Southeast Regional Office replied that some options, like management strategy evaluations (MSE), may play a role in creating efficiency gains in some areas. They elaborated that staffing is not likely to increase; thus, efficiency gains need to be explored wherever else possible. The SEFSC agreed that better matching assessment needs with available resources would help optimize the capability of the analytical agencies (i.e., the SEFSC and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute) to respond to management needs. Further, the SEFSC recalled discussions from the SEDAR Steering Committee which encouraged exploring assessing stocks in simpler ways outside of the

SEDAR process. A Committee member asked if the MSE-type work would be handled outside of the SEDAR process. The SEFSC replied that it depends on the scope of work and resources required. Council staff clarified that the Gulf Council has in the past requested that MSEs occur outside the SEDAR process; however, the SEDAR Steering Committee acknowledged the stresses on human and other resources in the SEDAR process. Other Council members were encouraged by facets of the re-envisioned assessment process.

Council staff discussed which key stocks would be considered for the Gulf. Key stocks would be those which are important to management, but not necessarily the most “data-rich” species managed by the Gulf. These preliminarily included: red snapper, red grouper, gag, king mackerel, greater amberjack, gray snapper, gray triggerfish, and vermilion snapper. A Council member asked why shrimp was not included as a key stock. Council staff replied that the goal was to use the current assessment of shrimp to assess those penaeid stocks. The Council member thought it was immaterial how the current shrimp benchmark assessment evolves, as to whether shrimp is a key stock for future assessments. A Committee member replied that there are dozens of species managed by the Council and that not all species can be labeled as key stocks; however, just because a species is not labeled as a key stock does not mean it will not be routinely assessed in some way. Another Committee member requested consideration of yellowtail snapper as a key stock and mentioned that he considered cobia as much of a “key stock” as king mackerel. Council staff clarified that the assessment of key stocks would be negotiated between the SEDAR cooperators, like the Gulf Council, and the analytical agencies. The proposal will be reviewed next by the SSC after it undergoes further development.

Review and Discussion of Gulf of Mexico SEDAR Schedule (Tab I, No. 4)

Council staff reviewed the SEDAR schedule for Gulf stocks through 2026 and clarified that the initiative to implement the routine assessment of key stocks was expected to begin in 2026.

Other Business

A Council member asked about a motion passed at a previous Council meeting regarding revisions to the SEDAR process, including incorporation of state surveys for recreational data and conducting assessments outside of SEDAR. The SEFSC replied that, beyond the discussions and presentations at the SEDAR Steering Committee in March 2024, they were exploring methods such as using percent change in a representative index for adjusting catch advice. The SEFSC thought that work on this motion was making progress and would bring more details at a future Council meeting.

Mr. Chair this concludes my report.