

**Gulf SEDAR Committee Report**  
**October 26, 2020**  
**Dr. Tom Frazer, Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab I, No. 1**) as written and approved the minutes (**Tab I, No. 2**) of the June 2020 meeting as written.

*Update on Operational Assessment Process and SSC Recommendations (Tab I, No. 4a)*

Dr. Joe Powers, Chair of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), provided a summary of updates to the operational assessment (OA) process as presented to the SSC by SEDAR staff. The objective of the changes to the OA process is to increase efficiency and throughput with minimal loss of transparency. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) has recommended eliminating assessment panels for all future OAs and replacing them with topical working groups (TWG). These TWGs will increase efficiency by focusing on specific topics and avoiding the review of previously accepted components of an assessment, and be comprised of SSC members, academia and stakeholders, operating based on statements of work (SOW). SSC members would offer guidance on issues requiring TWGs, developing SOWs, and reviewing TWG findings. The number of TWGs per assessment will vary and SOWs will need to be developed at least two years in advance of an OA. Dr. Clay Porch (SEFSC) clarified the purposes and outcomes of research track assessments, operational assessments, and interim analyses, and also addressed the issue of possibly needing TWGs after an operational assessment has been started.

Dr. Frazer asked for examples of specific unanticipated issues that should require minimal time to review and be incorporated into an OA. Studies of discard mortality rates would be fairly quick to incorporate after a review by a TWG. Examples that would potentially delay the process include incorporation of new information on life history, or the reproductive history of a stock. The Council asked for an estimate of time savings or number of assessments based on comparing the current OA process to the proposed modifications. Dr. Porch estimated a 20% increase in throughput and noted that the SEFSC is continually working on other changes to increase efficiency, such as automating data processes. Dr. Powers added that interim analyses (IAs) increase efficiency, and may be another mechanism to focus on increasing throughput. Ms. Bosarge asked if the proposed OA process would still include avenues for stakeholders to participate. Dr. Porch replied that TWG meetings will be available to the public to view and provide feedback, with the intent to hold some sessions that provide information in less technical language to reach stakeholder audiences more effectively.

*Interim Analyses – Discussion on Timing and Use for Management (Tab I, No. 5)*

Dr. Carrie Simmons gave an overview of IAs, including timing from analysis request to management implementation, methods to improve or automate the process, current requests, and future considerations when using this tool. IAs are a quantitative approach for catch advice, using a fishery-independent index, that is completed separately from the SEDAR process. She

provided red grouper as an example. Some methods the Council may use to improve timeliness for management purposes include modifying framework procedures, automating the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rule, and streamlining the framework action approach where possible.

Ms. Bosarge suggested that Council staff work with the SEFSC to develop a 3-year proposed schedule of IAs for the top species and bring that back to the Council to consider at a future meeting. Mr. Diaz suggested adding a standard agenda item to review eligible IA species to every October Council meeting may benefit the purpose of achieving improved timeliness. He also suggested listing the Council's outstanding requests for IA on the Gulf schedule.

*SEDAR Steering Committee Report from October 16, 2020 Webinar Meeting (Tab I, No. 6)*

Dr. Simmons gave a short overview of outcomes from the most recent SEDAR Steering Committee webinar including 2021-2022 assessment schedule changes. Due to the current workload for data providers and a backlog of aging fish, some delays will occur. Gag will be prioritized for the Gulf; gray snapper, yellowedge grouper and gray triggerfish assessments will be delayed. The Committee approved a motion to hold a SEDAR Methods and Procedures Workshop to discuss improving the quality of fishery-independent data inputs and streamlining future stock assessments. Finally, information was provided for a SEDAR Research Recommendations Search Tool created by SEDAR staff (<http://sedarweb.org/research-recomendations>).

*Review of Gulf Stock Assessment Schedule (Tab I, No. 6b)*

Mr. Rindone reviewed the Gulf SEDAR schedule for 2020 through 2024. The Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs will be reviewing yellowtail snapper projections on October 30<sup>th</sup>. Changes to the schedule include moving the gray snapper OA back one year from 2021 to 2022, and the yellowedge grouper OA back one year from 2022 to 2023 with an anticipated completion in 2023. The gray triggerfish research track start date will also be delayed at least one year.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.