

Revisions to the Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop

A 'Pilot' for a Revised SAW Protocol

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 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 reviewed by a panel of stock assessment experts called the Stock Assessment Review Committee or SARC.

The SAW has been in place for nearly 20 years, developing fishery stock assessments; providing for expert peer review of the assessment reports; and developing management advice consistent with those assessments for the partner management bodies: the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (NEFMC, MAFMC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). The overall SAW process is steered by the Northeast Regional Coordinating Council (NRCC): a group made up of the region's executives (NEFMC and MAFMC chairs, vice-chairs and executive directors; ASMFC executive director; NMFS Regional Administrator and Science and Research Director) who decide upon stocks to be reviewed, terms of reference for those assessments and the overall process and protocol used by the SAW.

Over the last year the NRCC has been evaluating the current model and has suggested some revisions that make more clear that ownership of the final step of the process - development of management advice consistent with the accepted assessment - is the responsibility of the Regional Council or Commission that manages the stock rather than the peer review panel. As a result, the traditional model will be revised slightly for the 39th SAW cycle (June 2004 SARC)..

The following table summarizes the changes, all relative to the existing protocol. In overview, the revised process is very similar to past protocols with two significant differences: the SARC panel will be smaller (3 panelists and a chair) and will be made up of assessment experts from outside the region; the SARC panelists will author individual meeting reports which will be summarized by the SARC Chair - the main assessment report will be produced by the Working Group/Technical Groups responsible for developing the assessments.

The changes in the procedure for the 39th SARC are viewed as a pilot and will be evaluated by the NRCC later this year.

Revisions to the Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop - ‘Old’ versus ‘New’

	‘Old’ Model	‘Revised’ Model
Assessment preparation	SAW working groups/ASMFC technical committees	No change (although efforts will continue to make process more inclusive). Meeting open to industry, public.
Working papers	Used by working/technical group, provided to SARC, no standing after SARC	Used by working/technical group, no standing after working/technical group meeting
Assessment Report	<i>SARC Consensus Summary</i> , produced by working/technical groups, published by SARC	<i>SAW Assessment Report</i> , produced by working/technical groups, reviewed by SARC
Research recommendations	Suggested by working/technical groups; written by SARC	Written by working/technical groups, included in <i>Assessment Report</i>
SARC composition	12-18 panelists: 2 CIE, 4 NEFSC, 1-2 Council, 1-4 ASMFC, others	4 panelists: all provided by the Center for Independent Experts (CIE), Univ. of Miami
Advisory Report/Assessment Summary	<i>Advisory Report</i> written by SARC during meeting, includes management advice	<i>Assessment Summary</i> written by working/technical group, finalized at SARC, no management advice
SARC Panelist Reports	Not applicable.	Report from each SARC panelist, summarized by SARC Chair, provided to Councils/Commission and CIE, included in <i>Assessment Report</i>
Public Review Workshops	Conducted for Councils/Commission by SAW Chair	<i>Assessment Report</i> will be distributed to Councils/Commission, presentation of results provided at Council/Commission meetings as appropriate
Management Advice	Developed by SARC and included in Advisory Report	Developed from <i>SAW Assessment Report</i> by PDT, Technical Teams, Management Boards, etc., as appropriate