

Social Science Planning Team
Proposed Purpose and Organization
Executive Director's Report | June 2017

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) tasked a select group of staff and Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) representatives to define a standing advisory body that would facilitate and enhance the use of social science data in the management process – the Social Science Planning Team (SSPT). For the purposes of the SSPT, the social science fields include anthropology, sociology, economics, and human geography. This document represents the working group's consensus proposal on the most appropriate mission, scope, and organizational format to work efficiently and productively towards the Council's stated and ongoing goals for research and analysis. The SSPT will only be formed upon the Council's recommendation.

The Council's consideration of an SSPT has multiple origins. First, the SSC has repeatedly noted in its minutes that certain aspects of social science data collection and social impact analysis could be improved through efforts that occur over the medium- to long-term; those efforts need not be driven by specific policy actions (Council agenda items).¹ The SSC's comments have often, but not always, been offered in the context of the Limited Access Privilege Program (LAPP) reviews that are mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). Second, the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) held a Human Dimensions Workshop in June 2016 where attendees discussed the utility of an advisory body that is charged with long-term strategic planning to improve the flow of social science information that supports analyses. Finally, the Council's staff, NMFS Alaska Region Office (NMFS AKRO), and the AFSC frequently discuss how to better align AFSC's research program with the Council and NMFS's management priorities, and how to deliver products that inform topical policy issues in a format that is timely, practical for analytical staff, and applicable across a variety of Council action items.

This document includes two sections. The first section (**Background**) summarizes positions on the purpose for, and scope of, an SSPT that were expressed in SSC minutes and the Human Dimensions Workshop summary, as well as Council staff and NMFS staff perspectives generated through internal discussion. The second section (**Proposal**) includes a draft mission statement for the Council's consideration, and describes the SSPT's operating principles in terms of scope, membership, and meeting format. In addition to the working group's consensus proposals, this document notes examples of functions that were considered but ultimately not included, with a brief description of the group's rationale.

I. Background

The MSA and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) statutes, as well as Executive Order 12866, require the Council to consider the social and economic impacts of its management recommendations. Moreover, the Council's implementation of a LAPP triggers MSA requirements to conduct periodic reviews of those programs to ensure that they are meeting established goals and objectives. The Council's program reviews are subject to evaluation by the SSC, which has recommended the implementation of an

¹ The SSC's most recent comments on this issue are reported in its [minutes from the June 2016 meeting](#), but date back to the 18-month review of the Bering Sea Crab Rationalization Program (2007), and also include comments on program reviews of Amendment 80 and the Halibut/Sablefish IFQ Program.

advisory process to improve data collection and analytical methodologies in the medium- to long-term. Finally, at the national level, NMFS issued a Policy Directive (#01-119) in July 2016 that calls for fishery “allocations” to be reviewed when a certain trigger is met. The trigger, which is yet to be defined, could theoretically be predicated upon certain indicators, which could in turn be related to social outcomes. The Council will begin to consider triggers for allocation reviews at its June 2017 meeting in Juneau, AK.

SSC minutes, the Human Dimensions Workshop summary, and working group conversations have repeatedly hit on a set of themes that informs the proposed scope for the SSPT: identify social science data gaps and existing information sources that are underutilized; advise on new data collection efforts that serve across multiple FMPs and LAPPs; support staff analysts and consult on methodology when appropriate; focus social science research priorities; promote alignment of regional management priorities and AFSC research; and explore the feasibility and applicability of advanced analytical techniques outside of the time-constraints of a typical SSC meeting agenda.

II. Proposal

Draft Mission Statement

The Social Science Planning Team (SSPT) is established to improve the quality and application of social science data that informs management decision-making and program evaluation. The SSPT is constituted of representatives who will strategize medium- and long-term improvements in data collection and analytical methodology, allowing the NPFMC to better meet its own program objectives as well as LAPP review requirements defined in the Magnuson-Stevens Act and recommended in NMFS guidelines. The SSPT will identify data needs, make recommendations regarding research priorities, and advise analysts in efforts to improve analytical frameworks when possible. The SSPT will support the collection and aggregation of social science data in a manner that cuts across Fishery Management Plans and specific management programs within the North Pacific region.

Scope

- Identify deficiencies in collected social science data; recommend priority of need to address gaps
- Review existing data sets in regard to their quality and utilization (or underutilization) in analyses
- Recommend revisions to data collections where possible, recognizing that the Council does not directly administer all relevant social science data collection efforts
- Establish analytical “best practices”
- Support staff with advice and feedback on analytical strategy and methodology during the planning stages of complex projects and LAPP reviews, as requested by staff and when befitting the project development timeline
- Maintain an understanding of current and ongoing social science research in areas relevant to North Pacific fisheries management; serve as a network that makes newly developed resources accessible to the NPFMC process through a variety of means
- Provide feedback on AFSC’s annual research proposals, as allowed by timing of Requests for Proposals (RFP)
- Provide feedback on NPFMC’s research priorities in the form of comments channeled to the SSC

Notes on Scope –

The North Pacific region is a leader in fishery and community research. Those initiatives require a great deal of effort and support from agencies, taxpayers, and fishermen themselves. The SSPT's purpose is not only to make recommendations for new or enhanced data collections, but also to identify opportunities to make use – or better use – of existing sources. In recognition of the finite resources available to start new projects, the SSPT would consider prioritization as a core function.

Both the Council and the AFSC establish research priorities; these lists differ by design. The SSPT could maintain an internal list of social science priorities, and could channel those research suggestions to AFSC directly, and to the Council via the SSC. The working group does not propose that the SSPT should review the Council's research priorities, as that task is already a function of the SSC.

The SSPT could contribute to the establishment of analytical “best practices” in a variety of ways. The working group does not propose that the SSPT would be a review panel that adds another layer of critique to NEPA analysis drafts. Rather, the SSPT would be available to work with analysts to tailor analytical approaches to particular projects on the front-end, and would disseminate new or underutilized social science research and resources in a manner that helps academic work reach those who can practically apply it to contemporary management issues. Identifying, assessing, and sharing research relevant to data collection and program evaluation could serve as a form of professional development, and is not dissimilar to author-talks that take place at Groundfish Plan Team meetings and during SSC modules that often occur at the February meeting. In a general sense, the SSPT should foster a social science “network” within the North Pacific's management ecosystem that benefits many organizations.

The working group considered proposing that the SSPT should develop a set of LAPP performance metrics to be used in program reviews, but determined that North Pacific programs are too distinct from each other to be evaluated against a uniform rubric. A menu of metrics that could be evaluated during any particular review should naturally emerge as the SSPT establishes a history of providing informal direction and feedback to staff during the pre-analysis stage of such projects.

The working group considered functions such as reviewing or contributing to annual reporting documents (e.g., SAFE reports) or producing the SSPT's own periodic reports on available human dimensions data and outcomes in the region. These functions were determined to be out of scope because they are already the province of other organizations – primarily the AFSC. Moreover, the working group recognized that the time required to produce such work would come at a direct and significant cost to the staff resources of the members' home organizations or institutions. Nevertheless, the work of the SSPT should have the ancillary benefit of improving existing annual reports over time.

Membership & Organization

- Membership shall include at least one representative from NPMFC staff, NMFS AKRO staff, NMFS AFSC staff, and the SSC
- Membership shall generally be limited to affiliates of public organizations and academic institutions
- SSPT meetings are open to the public and will be noticed in the *Federal Register*
- SSPT will elect a chairperson from among its seated members
- Chair will take lead on setting SSPT meeting agendas; agenda is subject to NPFMC Executive Director approval prior to publication in the *Federal Register*
- Designated NPFMC staff representative provides coordination support to the chair
- Chairperson or designee will report meeting minutes and/or progress summary to the SSC and Council on an annual basis

Notes on Membership & Organization –

While there is no defined maximum or minimum number of people who could serve on the SSPT, the working group deems it essential to have representation from the four organizations listed above. In the future, with the Council's concurrence, the workgroup might recommend the inclusion of a representative from an organization such as the Alaska Fisheries Information Network (AKFIN), North Pacific Research Board (NPRB), the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADFG), or academia. The working group offers this proposal with the understanding that the Council would support travel and accommodation for NPFMC staff and other non-Federal employees, but that NMFS affiliates would travel at the expense of their home office.

A designated NPFMC staff member would serve as primary coordinator for the SSPT, as is the case for existing Groundfish (and other) Plan Teams. That individual would be the primary point of contact for scheduling and reporting, and would make presentations to the Council and the SSC if the chairperson is not available.

Roster of Initial SSPT Members (Affiliation)

Rachel Baker	NMFS AKRO SF
Sam Cunningham	NPFMC Staff
Steve Kasperski	AFSC
Seth Macinko	SSC (Univ. Rhode Island)
Sarah Marrinan	NPFMC Staff
Matt Reimer	SSC (Univ. Alaska-Anchorage)
Marysia Szymkowiak	PSMFC

Meeting Format

- Public, in-person meeting to be held once annually
- Meeting will occur on a regular schedule; timing is not linked to the schedule of particular Council actions
- Meetings will normally be held in Anchorage, Juneau, and Seattle; location will be determined on the basis of cost, members' ability to travel, and opportunities to collocate with other fishery meetings in order to maximize efficiency and participation

- Meetings will operate by consensus under the direction of the chairperson; minority views on recommendations or statements made by the SSPT will be reflected in publicly available meeting minutes

Notes on Meeting Format –

Holding a single annual meeting accords with membership bandwidth, travel budgets, and the many fishery-related meetings that compete for interested stakeholders' time. The working group concurs that in-person meetings provide additional values that justify occasional travel costs. Relative to teleconferences, in-person meetings induce better preparation and buy-in for a cooperative effort that requires novel thinking and research, and that is additional to all members' core job responsibilities. In-person meetings create an environment where opportunities to coordinate or collaborate across organizational missions may naturally emerge. Whereas committees that are driven by a particular Council action tend to schedule ad hoc meetings based on need (e.g., Electronic Monitoring Workgroup or Halibut Abundance-Based Mgmt. Workgroup), the SSPT's proposed annual schedule befits a mission that is focused on medium- to long-term efforts and returns.

The internal working group proposes that its first meeting be held in November 2017. Thereafter, annual meetings would be held on or about May of each year. The month of May minimizes conflict with Council meetings, university academic calendars, and summer months that often make it difficult for stakeholders to attend. Moreover, SSC members and interested social science practitioners often plan fieldwork for the summer months. Relative to a fall or winter meeting, AFSC has noted that a May meeting would better enable the SSPT to provide suggestions for the Center's annual human dimensions RFP process.