



Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee and Advisory Panel Meeting

**November 30, 2022
Webinar Meeting Summary**

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Ecosystem and Ocean Planning (EOP) Committee and Advisory Panel (AP) met on Wednesday, November 30th from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to begin a comprehensive review of the Council's Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) risk assessment and to develop the process and timeline to complete the review in 2023.

EOP Committee Attendees: M. Duval (Committee Chair), A. Nowalsky, J. Cimino, D. Stormer, K. Kuhn, S. Winslow (Committee Vice-Chair), S. Lennox, P. Geer, T. Schlichter, J. Hermsen, M. Kahley

EOP Advisory Panel Attendees: F. Akers, E. Bochenek, J. Deem, J. Firestone, W. Goldsmith, Z. Greenberg, P. Himchak, F. Hogan, M. Lapp, C. LoBue, P. Lyons Gromen, P. Simon

Other Attendees: S. Gaichas, G. DePiper, B. Muffley, E. Keiley, K. Wilke, J. Gartland, G. DiDomenico

Conducting a risk assessment is the first step the Council's EAFM structured framework process (Figure 1) and is intended to identify and prioritize ecosystem interactions and help the Council decide where to focus limited resources to address priority ecosystem considerations in its science and management programs. The initial EAFM risk assessment was completed in 2017 and has been updated annually using the utilizing information from the NEFSC Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem Report to provide a snapshot of the current risks to meeting the Council's management objectives. While the risk assessment has been updated to utilize the most recent information available, the risk elements, indicators, and ranking approaches have remained the same as in the original risk assessment. There is a significant amount of additional information and new analyses available to help inform an updated risk assessment that reflect the Council's changing management priorities.

Given the length of time since its initial development, Council and NEFSC staff started off the meeting with a series of presentations that provided an overview of how the risk assessment was developed and how it has been used by the Council and its implementation of the EAFM structured framework process. Staff also offered guidance on what areas of the assessment could be changed, the types or new information available, and opportunities to expand the Council's use of the risk assessment and coordinate with other Council-related ecosystem activities.

Following the presentations and any questions/answers, the Committee and AP offered a variety of suggestions for potential new/revised risk elements, new data and/or resources available to

help inform updated indicators, and alternative ways to evaluate risk ranking criteria. These ideas and concepts will be more fully fleshed out and considered as the risk assessment review continues.

Below is a summary of some of the suggestions offered by the Committee and AP:

- Adding aquaculture in the “Other Ocean Uses” risk element.
- Consider Highly Migratory Species (HMS) and food web interactions.
 - Look for results from ongoing HMS vulnerability assessment.
 - Other predator-prey information such as sea bird diet data.
- Greater consideration of wind lease impacts and risks – for example, changes to local ocean currents and effects on primary productivity/species composition.
 - Utilize new wind related information and research to inform wind risks.
- Consider impacts of invasive species.
- Greater focus on inshore/estuarine habitat alterations and impacts on species productivity. Refine the existing habitat risk elements (“Estuarine Habitat” and “Offshore Habitat”) to incorporate new habitat analyses and vulnerability assessments.
- Consider ways to update or refine the species vulnerability assessment that was completed back in 2016 and used to inform the “Distribution Shift” risk element.
- The potential to evaluate, refine, and decompose short and long-term risks and the possibility of doing short/long-term forecast indicators.
- Use and integration of information being developed in the Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profile (ESP) reports for bluefish, black sea bass, and Atlantic mackerel. These reports contain ecosystem information at the stock specific level.
- Consider improvement and/or refinement to some of the “Management” related risk elements.
- Timing and frequency of future updates to the risk assessment to ensure it’s meeting Council needs and contains most appropriate information.

There were also suggestions made on how to improve the risk assessment report and ways to include additional detail on the data and rationale used to support the different risk indicators and rankings.

The group also noted that this review provides an opportunity for the Council to consider future application and integration of the risk assessment into other Council products and decisions. For example, presenting ecosystem information and risk assessment results to the different AP’s and greater inclusion of this information into the Council’s fishery information documents and AP fishery performance reports.

Next steps and review approach for 2023

The group then discussed the process and timeline for conducting the review in 2023. There was general agreement to following approach:

- Meeting 1 (late winter/early spring) – consider risk elements and definitions
- Meeting 2 (early summer) – consider indicators and risk ranking criteria

- Meeting 3 (late summer/early fall) – review updated risk assessment components and application(s) for Council needs
- Present updated risk assessment to Council in fall 2023

Similar to the approach taken during the development of the original assessment, all of these meetings would be held jointly with the EOP Committee and AP to ensure we are getting input and addressing the key risks of interest by the Council and stakeholders. The first two meetings would likely be held via webinar and the group expressed interest in the third meeting be held in-person or hybrid to allow for greater discussion and interaction within the group. To help organize some of the initial discussions, it was suggested to pull out the relevant components of the EAFM Guidance document (i.e., ecosystem level goals and objectives) and the State of the Ecosystem report (i.e., key ecosystem indicators and new information) to ensure these are reflected in the risk assessment.

Some members of the Committee expressed concern about the scope and number of risk elements that could be included and emphasized prioritizing the risk elements so the report is not overwhelming. There was also interest among the group to consider developing metrics in order to evaluate and identify how and where the risk assessment information is being used by the Council.



Figure 1. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s EAFM structured decision framework to incorporate ecosystem considerations into management (from Gaichas et al. 2016). [3_HabStat_1](#)