

----- Original Message -----

**Subject:**Confirmation of Regional Peer Review Process (description)

**Date:**Tue, 24 Jun 2014 11:54:12 -0700

**From:**Pat Livingston - NOAA Federal <[pat.livingston@noaa.gov](mailto:pat.livingston@noaa.gov)>

**To:**Chris Oliver - NOAA Affiliate <[chris.oliver@noaa.gov](mailto:chris.oliver@noaa.gov)>

**CC:**Douglas Demaster - NOAA Federal <[douglas.demaster@noaa.gov](mailto:douglas.demaster@noaa.gov)>, Jim Balsiger - NOAA Federal <[Jim.Balsiger@noaa.gov](mailto:Jim.Balsiger@noaa.gov)>, David Witherell - NOAA Affiliate <[David.Witherell@noaa.gov](mailto:David.Witherell@noaa.gov)>, Glenn Merrill - NOAA Federal <[glenn.merrill@noaa.gov](mailto:glenn.merrill@noaa.gov)>

Dear Chris,

As you know, NMFS AKR and AFSC have worked together with NPFMC over the years to develop a peer review process that meets our needs and is compliant with MSA requirements. We recently worked with you to develop a more comprehensive description of that process, which is now on the NPFMC web site. The agency is now formalizing the peer review processes by publishing a Federal Register Notice that briefly describes the process for each region along with the links to the complete description of the process. We will also be preparing a memorandum for the record for each region that indicates the date on which the Council and Region/Center agreed on the process.

By this email, I am asking for your approval of the attached FRN description of the North Pacific process. The date on which I receive your approval will be the date of our agreement that will be put onto the memo for the record.

Best regards,  
Pat

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**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
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June 25, 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

FROM:

  
James W. Balsiger, Administrator, Alaska Region

  
Douglas P. DeMaster, Science and Research Director, Alaska Region

SUBJECT:

Establishment of the North Pacific Stock Assessment Review Process pursuant to Magnuson-Stevens Act § 302(g)(1)(E)

Section 302(g)(1)(E) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) provides that “The Secretary [of Commerce] and each Council may establish a peer review process for that Council for scientific information used to advise the Council about the conservation and management of the fishery.” (16 U.S.C. § 1852(g)(1)(E)). The MSA National Standard 2 Guidelines provide guidance on the “best scientific information available” standard, including guidance on standards for establishing a peer review process per MSA section 302(g)(1)(E). The NS2 Guidelines also state that the Secretary will announce the establishment of a peer review process under MSA 302(g)(1)(E) in the Federal Register, along with a brief description of the process. This memorandum summarizes the decision by the Secretary of Commerce, through the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) to establish the North Pacific Stock Assessment Review (NPSAR) process pursuant to MSA section 302(g)(1)(E).

#### Description of the Peer Review Process

The development of the NPSAR process described briefly below has evolved over the years and is currently in use.

The North Pacific Stock Assessment Review (NPSAR) process has been jointly established by the NMFS Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC), NMFS Alaska Regional Fisheries Office (AKRO), and North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) to conduct the peer review of scientific information used for fishery management in the North Pacific region. The NPFMC’s SSC reviews all the main scientific analyses that come before the Council for action, including SAFE documents. The NPFMC’s SSC has a set of guidelines that it uses specifically when reviewing SAFE documents.

The AFSC is responsible for stock assessments for about 25 species or species groups listed in the groundfish fishery management plan (FMP) for the Gulf of Alaska and



approximately 25 species or species groups in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish FMP. The State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) has responsibility for one groundfish stock assessment in the GOA FMP and all assessment responsibility for Scallops. The AFSC and ADFG share assessment responsibilities for the 10 species in the Bering Sea crab FMP. Scientific recommendations for these living marine resources are provided by the NPFMC with various management authorities delegated to the State of Alaska for crab and scallop fisheries. The SAFE report is compiled by the Plan Teams (which are scientific review bodies specific to each FMP) with contributions that include individual stock assessment, economic, and ecosystem chapters from AFSC and ADFG. The SAFE is disseminated by the NPFMC and describes the condition and current status of these resources in addition to information that summarizes the ecosystem and economic status. The stock assessment, economic, and ecosystem chapters are subject to agency internal review before dissemination to the FMP Plan Teams and the Council's SSC. The information is provided to the NPFMC and ADFG to be used as the basis of their management decisions. Management decisions by NPFMC are subsequently approved and disseminated by the NMFS. Management decisions by ADFG must be consistent with the specific management authorities delegated to the State of Alaska under the crab and scallop FMPs.

#### Agreement to Establish a Peer Review Process

The NPFMC and the NMFS Alaska Region and Alaska Fisheries Science Center have worked collaboratively over the years to develop and refine this MSA 302(g)(1)(E) compliant process. Recent efforts have been made to more fully describe and document this process as a result of the NS2 Guidelines revision. The confirmation of the peer review descriptions to be published in the FR and the more detailed description already on the NPFMC's web site (<http://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/resources/SAFE/AFSCsafeReviewProcess.pdf>) was conveyed in an email response from NPFMC Executive Director, Chris Oliver to us on June 25, 2014.

Cc: NPFMC - Chris Oliver  
F/AKC2 - Pat Livingston  
F/ST4 - William Michaels

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**RIN xxxx-xxxx**

**Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; National Standard 2 - Scientific Information; Regional Peer Review Processes**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS); National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of Regional Peer Review Processes.

**SUMMARY:** Section 301(a)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) specifies that fishery conservation and management measures shall be based upon the best scientific information available. 16 U.S.C. 1851(a)(2). Section 301(b) of the MSA states “the Secretary [of Commerce] shall establish advisory guidelines (which shall not have the force and effect of law), based on national standards, to assist in the development of fishery management plans.” 16 U.S.C. 1851(b). These national standards include National Standard 2 (NS2) which provides guidance on the “best scientific information available” standard, including guidance on standards for establishing a peer review process per MSA section 302(g)(1)(E). The NS2 guidelines appear at 50 CFR 600.315. Section 302(g)(1)(E) of the MSA provides that: “The Secretary and each Council may establish a peer review process for that Council for scientific information used to advise the Council about the conservation and management of the fishery.” 16 U.S.C. 1852(g)(1)(E). The decision to establish a 302(g)(1)(E) peer review process, including the terms of reference for a review within that process, is a joint

decision made by the Secretary and a Council. Under the NS2 guidelines, the Secretary will announce the establishment of a peer review process under MSA 302(g)(1)(E) in the Federal Register. (See 50 CFR 600.315(b)(4)). The notice is largely an affirmation that the existing regional peer review processes jointly commissioned by the Secretary and Council are consistent with widely accepted peer review standards and public transparency pursuant to the NS2 guidelines. This notice provides a summary of each regional peer review process established pursuant to MSA section 302(g)(1)(E). It also directs the public to a webpage where detailed guidelines can be found for each 302(g)(1)(E) peer review process. NMFS and Council may update those guidelines as necessary. The scope of the notice covers the announcement of the jointly established 302(g)(1)(E) peer review processes that have been determined by the Secretary (through the NMFS Assistant Administrator) in conjunction with the relevant Councils to be compliant with National Standard 2 (NS2), and does not cover peer review processes established by other entities.

**DATES:** Effective [INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

William Michaels by phone 301-427-8155, or by e-mail: [william.michaels@noaa.gov](mailto:william.michaels@noaa.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** This notice announces the peer review processes established jointly by the Secretary and regional Fishery Management Councils pursuant to MSA section 302(g)(1)(E). The decision to establish a 302(g)(1)(E) peer review process is a joint decision made by the Secretary and a Council. If the Secretary and a Council establish such a process, it will be deemed to satisfy the requirements of the Information Quality Act (44 U.S.C. 3516), including the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review (70 FR 2664, January 14, 2005). The NS2 guidelines provide guidance

and standards to establish a 302(g)(1)(E) process. (See 50 CFR 600.315(b)). The NS2 guidelines describes criteria for evaluating best scientific information available (BSIA) for the effective conservation and management of fisheries managed under Federal fishery management plans, such as relevance, inclusiveness, objectivity, transparency, timeliness, verification, and validation. NS2 also specifies that scientific peer review is an important process in the determination of the BSIA, and adopts many of the OMB peer review standards required of Federal agencies. These standards emphasize the importance of expert qualifications; balance in knowledge and perspectives; lack of conflicts of interest; independence from the work being reviewed; and transparency of the peer review process. NS2 specifies that the degree of independence for a peer review may vary depending of the novelty, controversy, and complexity of the scientific information being reviewed. For reviews requiring a high degree of independence, the Center for Independent Experts (CIE) have often been used as an independent selection process for obtaining highly qualified experts to participate on review panels. NS2 also provides guidance for the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) participation in peer review. This notice affirms the regional peer review processes established jointly by the Secretary and respective Councils are NS2 compliant with the peer review standards of NS2, and provides publicly available webpages for the detailed guidelines of each 302(g)(1)(E) peer review process which may be updated as appropriate to improve the procedures of the review process. Although not within the scope of this notice, there are other important processes, including peer review, that are not jointly established by the Secretary and Council pursuant to section 302(g)(1)(E), such as peer reviews pertaining to international fisheries management agreements.

(a). Description of Regional Peer Review Processes. The following peer review processes have been established jointly by the Secretary and Council pursuant to MSA section 302(g)(1)(E).

**(1). Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee (SAW/SARC).**

(i). Scope and objective. The Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee (SAW/SARC) process has been jointly established by the NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC), NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO), New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC), Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) to conduct the peer review of scientific stock assessment information used for fishery management in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions.

(ii). Background. The Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop or “SAW” is a formal scientific peer-review process for evaluating and presenting stock assessment results to managers. The SAW protocol is used to prepare and review assessments for fish and invertebrate stocks in the offshore US waters of the northwest Atlantic. Assessments are prepared by SAW working groups (federally led assessments) or ASMFC technical assessment committees (state led assessments) and peer reviewed by an independent panel of stock assessment experts called the Stock Assessment Review Committee or “SARC” to determine the adequacy of assessments for providing a scientific basis for management. Published SAW assessment reports reflect the written decisions and conclusions of the SARC panel regarding each of the assessment Terms of Reference. The assessment schedule is developed by the Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC). The NRCC includes high level representatives from the NEFSC, GARFO, MAFMC, NEFMC, and ASMFC. Assessment scheduling is an NRCC consensus decision based on many factors. The NEFSC Center Director has the ultimate



responsibility for staff tasking and prioritization even though the assessments will be based on NRCC recommendations to the extent possible. Peer reviewed assessment results and reports from the SARC review panel are provided to SSCs, who then make ABC recommendations to the Fishery Management Councils.

(iii). Terms of reference. The SAW/SARC process for conducting peer review of scientific information for fishery management is fully compliant with the NS2 guidelines. Peer reviewer selection takes into consideration qualifications of experts, balance of perspective, conflict of interest, and independence. Benchmark stock assessments undergo a higher degree of peer review than stock assessment updates, because the latter incorporate new data into the previously accepted benchmark assessment model. Results from these assessments are entered into the NMFS Species Information System.

(iv). Compliance with National Standard 2. The SAW/SARC process for conducting peer review of scientific information for fishery management is fully compliant with the NS2 guidelines.

(v). Transparency. SAW working group meetings, as well as the SARC peer review meetings, are open to the public. Dates and locations of these meetings are posted on a public NEFSC webpage well in advance, and peer review meetings are also announced through public notices and at public Fishery Management Council meetings. SAW working papers made available to the SARC are available on a public NEFSC webpage before, during, and after the peer review. Names of reviewers are posted online. Paper copies of reports are available during peer reviews. A public comment period is scheduled on the SARC review meeting agenda. When the peer review is completed, published proceedings and reviewer reports are posted on public NEFSC webpages (<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/publications/> and <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/saw/>)

and public presentations are given to the Fishery Management Councils. A detailed description of the SAW/SARC peer review guidelines is available to the public at webpage

<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/saw/>.

(vi). Other peer review processes.

(A). NEFSC assessment scientists work closely with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and state natural resource agencies from Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine to assess the domestic status of Atlantic salmon in the US. Each state and federal agency provides representatives to the US Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee (USASAC). The USASAC produces annual reports on stock status and associated activities (<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/sos/spsyn/af/salmon/>).

(B). The North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) is an international treaty organization charged with managing Atlantic salmon throughout its range, based on the BSIA. NASCO seeks scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) on a number of different issues including stock status across the species range, and catch advice for mixed-stock fisheries subject to the NASCO convention. NEFSC assessment scientists participate in the ICES Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon (WGNAS) to address terms of reference provided to ICES from NASCO. The USASAC annual report provides the basis for the US input data needed by the WGNAS. The WGNAS annual report is peer reviewed by the ICES Salmon Review Group (RG) in conjunction with the Working Group on Baltic Salmon and Trout. The Salmon RG is comprised of a panel of experts and together with the WGNAS report, they draft the advice document in response to the terms of reference. Draft advice documents for NASCO are reviewed ICES Advisory Committee (<http://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/WGNAS.aspx>).

**(2). Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC).**

(i). Scope and objective. The Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC), the scientific arm of the Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC), has been established jointly with the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC), NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) and the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) to conduct peer review of scientific information used for fishery management in the transboundary waters of the Northeast region.

(ii). Background. The TRAC is overseen by the US-Canada Steering Committee, comprised of executive directors and chairs of the NEFMC; the GARFO Administrator; Canadian counterparts; and co-chaired by NMFS and DFO personnel. The TRAC is an integrated peer review process for annual stock assessments as well as for ‘benchmark’ assessments which are reviewed periodically. The benchmark assessment meeting is a review by independent experts of the scientific rigor of the assessment approach to determine its adequacy for providing a scientific basis for catch advice. The benchmark meeting reviews 1) the data, where datasets are documented and analyzed, and 2) the proposed model that provides quantitative population analyses and population parameters. The final accepted benchmark stock assessment model is then applied in the annual stock assessments.

(iii). Terms of reference. The terms of reference are established and reviewed prior to each TRAC meeting by the TMGC, NEFSC, NRCC, and parallel committees in DFO before final review by the US-Canada Steering Committee.

(iv). Compliance with National Standard 2. The TRAC process for conducting peer review of scientific information for fishery management is fully compliant with the NS2 guidelines.

(v). Transparency. TRAC meetings are open to the public, and meeting dates are posted on the TRAC website and by a link on the SAW/SARC website. Letters of invitation for these meetings are sent via e-mail announcing meeting dates, location, and agenda. Prior to the TRAC meeting, science-industry meetings are held with the fishing industry to provide an opportunity to share any concerns relative to the data that will be used in the upcoming assessments. Assessment results are presented to the TMGC, the NEFSC, and the US-Canada Steering Committee, and the assessment results are used by the NEFMC and GARFO as a basis for fishery management decisions. Working papers are available on the TRAC website and on a public website prior to each meeting. Final peer review assessment results, status reports, and Proceedings and guidelines are available on the TRAC website, maintained by DFO at <http://www2.mar.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/science/TRAC/meetings.html> and at <http://www2.mar.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/science/trac/rd.html>, and status reports are available on the NEFSC website <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/saw/trac/>.

**(3). Southeast Data and Assessment Review (SEDAR).**

(i). Scope and objective. The Southeast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process has been jointly established by the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO), Southeast Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC), Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC), and Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC) to conduct the peer review of scientific information used for fishery management in the US Southeast Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean regions.

(ii). Background. The SEDAR is overseen by the SEDAR Steering Committee, comprised of executive directors and chairs of the GMFMC, CFMC and SAFMC; executive directors of the Atlantic and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commissions; the SERO Administrator; and chaired

by the director of the SEFSC. SEDAR seeks improvements in the quantity and scientific quality of stock assessments to address existing and emerging fishery management issues. SEDAR emphasizes transparency in the assessment review process, and a rigorous and independent scientific review of completed stock assessments. An SEDAR review is organized as three workshops: (1) data workshop where datasets are documented, analyzed, and reviewed and data for conducting assessment analyses are compiled; (2) assessment workshop where quantitative population analyses are developed and refined and population parameters are estimated; and (3) review workshop where a panel of independent experts reviews the data and assessment and advises on whether the assessment is of sufficient quality for use in management.

(iii). Terms of reference. The terms of reference for conducting a peer review within the SEDAR process are established before the peer review by the SEFSC with the SAFMC, GMFMC, or CFMC and their SSCs.

(iv). Compliance with National Standard 2. The SEDAR process for conducting peer review of scientific information for fishery management is fully compliant with the NS2 guidelines.

(v). Transparency. All SEDAR workshops are open to the public. Public testimony is accepted in accordance with the Council Statement of Organization Practices and Procedures (SOPP). Workshop times and locations are announced in advance through the Federal Register. All SEDAR reports are posted on the SEDAR website and are hyperlinked to the respective Council(s) and the NMFS SERO and SEFSC websites. The SEDAR webpage is at <http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/>. The detailed description of the SEDAR peer review guidelines is publicly available at the website

([http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/download/D2c\\_RW%20panelist%20instructions.pdf?id=DOCUMENT](http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/download/D2c_RW%20panelist%20instructions.pdf?id=DOCUMENT)).

(vi). Other peer review processes.

(A). Cooperative Federal and State agency assessments: The SEFSC works closely with state agencies and commissions on data collections and stock assessments. Assessment reviews of highly migratory sharks in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions fall into the jurisdictions of the Highly Migratory Species Division of NOAA Fisheries and the coastal states of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic from Texas through Florida to Maine. These assessments are reviewed through the SEDAR process with CIE reviewers. Note that NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office's Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee conducts and reviews blue crab assessments, and incorporates CIE reviewers into their reviews.

(B). International assessments: SEFSC assessment scientists participate on the Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) of the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT).

(C). Other non-NOAA entities: Following the NS2 guidelines, the SSC peer review process for stock assessments by non-NOAA entities was developed and approved by the SAFMC on June 14, 2013. The SSC develops and provides the SAFMC with recommended ToRs for each peer review. This peer review will be conducted by a panel of reviewers appointed by the SAFMC, and may include independent experts. The appointment process shall be similar to that used in the SEDAR Review Workshop Panels, with an SSC member serving as the peer review panel chair.

**(4). Stock Assessment Review (STAR)**

(i). Scope and objective. The Stock Assessment Review (STAR) process has been jointly established by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC), NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC), NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC), and NMFS

West Coast Region (WCR) to conduct the peer review of scientific information used for fishery management of Coastal Pelagic Species and Pacific Coast Groundfish in the Pacific region.

(ii). Background. The STAR peer review process is primarily overseen by the PFMC's SSC and conducted in collaboration with the NWFSC and SWFSC. It is a transparent, rigorous and independent scientific peer review process designed to evaluate the technical merits of benchmark stock assessments and related scientific information. The STAR process allows the Council to make timely use of new fishery and survey data, ensure the stock assessments represent the BSIA for management decisions and provide opportunity for public comment. STAR Panels are held early in the management process to ensure their recommendations are readily available for fishery management decision-making. The relevant SSC subcommittees typically review updated and data-moderate assessments, although STAR panels may be used as needed.

(iii). Terms of reference. The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Groundfish and Coastal Pelagic Species Stock Assessment and Stock Assessment Review Process is updated by the Council in partnership with the NMFS. The TOR describes the STAR process and includes an overview of the stock assessment prioritization process, STAR Panel goals and objectives, roles and responsibilities of STAR participants, as well as a calendar of events with a list of deliverables for final approval by the Council. The TOR is publicly available on the Council's website.

(iv). Compliance with National Standard 2. The STAR process for conducting peer review of scientific information for fishery management is fully compliant with the NS2 guidelines.

(v). Transparency. STAR panel review meetings are open to the public and background materials are publicly available. Public testimony is accepted in accordance with the Council

Statements of Organization Practices and Procedures (SOPP). STAR Panel meeting times and locations are announced in advance through the Federal Register. STAR panel review reports are posted on the Council's website. More detailed information about the STAR process can be found on the Council's website at: <http://www.pcouncil.org> and its ToRs can be found at [http://www.pcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Stock\\_Assessment\\_ToR\\_2013-14\\_Final.pdf](http://www.pcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Stock_Assessment_ToR_2013-14_Final.pdf).

(vi). Other peer review processes. There are other important peer review processes used to ensure the use of the best scientific information is available for management decisions of Pacific coast fisheries. The list below includes examples of other peer review processes but is not exhaustive of all peer review processes conducted along the Pacific coast.

(A). Pacific coast salmon. The PFMC's SSC and Salmon Technical Team (STT) complete an annual methodology review to ensure new or significantly modified methodologies employed to estimate impacts of the Council's salmon management use the BSIA. The methodology review is also used as a forum to review updated stock conservation objective proposals. The methodology review meetings occur during Council meetings and are fully open to the public.

(B). Review of International assessments: Under the authority of the Canada/US Pacific Hake/Whiting Treaty, the Pacific hake assessment is conducted by the Canada/US Joint Technical Committee (JTC) and is reviewed by the Scientific Review Group (SRG). The SRG Terms of Reference is based on the US-Canada Pacific Hake/Whiting Agreement and the Pacific Fishery Management Council's STAR terms of reference. SRG meetings are open to the public and are held annually, or more often if necessary.

(C). Pacific bluefin tuna, albacore, and sharks in the North Pacific Ocean are assessed by SWFSC staff and collaborating scientists from members of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC), within the ISC's



Working Groups. The ISC assessments provide the basis for scientific advice on the status of the Pacific bluefin tuna stock and international management decisions of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission and its Northern Committee, and domestic management decisions by the PFMC. CIE reviewers have conducted desktop reviews of ISC assessments. NMFS establishes the ToRs for these reviews which focus on providing suggestions for improving the assessments. ISC assessments are not NOAA products though the ISC assessment process is itself a type of peer-review process, as ISC Member scientists review each other's analyses before incorporating the analyses or results into the assessment.

(D). Tropical tunas are assessed by Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) staff. These assessments are used by the IATTC to set conservation and management measures and domestic management decisions by the PFMC and WCRO. IATTC assessments are not NOAA products, though NMFS scientists review the assessments and provide advice to IATTC staff.

**(5). North Pacific Stock Assessment Review.**

(i). Scope and objective. The North Pacific Stock Assessment Review (NPSAR) process has been jointly established by the NMFS Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC), NMFS Alaska Regional Fisheries Office (AKRO), and North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) to conduct the peer review of scientific information used for fishery management in the North Pacific region. The NPFMC's SSC reviews are all the main scientific analyses that come before the Council for action, including SAFE documents. The NPFMC's SSC has a set of guidelines that it uses specifically when reviewing SAFE documents.

(ii). Background. The AFSC is responsible for stock assessments for about 25 species or species groups listed in the groundfish fishery management plan (FMP) for the Gulf of Alaska and approximately 25 species or species groups in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands [groundfish](#) FMP. The State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) has [ve](#) responsibility for one groundfish stock assessment in the GOA [groundfish](#) FMP and all assessment responsibility for Scallops. The AFSC and ADFG share assessment responsibilities for the 10 species in the Bering Sea crab FMP. Scientific recommendations for these living marine resources are provided by the NPFMC with various management authorities delegated to the State of Alaska for crab and scallop fisheries. The SAFE report is compiled by the Plan Teams (which are scientific review bodies specific to each FMP) with contributions that include individual stock assessment, economic, and ecosystem chapters from AFSC and ADFG. The SAFE is disseminated by the NPFMC and describes the condition and current status of these resources in addition to information that summarizes the ecosystem and economic status. The stock assessment, economic, and ecosystem chapters are subject to [agency](#) internal-review before dissemination to the FMP Plan Teams and the Council's SSC. The information is provided to the NPFMC and ADFG to be used as the basis of their management decisions, which are subsequently approved and disseminated by the NMFS.

(iii). Terms of reference. The terms of reference (ToRs) for conducting a peer review within the NPSAR process [areis](#) established before the peer review by the AFSC in conjunction with the NPFMC. [These are comprised of the ToRs established prior to periodic CIE reviews, SAFE report chapter preparation guidelines, Plan Team ToRs, SSC review guidelines, and the Council's Standard Operating Policies and Procedures \(SOPPs\).](#)

(iv). Compliance with National Standard 2. The NPSAR process for conducting peer review of scientific information for fishery management is fully compliant with the NS2 guidelines. The stock assessment process begins with an annual memo from the AFSC stock assessment supervisors to staff outlining the dates for completion of the stock assessment chapters for internal review and the list of internal reviewers for each assessment. Stock assessments authored by ADFG follow a similar process. After review and revision, the draft stock assessment chapters are released for pre-dissemination review by the [appropriate](#) NPFMC Plan Team. The Plan Teams review stock assessments and associated ecosystem and economic appendices, compile the SAFE reports and make recommendations to the SSC. The SSC reviews the SAFEs and the Plan Team recommendations and sets the ABC and OFLs for each stock. In addition to the normal schedule of assessment updates and reviews, a separate review schedule involving the CIE is maintained, with the goal of obtaining a CIE review of all stock assessments once every five years. The members of the SSC represent broad areas of scientific expertise to encompass the full range of expertise required to review analyses that come to the Council to aid in decision-making. SSC members are nominated by individuals or agencies and are appointed and re-appointed annually by the NPFMC. There is also an annual call for nominations of SSC members. NPFMC's SSC members annually complete a financial disclosure form. Regarding the standard for independence, review assignments are made by the SSC chair to ensure that members are not assigned to review work products of individuals in their chain of command.

(v). Transparency. SAFE documents are made available to the Plan Team two weeks prior to the Plan Team meeting in which they are to be reviewed. The public is also given public access to these documents and are allowed to attend Plan Team and SSC meetings. Notification of Plan

Team meetings is provided in the *Federal Register*. Similarly, all documents reviewed by the SSC are made available to the public. This includes SAFE documents and Plan Team reports provided to the SSC in advance of the meeting in which the SSC makes ABC/OFL recommendations. The SSC publicly presents the findings of its report to the NPFMC at its meeting. When the SSC is making ABC/OFL recommendations for groundfish, the SSC report also characterizes the nature of any public testimony provided to the SSC at its meeting. The final SAFE is also published on the NPFMC webpage. More detailed information for the North Pacific Stock Assessment Review process is publicly available at the webpage <http://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/resources/SAFE/AFSCsafeReviewProcess.pdf>.

**(6). Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review (WPSAR).**

(i). Scope and objective. The Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review (WPSAR) process has been jointly established by the NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC), NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Fisheries Office (PIRO), and Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (WPFMC) to conduct the peer review of scientific information used for fishery management in the Pacific Islands Region.

(ii). Background. The WPSAR process was established to improve the quality and reliability of stock assessments for fishery resources in the Pacific Islands region. The process provides for rigorous and independent scientific review of stock assessments, and encourages constituent/stakeholder participation in stock assessment reviews. A two-year planning horizon is adopted to facilitate the timely execution of critical data collection activities, population dynamics model development, and stock evaluation exercises. The WPFMC, PIFSC and PIRO share the fiscal and logistical responsibilities of the WPSAR process. The WPFMC sponsors the

review process, and PIFSC provides a senior scientist to coordinate and facilitate the review process with assistance from WPFMC and PIRO staff. Specifically, the PIFSC coordinator consults with the WPSAR Steering Committee, which is comprised of WPFMC, PIFSC, PIRO representatives to develop the WPSAR schedule, prepare terms of reference, and convene the WPSAR. The WPSAR process adopts a two tier approach for the review and acceptance of stock assessment research products, and the WPSAR Steering Committee determines whether to utilize a Tier 1 or Tier 2 approach. Under Tier 1, the CIE reviewers conduct independent peer reviews of new stock assessment methodologies and international stock assessments in accordance with the specified terms of reference. The application of new methodologies and routine assessment updates fall under Tier 2, and utilizes a panel of 4-6 independent subject matter experts. The PIFSC coordinator, in consultation with the WPSAR Steering Committee identifies and selects expert panel members. The selected WPSAR Independent Expert Review Panel reviews Tier 2 products in accordance with the specified terms of reference. A standing member of the Council's SSC will chair each WPSAR Independent Expert Review Panel. Each review (Tier 1 or 2) produces and provides a standardized report to the Council for their consideration in determining appropriate action. Stock assessment reports specify the management parameters required under the MSA or the WPFMC's fishery ecosystem management plans.

(iii). Terms of reference. The terms of reference are developed before each review, and identify the specific assessment parameters to be address during that review, including the adequacy of the assessment to provide for the formulation of best management practices.

(iv). Compliance with National Standard 2. The WPSAR process for conducting peer review of scientific information for fishery management is fully compliant with the NS2 guidelines.

For Tier 2 reviews, the panel will consist of 4-6 individuals, and the exact size is decided by the WPSAR Coordinator. The Chair will be a standing member of the Council's SSC, and appointed by the SSC. In addition, 1-2 panel members can be standing members of the SSC, and 2-3 individuals can be independent reviewers; all of which must meet qualifications required for the peer review. The independent reviewers can come from the CIE, academia, or be nominated by the public.

(v). Transparency. All meetings are open to the public, and will be announced in the Federal Register with a minimum of 14 days before a review. More detailed information for the WPSAR process is publicly available at **[NEED WPSAR peer review guideline webpage](#)**.

(vi). Other peer review processes.

(c). References Cited.

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