

# A Review of the New England Fishery Management Process

April 2011

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to conduct a regional assessment and management review of the fishery management process (hereafter referred to as “the process”) in New England, focusing on the relationships among the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC), the Northeast Regional Office (NERO), and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC). The study also incorporated a review of other factors that influence the effectiveness of those three entities in carrying out their responsibilities under the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSRA). This study was requested by John Pappalardo, Chair of the NEFMC, acting in his personal capacity. Pappalardo’s request stemmed from frustration resulting from struggles implementing the MSRA requirements and concern that the goals established by the Act were unattainable and not adequately supported by the necessary science resources. The MSRA increases science and management requirements for ending overfishing and rebuilding fish stocks on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Fishery Management Councils.

This effort was designed to be rolled out in phases. The initial phase, which concludes with this report, focuses on gathering stakeholder input via interviews. The stakeholders referenced throughout this study are an active part of the management process, and are impacted by the process. The interview questions were designed to understand the strengths and weaknesses within the current fishery management process in New England under the MSRA, and to gather recommendations to improve the process. Future phases of this effort will involve a more focused analysis of the top recommendations identified in this report and implementation. The effect of the overall effort will be stakeholder-driven change to improve the current fishery management process.

Interviews were conducted with 179 stakeholders selected from nine groups: NERO, NEFSC, NEFMC, industry, research partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), NMFS Headquarters and municipalities. We identified interview participants by reviewing organizational charts from NERO, NEFSC, and NEFMC, Council attendance rosters, and by asking for referrals. We gathered and analyzed interview data and summarized these data into themes. General statements are attributed to the interview groups and are not intended to represent a consensus or majority opinion within a group.

Stakeholder Group	# of Interviewees
Industry	59
New England Fishery Management Council	40
Northeast Regional Office	30
Northeast Fisheries Science Center	20
Non-Governmental Organizations	11
National Marine Fisheries Service Headquarters	6
Research Partners	6
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council	4
Municipal	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>179</b>

Stakeholders agreed that there are many positives with the current process, including the presence of dedicated staff within each organization; the transparency of the process; cooperative research

programs; the growing use of science in the process; the role of sector managers; and the Marine Resource Education Program.

Stakeholders identified a number of problems and challenges across the entire process. Problems exist that cannot be attributed to any single organization or person and will require a collective effort to change. The challenges we identified are:

- Eliminating redundancies across the entire system.
- Building a shared sense of accountability for outcomes among NERO, NEFSC, and NEFMC.
- Defining clear, objective criteria for determining the success of a management decision.
- Developing a shared vision and strategy to guide the process.
- Creating a more welcoming environment at the Council meetings.
- Reducing the negative impacts of lawsuits and politics on the process.
- Working to minimize redundancy created by NEPA and MSRA.
- Fostering an environment of service to the industry.
- Reestablishing “development of the commercial fishing industry” as part of the NMFS mission.
- Streamlining the layers of NOAA review needed to respond to stakeholder requests.
- Improving the quality and timeliness of industry generated data.
- Building industry confidence in survey generated data.
- Reducing the time required for science to inform the management process.
- Simplifying NMFS outreach and communications.
- Geography and history compound challenges.

Stakeholders willingly provided recommendations for ways to improve the fisheries management process. The most frequent recommendations were:

- Improve collaborative research and the Research Set-Aside (RSA) programs.
- Simplify the governance across the three organizations.
- Maximize collaboration across the system and simplify communications with stakeholders.

Other recommendations included:

- Scale up the collection and use of socioeconomic data in the Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) in order to make socioeconomic analysis a more visible and meaningful part of the management process.
- Conduct a comprehensive analysis of all NMFS data systems to identify areas that will improve data gathering, data management, data analysis and data use.
- Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the FMP reporting requirements to find opportunities to eliminate unnecessary reporting/analysis/writing (e.g., Does an EIS need to be created for each FMP?) and decrease the reporting workload on Council and NERO staff.
- Begin the creation of a regional vision and strategic plan to define a new model for collaborating with all stakeholders and to set a future direction for the fishery.

- Consider resources to scale up observer program and aging analysis to eliminate that as a bottleneck in the science process.
- Streamline NOAA communications review protocols to improve the response time to stakeholder request and inquiries.
- Design a cost-effective performance management system to track the progress of decisions and capture lessons learned and best practices.

Additional challenges and recommendations that are specific to each of the three organizations can be found in the final section of this report.

After completing our themes, we reviewed past efforts and concluded that many past and current efforts have arrived at similar conclusions. This indicates that little change has been made over the years, and that for improvements to be made all stakeholders must work together to implement both procedural and cultural recommendations.

We recognize we were unable to speak with everyone involved in the New England Fishery Management process, but we would like to thank all those who participated in this study.

Sincerely,

Preston Pate and SRA-Touchstone Consulting Group