



**SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE (SSC)**  
**SEPTEMBER 27, 2023**  
**VIA ZOOM**

**SUMMARY MINUTES**

The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:05 a.m. by the Chairman, Dr. Vance Vicente, certifying a quorum of nine (9) members present of the SSC.

SSC Members present: Dr. Vance Vicente, Dr. Richard Appeldoorn, Dr. Michelle Schärer, Dr. Jorge García, Dr. Walter Keithly, Dr. Juan Cruz, Dr. Erik Williams, Dr. Jason Cope, and Dr. Tarsila Seara.

SSC Member excused: Dr. Todd Gedamke.

A motion to approve the agenda by Jason Cope and seconded by Richard Appeldoorn, were approved without opposition. The minutes from May 1-2, 2023 and May 3-5, 2023 were approved, motioned by Richard Appeldoorn and seconded by Jason Cope, without opposition.

- A. SEDAR 80 USVI Queen Triggerfish – Adyan Ríos, SEFSC Caribbean Fisheries Branch, and Kyle Shertzer, SEFSC Atlantic Fisheries Branch.

The SSC Members discussed the SEDAR 80 Data Assessment Review, and provided the SEFSC with the following directives:

1. Fix the RVC selectivity.
  - RVC domed selectivity saturate at a fixed value of 0.9.
2. Estimate the fishery selectivity.
3. Run models with an equilibrium catch (chosen by assessors) and a sloped catch (chosen by assessors) to confirm model behavior is similar.
4. Repeat the profile over the equilibrium catch.
5. The analysts should decide between Tier 1 or Tier 2 of the ABC Control Rule to be used for the USVI Triggerfish data.

All SSC Members present, unanimously, approved Jason Cope, Kyle Shertzer, and Eric Williams's recommendations.

- B. Research priority updates.

SSC Member Richard Appeldoorn motioned to give a **Top 10** priority list recommendations to help provide input to the CFMC with guidance for the IRA funds.



### Proposed priority research topics from the SSC prepared from May 1-5<sup>th</sup> Joint Meeting.

1. FISHERIES LANDING DATA - Improve Fisheries Landing Data based on Port Landings Studies. Develop statistics-based methods.
2. EFFORT ESTIMATION - Develop alternate methods for estimating efforts.
3. PREPARE FOR (h)(2) FLEXIBILITIES - Simulations to test alternate ACLs for (h) (2) flexibility.
4. PREPARE FOR (h)(2) FLEXIBILITIES- Collect life history information.
5. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA FOR MANAGEMENT- Periodic systematic collection of data to provide a baseline and comparative basis for social impact assessments.
6. EBFM (ASSESSING REGULATORY IMPACTS)- Evaluate the effectiveness and impacts of closed areas.
7. Expand fishery-independent monitoring and surveys.
8. Develop Species and Habitat Climate Vulnerability indices for the US Caribbean.
9. EBFM reference points for use in the fisheries management decision support system in the US Caribbean.
10. Continue participation in the re-initiation of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP).

The SSC Members gave the Top 10 priority list a ranking of high priority (#3).

This motion was presented by Juan J. Cruz, and seconded by Tarsila Seara, without any vote against it or abstention. These top 10 priorities will be presented for evaluation to the CFMC as the main priorities from a science perspective.

#### C. Other Business.

- Three recent publications on Nassau grouper (*Epinelus striatus*) critical habitat were briefly reviewed by Dr. Michelle Schärer, HJR Reefscaping.
  1. “Spatial distribution of spawning groupers on a Caribbean reef from an autonomous surface platform”: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S016578362300187X>
  2. “Spatial and temporal dynamics of a Nassau grouper fish spawning aggregation located on an isolated seamount in Puerto Rico” <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/aqc.3994>
  3. “Home range, space use, and vertical distribution of Nassau grouper (*Epinephelus striatus*) during non-spawning times in Western Puerto Rico” <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2023.1206070/full>

The SSC Committee reviewed the articles and took no specific action on this, rather, participated in a question-and-answer segment.

- Proposed rule to change the ESA Status of Pillar Coral from threatened to endangered – Alison Moulding, Southeast Regional Office.

The SSC Committee, unanimously, decided to rectify that the Committee by itself doesn't have the jurisdiction to give any input or position about this matter. However, the Committee encouraged its members to submit their individual comments and/or recommendations to [alison.moulding@noaa.gov](mailto:alison.moulding@noaa.gov) by October 30, 2023.

The SSC Meeting was adjourned by Richard Appeldoorn's motion and seconded by Jorge García, without any opposition at approximately 5:00 pm, September 27, 2023.