MEMORANDUM

Date: 7 December 2018

To: Michael P. Luisi, Chairman, MAFMC

From: John Boreman, Ph.D., Chair, MAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee

Subject: Report of the December 2018 SSC Webinar

The SSC met via webinar on the 6th of December 2018 specifically to address the report of the joint SSC/NEFSC Working Group assigned to develop an estimate of OFL for Atlantic Surfclam (Attachment 1). A total of 12 SSC members participated in the webinar (Attachment 2), which constituted a quorum. Also attending, in addition to yourself, were MAFMC staff and Council members, NEFSC staff (via webinar), GARFO staff, and representatives from academia and the fishing industry. Documents referenced in the report can be accessed via the SSC’s meeting website (http://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2018/december-ssc-webinar).

At its May 2017 meeting, the SSC agreed with the findings of the Demersal Working Group and the SARC Review Panel that the estimate of OFL in the Atlantic Surfclam assessment was unreliable and should not be used as a basis for management advice. Instead, the SSC used catch records to support its ABC recommendations for 2018, 2019, and 2020. At the May 2018 SSC meeting Council staff proposed an alternative method for estimating OFL that the SSC determined warranted further investigation. Subsequently, the Council directed the SSC to work with NEFSC staff to determine if an OFL could be estimated given the most recent scientific information available: “Move to have members of the SSC work with NEFSC to refine the OFL method provided so it can be considered for use with a P* approach to estimating an ABC. A joint SSC/NEFSC working group will be established for this project with delivery of the results at a future SSC meeting, no later than February 2019.”

The joint SSC/NEFSC Working Group members are Dan Hennen (NEFSC staff and NEFSC lead assessment scientist for Atlantic Surfclam) and Mike Wilberg, Brian Rothschild, Paul Rago, and Tom Miller (SSC members). The report of the Working Group was presented to the SSC during the webinar in two parts. Dan Hennen presented the results of the analyses performed under the direction of the Working Group, and Mike Wilberg presented the Working Group’s conclusions and recommendations. The Working Group concluded that enough information was available to determine an OFL and the best approach is to use the outputs from the benchmark assessment to establish an Atlantic Surfclam OFL in 2019 and 2020. However, the Working Group noted the high level of uncertainty associated with knowledge of the stock and
recommended using the point estimate of the OFL from the benchmark assessment and a coefficient of variation (OFL CV) of 150%.

The SSC agreed to support the findings and recommendations of the Working Group and used information provided in the Working Group report to recommend new ABCs for 2019 and 2020. Responses by the SSC to the terms of reference provided by the MAFMC (noted in italics) are as follows.

*For Atlantic Surfclam, the SSC will provide a written report that identifies the following for the 2019-2020 fishing years:*

1) *The level of uncertainty that the SSC deems most appropriate for the information content of the most recent stock assessment, based on criteria listed in the Omnibus Amendment.*

The SSC deemed that Atlantic Surfclam should be considered a stock with an SSC-modified OFL probability distribution.

2) *If possible, the level of catch (in weight) associated with the overfishing limit (OFL) based on the maximum fishing mortality rate threshold or, if appropriate, an OFL proxy.*

The estimated OFLs are **74,281 mt** for 2019 and **74,110 mt** for 2020. The OFLs are based on the 2016 benchmark assessment.

3) *The level of catch (in weight) and the probability of overfishing associated with the acceptable biological catch (ABC) for the stock, the number of fishing years for which the ABC specification applies and, if possible, interim metrics that can be examined to determine if multi-year specifications need reconsideration prior to their expiration.*

The SSC assumed a lognormal OFL distribution with a CV of 150%. The SSC’s choice of 150% CV for the OFL is for several reasons:

- The uncertainty in biomass estimates derived from the assessment is several-fold higher than seen in assessments for other species;
- The Georges Bank component of the survey declined unexpectedly with use of a higher efficiency gear in the new survey series;
- Fishing mortality is low;
- The Georges Bank component of the survey is highly uncertain due to small sample sizes;
- There are few years in the new survey time series; and
- Recruitment is difficult to estimate.

The ABCs recommended by the SSC based on this CV are **56,419 mt** for 2019 and **56,289 mt** for 2020.
4) The most significant sources of scientific uncertainty associated with determination of OFL and ABC.

- Absolute estimates of spawning stock biomass (SSB), recruitment (R), and fishing mortality (F) are scale uncertain.
- Uncertainty from combining absolute SSB, F, and R estimates, and projected trends for the northern and southern areas into a “whole stock.”
- Ecosystem analyses suggest surfclam habitat is changing – decreasing in Delmarva and increasing in NJ and Long Island. The net effects on total habitat area and carrying capacity are unknown.
- Model assumption of a 12% incidental mortality, which also may have changed.
- Dredge efficiency is a major factor for setting the scale of the model.
- Catchability was estimated differently for the old and new surveys.
- The assumed dome-shaped selectivity patterns for the survey were based on gear selectivity experiments and are not identical to the way selectivity is defined in the model.
- The distribution of size-at-age in the assessment has largest individuals at intermediate ages (probably because the CVs on size at age for the older ages are too small). This may cause a bias in estimates of F.
- There were conflicts between prior distributions of parameters and some other data sets for both models, but especially for the Southern Area. This is a common problem in integrated stock assessments, but may be indicative of structural problems that could be explored (e.g., heterogeneity in growth, recruitment, or mortality, which are not modeled in the assessment).
- The recent survey indices based on the new survey on Georges Bank are lower, which is inconsistent with use of a higher efficiency gear.

5) Ecosystem considerations accounted for in the stock assessment, and any additional ecosystem considerations that the SSC considered in selecting the ABC, including the basis for those additional considerations.

No additional ecosystem considerations were taken into account in selecting the ABC.

6) Prioritized research or monitoring recommendations that would reduce the scientific uncertainty in the ABC recommendation and/or improve the assessment level.

- Need for increased understanding in the link/relationship between the OFL and reproductive potential of the Atlantic surfclam stock.
- Reproductive consequences of fishery operations and relationship of clam density (i.e., high concentration areas versus low density patches); clam density differences in Georges Bank and Southern Region.
- Recovery potential of heavily fished areas.
- Increased understanding of stock dynamics at smaller spatial scales – scale needed is likely finer than current survey gear and survey design. Evidence suggests that patch
density in bivalves at small spatial scales can have a substantial impact on reproductive success.

- Dredge efficiency is a major factor for setting the scale of the model – more work may be needed.
- Re-examine whether the structural decisions in the assessment model are leading to conflicts in the data.
- Consider methods to estimate natural mortality (M) from the assessments by using data from shells and recently dead individuals.
- Continue to develop the institutional capacity and support for age-length integrated models.
- Examine spatial scales of variability in survey and commercial catch data, as they may be useful in improving the design of the survey or in developing regions for assessment or management.
- Model-based estimators should be used to “fill gaps” in survey strata.
- Consider the new observer discard data.
- Include Nantucket Shoals in the surveyed area for Atlantic Surfclam.
- Use "gap filling" (using data from adjacent years or areas) to calculate survey indices.

7) The materials considered in reaching its recommendations.

- Surfclam OFL Working Group Report and Meeting Summary
- Updated NEFSC Surfclam Analyses Report
- Atlantic Surfclam Background Document
- SAW 61: Summary Report, Assessment Report, and Panelist Reports
- Biological reference points for Atlantic surfclam (*Spisula solidissima*) in warming seas (Hennen et al.)

These documents can be accessed via the SSC meeting website (http://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2018/december-6).

8) A conclusion that the recommendations provided by the SSC are based on scientific information the SSC believes meets the applicable National Standard guidelines for best scientific information available.

The SSC believes that the recommendations provided are based on scientific information that meets the applicable National Standard guidelines for best scientific information available.

c: SSC Members, Warren Elliott, Chris Moore, Brandon Muffley, Jessica Coakley, Dan Hennen, Jan Saunders
AGENDA

Thursday, December 6, 2018

9:00 Welcome/Overview of meeting agenda (J. Boreman)

9:10 Overview of SSC/NEFSC Surfclam OFL Working Group analyses and recommendations (D. Hennen/M. Wilberg)

10:00 SSC review and possible revisions of previously recommended 2019 – 2020 Surfclam ABCs (W. Gabriel)

11:30 Other business, if needed

12:00 Adjourn
MAFM Scientific and Statistical Committee
6 December 2018
Webinar

Meeting Attendance

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<td><strong>SSC Members in Attendance:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>John Boreman (SSC Chairman)</td>
<td>NC State University</td>
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<td>Tom Miller (SSC Vice-Chairman)</td>
<td>University of Maryland – CBL</td>
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<td>Ed Houde</td>
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<td>Mike Wilberg</td>
<td>University of Maryland - CBL</td>
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<td>Paul Rago</td>
<td>NMFS Fisheries (retired)</td>
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<td>Doug Lipton</td>
<td>NMFS</td>
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<td>Wendy Gabriel</td>
<td>NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center</td>
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<td>Lee Anderson</td>
<td>University of Delaware (emeritus)</td>
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<td>Mark Holliday</td>
<td>NMFS (retired)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian Rothschild</td>
<td>UMass Dartmouth (emeritus)</td>
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<td>Olaf Jensen</td>
<td>Rutgers University</td>
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<td>Cynthia Jones</td>
<td>Old Dominion University</td>
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| Others in attendance:     |                                            |
| Jessica Coakley           | MAFMC staff                                |
| Brandon Muffley           | MAFMC staff                                |
| Jose Montañez             | MAFMC staff                                |
| Mike Luisi                | MAFMC Chair                                |
| Peter DeFur               | MAFMC member                               |
| Dan Hennen                | NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center    |
| Doug Potts                | NMFS GARFO                                 |
| Daphne Munroe             | Rutgers University                         |
| Guy Simmons               | Sea Watch international                    |
| Peter Himchak             | LaMonica Fine Foods                        |
| Eric Powell               | University of Southern Mississippi         |
| Tom Hoff                  | Wallace and Associates                     |
MEMORANDUM

Date: 25 March 2019

To: Michael P. Luisi, Chairman, MAFMC

From: John Boreman, Ph.D., Chair, MAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee

Subject: Report of the March 2019 SSC Meeting

The SSC met in Baltimore on the 19th and 20th of March 2019 primarily to address a number of topics: (1) review 2020 ABC recommendations for Golden Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish; (2) receive a briefing on the new stock assessment scheduling plan recently adopted by the Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC); (3) discuss SSC input into the Council’s five-year research plan; (4) provide feedback to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) on their draft state of the ecosystem report; (5) receive a briefing on the current status and future plans for the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP); and, under Other Business, (6) discuss involvement of the SSC in agency decisions that overrule the SSC’s (and Council’s) ABC recommendations, and (7) finalize plans for SSC guidelines on determining coefficients of variation for overfishing limits (Attachment 1).

A total of 14 SSC members participated in the meeting on March 19th and 15 members on March 20th (Attachment 2), which constituted a quorum for each day. Also participating were Council members and staff, NEFSC staff, and a representative from the fishing industry. Documents referenced in the report can be accessed via the SSC’s meeting website (http://www.mafmc.org/ssc-meetings/2019/march-19-20).

Golden Tilefish

José Montañez (Council staff) summarized the current status of management, the data update provided by the NEFSC, and the most recent fishery performance report for Golden Tilefish. According to the data update, the size distribution of fish landed continues to be wide and comprises all market categories. In addition, the strong 2013 year class seems to be progressing through the fishery as expected. Based on the lack of compelling evidence to the contrary, the SSC decided to maintain its ABC recommendation for 2020 (742 mt).

The SSC expressed concern that there appears to be no strong year class following the one produced in 2013. The SSC is also concerned about the lack of information on recreational catch and supports its earlier recommendation to include recreational catch in the next assessment.
The SSC encourages the catch recording system being planned for the tilefish recreational fishery to be implemented as soon as possible.

Blueline Tilefish

Matt Seeley (Council staff) summarized the current status of management, the data update provided by the NEFSC, and the most recent fishery performance report for Blueline Tilefish. Available data on landings and discards shows levels similar to recent years and well under the ABC. Lacking evidence to the contrary, the SSC decided to maintain its ABC recommendation for 2020 \((45.6 \text{ mt})\).

The SSC noted that the catch distribution of Blueline Tilefish in 2018 shifted north, compared with previous years, which could be a single-year anomaly or be indicative of a possible range expansion for the species. The SSC encourages charter boats to report sizes (lengths, weights, or both) of the Blueline Tilefish caught, as well as location, to get a better handle on the biological and distributional characteristics of the species in the Northeast. The SSC also encourages coordination between the Northeast and Southeast US regions in the conduct of surveys targeting Blueline (and Golden) Tilefish. Finally, as already mentioned for Golden Tilefish, the SSC encourages the catch recording system being planned for the tilefish recreational fishery to be implemented as soon as possible.

NRCC Assessment Scheduling and Peer Review Process

Brandon Muffley (Council staff) briefed the SSC on the stock assessment scheduling and peer review process recently adopted by the NRCC. His briefing was essentially the same as the one given to the Council by the NEFSC at the December 2018 meeting in Annapolis, but with additional details about the scoring factors used for ranking managed species across council jurisdictions, the various levels of management track reviews, and how research topics are selected and ranked. The new management track process provides routine updates for all managed species on a set timetable, greater flexibility to improve assessments without necessitating a full benchmark, and guidelines for sorting management track assessments into levels that dictate to extent of peer review needed. The research track process can be species- or topic-oriented, and establishes a five-year schedule that allows time to identify research needs, garner resources, conduct the research, and peer review research results. Working groups comprising scientists within and outside the NEFSC will be established for each research track species or topic, similar to the one recently used for the Atlantic Mackerel benchmark assessment and the one envisioned for addressing timing of Illex squid management advice.

Much of the SSC discussion centered around the additional workload that will likely be required of SSC members. The SSC chairs for both the New England and Mid-Atlantic councils will serve on the Assessment Oversight Committee, along with the chief of the NEFSC Population Dynamics Branch and the chair of the ASMFC Assessment Science Committee, which will be responsible for ensuring that management track assessments receive the proper level of peer review. Members of the SSC will be asked to serve on panels for expedited or enhanced peer
review of management track assessments. SSC members commented that the time currently envisioned to conduct expedited (1-2 hours) and enhanced (half to full day) management track peer reviews is underestimated. In addition, SSC members suggested additional factors that could have been considered in the species scoring matrix, such as shifting spatial distributions induced by climate change. Regarding the research track process, one of the benefits of the five-year scheduling is that it will allow solicitation and the potential prioritization of funds from sources outside the Council and NEFSC, including agency-based programs such as S-K grants, NOAA Sea Grant, the NOAA Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, and industry-based programs such as SCeMFiS (Science Center for Marine Fisheries). The SSC also encourages consideration of improvements to existing data collection programs and assessment methods, in addition to contemplation of new ones as potential topics for the research track.

Five-Year Research Plan

Brandon Muffley (Council staff) provided an overview of the proposed process to update the Council’s comprehensive five-year research plan. The Council agreed to update the research plan a year early in order to align it with and be informed by the Council’s next Strategic Plan (2020-2024). The SSC noted the statutory requirement in the MSA for each Council to develop these plans, but questioned how this plan is used to inform, prioritize, and fund research priorities for both the NEFSC and the Council. The SSC also noted the NEFSC and Council may utilize these plans differently given the potential differences in scale, overall goals, and objectives; the SSC offered that it might be informative to structure the plan in a way that accounts for these differences. The SSC indicated that it would be helpful to get feedback as to what current research priorities were and were not addressed and why, and if any of the research was used within the management process. The SSC also offered some initial feedback on larger topics (themes and programs) the next research plan should highlight (e.g., recreational data collection and improvements to stock assessments). Council staff will continue to work with the SSC and others (i.e., Advisory Panels, Monitoring Committees) to continue the development of the research plan. Time will be set aside on the agenda for the September SSC meeting to look at broader research issues in the mid-Atlantic region.

State of the Ecosystem Report

Sarah Gaichas presented the draft 2019 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem (SOE) report produced by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. The presentation reviewed the purpose of the report within the MAFMC EAFM framework, report structure, and an overview of 2019 results. These results were used to update the MAFMC EAFM risk assessment, and revised risk assessment summary tables were presented. Her presentation finished with an overview of technical improvements to ecosystem reporting, including the online availability of all indicator data and detailed technical methods for each indicator.

The aim of the SOE report is to inform fishery managers on an annual basis regarding ecosystem status and trends that are relevant to fishery management decision making. The report is designed to be short (<30 pages) and to use non-technical language. As in 2017-2018, the report is organized to align indicators with overarching management objectives. Similar to 2018, the
2019 report emphasizes synthesis across indicators (Overview section, pages 1-2), as well as reporting of individual indicators, and included a wide range of expertise in the planning, synthesis, and reporting through a series of workshops. Council staff (Brandon Muffley) participated in the organizational workshop in August 2018, which shaped the 2019 report.

The 2019 SOE includes new information as requested by MAFMC. The spatial scale of indicators is now included in each description at the request of the SSC in 2018. NEAMAP survey indices were added and compared directly with NEFSC survey indices (although further analytical work is to be done). Recreational fishery diversity (fleet and species) indicators were also added, and feedback from the SSC was requested on how to account for SAFMC-managed species. Finally, a Chesapeake Bay water quality indicator was added to partially address concerns about estuarine habitat quality. Some other planned improvements, such as statistical analysis of patterns across indicators, completion of a management complexity indicator, and quantitative evaluation of other ocean uses overlap with current fishery areas, could not be completed due to the government shutdown December 2018-January 2019; however, these analyses are planned for the 2020 report.

The SSC members were supportive of the work overall, and specifically appreciated the responsiveness to their 2018 comments in the 2019 report, as well as the improved transparency of SOE methods and the availability of indicator data. In response to a question on next steps in the EAFM process, the SSC was informed of the ongoing effort to develop a Summer Flounder EAFM conceptual model, to be developed in 2019.

The SSC noted that some indicators (e.g., revenue, recreational diversity) have many potential drivers that are changing over time, and asked whether these were appropriate risk indicators if the underlying drivers have not been analyzed in depth in the report. Similarly, the basis for assessing risk due to climate pressures on certain species (e.g., ocean acidification on scallops) in the SOE and associated risk assessment is based on the published climate vulnerability assessment, rather than more quantitative dose-response curves. Further, the SSC suggested that long term trends may be less important for some indicators than pattern detection (higher frequency variation), such that analytical methods could be further developed to detect significant patterns within and across indicators. Finally, the SSC inquired whether research was underway to determine ecosystem-level reference points or to suggest indicator-based management thresholds to further operationalize EAFM.

The SSC provided specific comments on recreational diversity indices. First, a general review of diversity literature for applications at different scales (e.g., total vs. south Atlantic vs. other managed species groups) was recommended, as was working with the Council to better determine objectives for the indicator. Distinguishing the MAFMC, SAFMC, and ASMFC managed species to the extent possible would be desirable to help determine how much control an individual management entity might have over changes in the indicator, as well as informing the extent of potential future management collaboration that may be necessary as ecosystem conditions change.

The SSC suggested additional indicators for consideration, including a young-of-year index (available from multiple surveys), frequency and occurrence of warm core rings from the Gulf
Stream (as both aggregation zones and drivers of species shifts), indicators of ocean acidification, and diet-data based indicators, such as mean stomach weights across feeding guilds or average weights of different diet components over time. The public requested improved indicators of apex predators, specifically for blacktip, spinner, and sandbar sharks, which are increasingly encountered by fishermen in the Mid-Atlantic.

**Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel**

Wendy Gabriel (NEFSC and SSC member) updated the SSC on the status of the activities of the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP). Her update included the purpose and objectives of NTAP in the context of the its charter, with objectives of understanding NEFSC trawl survey gear performance and methodology, the evaluation of the potential to complement or supplement any regional trawl surveys, and the improvement of understanding and acceptance of trawl survey data quality and results. To this end, NTAP has completed several studies of NEFSC survey trawl efficiency by comparing catch rates of nets with standard rockhopper sweeps to nets with heavy chain sweeps. This enables an estimation of relative efficiency of rockhopper sweeps and, in turn, estimates of swept area biomass. Results of these experiments have already been used in assessments of Witch Flounder, Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder (including TRAC), Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder, and Summer Flounder. As recommended by NTAP, future operational assessments will note specifically whether gear efficiency data were evaluated during the assessment process and incorporated into the model and if not, why not. The intent is to evaluate and incorporate results from these experiments where data are relevant and adequate.

Currently, NTAP is focusing on trawl wingspread consistency: if wingspread varies with depth, how does that affect estimates of area swept and gear performance? Analyses of the effect of variable area swept are nearly complete. Starting this summer, NTAP will be refining criteria for acceptable wingspread ranges based on results of flume tank experiments and a comparison of catch rates between nets with optimum wingspread and over- and under-spread. Performance of different door types will also be evaluated. A roadmap to improve performance for stock assessment data reliability will be developed, which integrates these and potentially other approaches. Decisions will be based on scientific research results, input from NTAP, and input from the SSCs, and may be a hybrid of several approaches. Funding for field experiments this year was obtained from de-obligated prior year money.

One potential emerging research focus of NTAP may be an evaluation of effects of designated wind energy areas on the current bottom trawl survey design and execution. Wind energy areas will render large portions of some survey strata untrawlable, and complementary sampling designs and protocols will need to be developed to monitor those areas in the future. Evaluation of potential changes in species distributions and associated possible impacts on availability to fishery independent surveys, and expansion of the number of species with trawl efficiency estimates may also be candidates for future work.

Although NTAP raised the question of effect of tow duration on survey performance in its earlier discussions, gear efficiency emerged as a theme, based on the potential to include those types of information in stock assessments (or as diagnostic and interpretive information, when constraints
on operational assessment data are present). Earlier work by Pennington and others on potential effects of tow duration on precision and accuracy may warrant revisiting. Although trawl sensors provide data on wingspread, they do not provide a direct indicator of trawl footrope performance, and as wingspread increases from optimum, the footrope may lose contact with the bottom. There may be opportunities to use management strategy evaluation to consider how trawl survey data is processed, using the Atlantic herring MSE approach.

Other Business

GARFO’s ABC for Black Sea Bass: The main discussion topic under Other Business was the action taken by GARFO last fall to unilaterally overrule the ABC recommended by the SSC at its July 2018 meeting. The SSC’s recommendation had been endorsed by the Council at its August 2018 meeting, and used to set proposed catch limits by the Council for Black Sea Bass in 2019.

The 2019 ABC specification published by GARFO for Black Sea Bass was not the same one recommended by the SSC. Instead, an ABC specification for the 2019 fishing-year was set by GARFO that was higher, equivalent to the SSC recommendation for the 2018 fishing year. This decision was made by GARFO based on newly available data from NEFSC scientists that indicated that the 2015 year-class of Black Sea Bass had a high probability of being above average. The SSC was neither notified nor consulted on the change in ABC, and to date we have been unable to determine if the decision was subject to scientific peer review. During the February 2019 SSC webinar, we were informed by GARFO staff that the SSC was not consulted because of the short rulemaking deadline to implement the 2019 specifications.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act and NOAA Fisheries Operational Guidelines specify the roles and responsibilities for the science and management of stewardship, specifically tasking the Council’s SSC to undertake the responsibility of recommending ABCs for each fishery under management by the Council based on peer-reviewed science. The SSC’s ABC recommendation to the Council is a result of the SSC's consideration of best available science and thorough scientific debate before reaching a consensus.

While GARFO has presumptive authority for implementing Black Sea Bass regulations, the SSC suggests the manner in which this recent ABC action was taken undermines the trust that the SSC has built with the Council and stakeholders. The SSC has a track record demonstrating that it is an independent and unbiased source of scientific recommendations, and that its decisions are not influenced by management pressure felt by the Council and the Regional Office. Oftentimes, Councils and GARFO are subject to advocates seeking to increase catches beyond scientifically sustainable levels. The MSA process was specifically designed to have the SSCs recommend the ABCs in order to insulate the biologically-driven decision making from such upwardly driven policy influences. In addition, the SSC is concerned that the "new data" process used by GARFO may be more difficult and not be as readily adopted if the outcome results in a lower ABC than recommended by the Council and the SSC. For these reasons, the SSC does not support the continued use of the GARFO process as described for Black Sea Bass.
The MAFMC SSC has demonstrated it can be responsive to requests from the Council to review its ABC recommendations based on new information or changed circumstances. Such new data has not always made a scientific case sufficient to persuade the SSC to make a change consistent with the principles of sustainability and the Council’s risk policy.

The SSC finds that, although time was short in the GARFO Black Sea Bass example, a quick turnaround review by the SSC of the new data and method used by the NEFSC in its analysis could have occurred, perhaps via email or telephone. This would have added some transparency and accountability to the way the action was being taken, and would have been more consistent with the roles envisioned by the Act. At a minimum, notice of the pending action overruling the SSC recommendation via communication from GARFO to the SSC would have been a desired professional courtesy that promoted future collaboration and cooperation.

If this type of situation occurs again in the future, the SSC is prepared to move quickly in evaluating the data and methods used by NEFSC in support of GARFO actions affecting management of Council species.

**OFL CV Guidelines:** The SSC Working Group developing guidelines for how the SSC selects an appropriate coefficient of variation (CV) for the overfishing limit (OFL) in its ABC-setting process used the opportunity afforded at the SSC meeting to get feedback from the entire SSC on finalization of the guidelines. Besides completion of the guidelines document for eventual presentation to the Council, the SSC is concerned that the process for implementing the guidelines in setting ABCs may become too cumbersome and time-consuming to be handled effectively during an SSC meeting. The SSC agreed that preparation of a pre-decision document that walks through the nine elements of uncertainty that constitute the CV would add efficiency to the ABC-setting process.

A consensus approach was agreed upon by the SSC members attending the meeting. For each species in which an ABC recommendation is required, the SSC lead for that species would draft a narrative, in consultation with Council staff, that evaluates the key sources of uncertainty and recommends an appropriate “bin” for the OFL CV (60%, 100%, or 150%). The narrative would be reviewed by a standing panel of SSC members to ensure consistency in interpretation of the guidelines and with how other species are being handled before being circulated to the entire SSC prior to the meeting in which the ABC will be set. The narrative drafted by the SSC lead would be considered “pre-decisional” and not in any way binding the SSC to a particular CV choice. Initially, the standing review panel would comprise the members of the OFL CV working group.

The final draft of the guidelines, and the associated process for their implementation, will be presented to the full SSC at its May 2019 meeting, with the intent of delivering them to the Council at the Council’s June 2019 meeting in New York City.

c: SSC Members, Warren Elliott, Chris Moore, Brandon Muffley, José Montañez, Matt Seeley, Paul Nitschke, Jan Saunders
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Scientific and Statistical Committee Meeting
March 19 – 20, 2019
Hyatt Place Inner Harbor
511 South Central Avenue, Baltimore, MD, 21201

AGENDA

Tuesday, March 19, 2019
1:00  Golden Tilefish data and fishery update; review of implemented 2020 ABC (Montañez)
2:15  Blueline Tilefish data and fishery update; review of implemented 2020 ABC (Seeley)
3:30  NRCC assessment schedule and review process (Boreman/Muffley)
5:00  Comprehensive 5-year Research Plan (2020-2024) – Overview (Muffley)
5:30  Adjourn

Wednesday, March 20, 2019
9:00  NEFSC Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem Report (Gaichas)
   •  Update of Council’s Risk Assessment
   •  Update on EAFM Summer Flounder conceptual model
10:30 Update on Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel activities (Gabriel)
11:30 Other Business
12:00 Adjourn
## Meeting Attendance

### SSC Members in Attendance:

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<td>Dave Secor (via webinar)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee Anderson</td>
<td>University of Delaware (emeritus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Holliday</td>
<td>NOAA Fisheries (retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan Jiao</td>
<td>Virginia Tech University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Frisk (via webinar, March 20th only)</td>
<td>Stony Brook University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob Latour</td>
<td>VIMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Rothschild</td>
<td>University of Massachusetts – Dartmouth (emeritus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olaf Jensen</td>
<td>Rutgers University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Others in attendance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt Seeley</td>
<td>MAFMC staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José Montañez</td>
<td>MAFMC staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon Muffley</td>
<td>MAFMC staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Nitschke (via webinar, March 19th only)</td>
<td>NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren Elliott</td>
<td>MAFMC Vice-Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg DiDomenico (March 20th only)</td>
<td>GSSA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>