



NOAA FISHERIES

Alaska Fisheries Science Center

Theme 2: Is the AFSC's process for conducting stock assessments efficient and effective?

Summary

Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) conducts stock assessments (SAFE reports) on an annual basis. The majority of groundfish and crab stocks are assessed annually. Some stocks (eg. rockfish) are assessed on a biennial stock assessment schedule to coincide with the availability of new survey data. For alternate years when a survey does not occur an executive summary is presented with recommended harvest levels for the next two years. Annual scheduling differs between groundfish and crab stock assessments, but both assessment cycles correspond to scheduled meetings of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). As part of the assessment cycle, peer review occurs both internally and externally prior to approval by the NPFMC. Assessment authors work throughout the year to respond to reviewer concerns and assessment needs that arise during review and Council deliberations.

AFSC stock assessment protocols have been developed to help guide assessment authors and are considered the terms of reference for presenting a stock assessment. The groundfish stock assessment authors are provided SAFE chapter guidelines that have been developed by the AFSC. SAFE chapter guidelines for crab stock assessments have been prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's Crab Plan Team. The intent of these guidelines is to provide a template format for authors to follow and ensure national and regional standards are met by each assessment. Included in all stock assessments is an executive summary, which addresses major components of the assessment. Internal reviewers use these guidelines to ensure that authors are meeting these AFSC terms of reference.

Groundfish and crab assessment authors are given assignments and initial deadlines for the annual assessment cycle in mid-July. Initial review of new assessment methods or large data changes is done during the NPFMC Groundfish Plan Team meetings held in September and during the spring NPFMC Crab Plan Team meeting. Groundfish stock assessments are generally prepared in September and October when new survey and fishery information becomes available. Internal AFSC review (minimum of one reviewer per assessment) occurs in October (and August, for September drafts), at least two weeks prior to the Groundfish Plan Team review. Assessments are released for public and NPFMC Groundfish Plan Team review one week prior to the Plan Team meetings in early September and mid-November. This is accomplished by posting all assessments on a publicly accessible website. Following the Plan Team meeting, the Scientific and Statistical Committee reviews the assessments and Plan Teams' recommendations. Crab assessments that use the summer survey data are on a tighter schedule, with survey estimates becoming available mid-August and SAFE completion by the end of August for internal review. The NPFMC Crab Plan Team reviews assessments in September and makes recommendations for the NPFMC SSC to consider at the October NPFMC meeting. Responses to all comments by the Plan Teams and the SSC pertinent to specific assessments from prior meetings are to be provided in the assessment per the SAFE Guidelines.

AFSC stock assessments evolve based on new research and critical reviews. In addition to the Council process and review, Committee of Independent Expert (CIE) reviews for individual assessments are conducted every five years. During the off-season, AFSC assessment authors work on responding to review comments and recommendations. At this time, authors may collaborate or consult with others in the AFSC on specific research ideas and topics. When technical issues encompass the majority of assessments, working groups are often established that include Plan Team members, AFSC assessment staff, and other subject matter experts. Findings of these working groups are usually presented at Plan Team meetings, discussed by both the Plan Teams and the SSC, and reflected in the minutes of these meetings, which are posted on the NPFMC website.