

**Terms of Reference**  
**National Marine Fisheries Service Office of Science and Technology**  
**Fiscal Year 2014 Stock Assessment Science Program Review**

**Purpose of the Review**

Reviews of science programs at the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) science centers (including associated laboratories) and the Office of Science and Technology (ST) are conducted annually to:

- Evaluate the quality, relevance, and performance of science and research conducted in NMFS science centers and associated laboratories
- Strategically position the science centers and ST in planning future science and research

**Background**

Housed at NOAA headquarters, ST is a liaison among NMFS' field scientists and NOAA/NMFS leadership. The Office is responsible for coordinating and helping to frame the direction of science programs at the national level and across NMFS' science centers. In conjunction with NMFS' Chief Scientist, six Science Center Directors, and three Senior Scientists, ST leadership helps prioritize and direct funding of the science activities undertaken by the agency, as well as the management of several national programs. Stock assessments are demographic analyses designed to provide scientific advice to fishery managers, and are a leading science priority for the agency and for ST. Thus, ST manages and supports numerous stock assessment-related activities at the national level, including strategic planning, quality assurance, data collection, research and development, education and training, and assessment tracking, reporting, communication, and outreach.

**Scope of Review**

The objective of this review is to evaluate the quality, relevance, and performance of the stock assessment program conducted by ST in support of the stock assessment programs in NMFS' science centers. Fishery survey and biological data for stock assessments were reviewed in 2013. In 2014, the review focus shifts to the overall program of assessment modeling, approach, review process, and communication. This is not intended to be an in-depth review of a particular stock assessment, and, given ST's role in coordinating programs and guiding science at the national level, this review will focus more on ST's support for, coordination of, and communication of assessment science throughout NMFS, rather than on the conduct of stock assessments. For the review, the panel shall consider materials provided by ST and comment on how well ST's assessment-related activities contribute to the conduct and advancement of stock assessments nationally.

During the review, the panel should consider the following overarching questions:

1. Is ST conducting the right set of activities to support NMFS stock assessments nationally?

- Keeping in mind budget realities, are there new directions or activities that ST should pursue in its national support of NMFS stock assessments, and/or should any current activities be expanded in scope?
  - Are any current activities unnecessary, or are there any activities that should be reduced in scope and/or consolidated?
2. Is the organization and management of ST's assessment program activities effectively supporting and advancing assessments nationally, and are there recommendations for improvement?
- Consider program structure, staffing, and funding; use of national working groups and RFPs; internal and external communication; and supporting and promoting national assessment practices.

## **Format**

The ST review will be conducted after the six science centers have conducted their reviews, and the duration of the meeting will be approximately four days. The venue will allow public access to open sessions and have wireless internet access, audio visual capability (e.g., teleconferencing, overhead projector, microphone amplification), and webinar capability to provide for access to open sessions of the review by the public and remotely located staff. Prior to the review a teleconference will be held between ST leadership and the review panel to discuss and clarify the charge to the reviewers, the scope of the review, focus questions provided in the scope, background documents provided, and products of the review.

The review will be structured with presentations that address topics related to each ST assessment-related activity. These presentations will draw upon background material that will be provided (as described in the next section) to all reviewers and the general public. A draft agenda for the review is as follows:

- Day 1
  - Welcome and presentations by ST leadership
  - Feedback from NFMS science centers
  - Description of available background documents for this review
  - Public comment (as requested)
  - Panel deliberation (closed session, 1 hr)
- Day 2
  - Stock assessment activities
  - Public comment (as requested)
  - Panel deliberation (closed session, 1 hr)
- Day 3
  - Stock assessment activities
  - Public Comment (as requested)
  - Panel deliberation (closed session, 1 hr)
- Day 4
  - Panel deliberation and discussion (closed session, as needed)
  - Preparation of the Panelists recommendations (closed session)

- Panel and ST Directorate discuss the results of the review (i.e., debrief, closed session)

## **Briefing and Background Materials**

All background materials will be provided to the panel electronically through the ST website no later than 2 weeks prior to the review. All presentations will be provided to the Panel, through the website, at the beginning of the review. Briefing books may be provided at the request of the panel chair.

## **Products**

Each Panelist will produce a succinct individual report detailing his or her observations and recommendations in response to the questions provided within the TOR for the program review. The chair may submit an individual report, but this is not a requirement. Individual reports are required for NOAA to comply with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA, 1972). Draft reports will be submitted to the ST Director at the close of the review. Final versions will be submitted by the panelists 1 week after the review concludes.

The panel chair will summarize the program review meeting (e.g. proceedings, salient issues, recurring observations) in a chair's report submitted to the ST Director within 1 week of the close of the review. The report will not represent a consensus of panelist's observations and recommendations. See Appendix 1 for report templates.

At the end of the review, each review panel member will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire to provide feedback on the review process.

## **Review Team Resources**

NMFS will pay for the travel cost for all panelists external to NMFS and a set fee for the services of non-governmental panelists. ST will assist review panel members in making travel arrangements.

During the review ST will provide the review panel with logistical support, and space to convene closed working sessions. If requested in advance, ST will, within reason, provide other items (e.g. desktop computers, printers/copiers) to assist the review panel with report preparation.

Following the conclusion of presentations by ST staff, the review panel will be provided time on the final day of the review to work on their draft reports.

## **Review Panel**

The scientific review panel will include 5-8 independent PhD-level (or equivalent) scientists with familiarity with the topic. Because the relationship between ST and the science centers will be a focus of the review, the panel should, to the extent possible, include reviewers familiar with a headquarters-type national role in supporting and coordinating a science program that is

implemented regionally by a dispersed set of field laboratories, and also some reviewers that previously served on science center program reviews. This will enable the panel have an integrated sense of headquarters functions as well as the science center programs that the ST program supports. Furthermore, the panel should include:

- 1 scientist from NMFS
- 1 scientist from another NOAA line or staff office
- 3- 5 (the majority) scientists external to NOAA
- 1 Science Center Director (SCD, optional)

NMFS requires that the chair not be a NMFS employee and encourages that the chair of the panel be a federal scientist external to NOAA. The NMFS program review coordinator will attend and provide guidance to the panel on complying with FACA. Individuals that have recently left NMFS employment may not be considered external. The NMFS Assistant Administrator or their designee shall approve the panel selections.

### **Agency Response**

The ST Director will send the chair's summary report and the panel members' individual reports to NMFS' Chief Science Advisor as soon as the reports are received. The ST Director will then have six weeks to prepare a brief response to chair's summary report (this can include clarifying information and responding to controversial points within individual reports, even if not mentioned in the summary).

NMFS' Chief Science Advisor will send the reports and ST response on to NMFS' Assistant Administrator for clearance.

After 60 days from the close of the review, all documents (chair's summary report, Director's response, individual reviewers' reports) will be posted on the ST website. Authorship of the individual review reports will not be attributed.

### **Material to be Provided**

ST will provide presentations made by staff and background materials in order to facilitate the independent review. All materials (e.g. power point presentations, word files, pdfs) will be named to indicate the main topic the material covers. Materials will be provided in an interactive agenda format (i.e. materials will be linked to the talks listed on the agenda) and will be marked as required primary references (must read) and secondary references (optional for further detailed information).

## Appendix 1. Program Review Report Template

Topic: Program Review of Stock Assessment Process

Office: National Marine Fisheries Service Office of Science and Technology

Address:

Dates:

### Review Panel Members

- Name, Affiliation, Chair
- Name, Affiliation, Reviewer
- Name, Affiliation, Reviewer
- Name, Affiliation, Reviewer
- Name, Affiliation, Reviewer
- Name, Affiliation, Reviewer

### 1. Template for Chair's Summary Report (2-3 pages)

Notes: This report is a summary by the chair of the meeting proceedings NOT consensus of the panel. Language used to describe summarized observations and recommendations should reflect this e.g., "a panel member said" NOT "the panel concluded".

- I. Summary Report Structure:
- II. Overview of Review Meeting Proceedings
- III. Recurrent Observations and Recommendations
- IV. Issues Raised by Members of the Public
- V. Concluding Comments

### 2. Template for Individual Reviewer's Report (5-7 pages each)

Structure:

- I. General Observations
    - a. Stock assessment activities
      - i. Current activities
      - ii. New directions or expansion
      - iii. Deletions or reduction
      - iv. Organization and management
    - b. Science center feedback
    - c. Other
  - II. Key (Specific) Findings and Recommendations
- Conclusions