

REGIONAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

DECISION PAPER

Security Classification: unclassified

Title: The new PSARC-RMEC process and proposed steps to improve delivery of advice

Issue:

1. A process for reporting to senior managers on science advice.
2. Advice formulation and wording of PSARC advice.

Background:

- Changes to the PSARC-RMEC process were initiated in 2005 to increase effectiveness and efficiency of the regional science advisory process. Changes include: 1) a reformulated role of RMEC to emphasize priority setting, 2) full participatory rights afforded to all meeting participants and 3) the provision for cross-sector PSARC meetings outside the normal subcommittee structure.
- From the National perspective there is interest in improving the consistency in the delivery of science advice across regions and increasing the efficiency in the delivery of SARA and OAP related advisory products. The Audit and Evaluation Directorate is interested in conducting quality assurance audits of the regional sciences advisory offices to assess the effectiveness of the science advisory process.

Steps in the annual cycle

- Priority setting is now formally linked to fiscal planning and delivery capacity. The PSARC Chair coordinates the process. Sector leads are asked to provide their requests for science advice late in the fiscal year in time to assess priorities and develop work plans for the next fiscal cycle.
- Once the sector requests are compiled they are reviewed by Science to assess the delivery capacity within Science Branch.
- The PSARC Chair schedules a RMEC meeting early in the fiscal year to discuss regional science advisory priorities. RMEC approves the final list of priorities for science advice.
- A request-for-working-paper (RFP) is developed for each approved assessment before any significant work is undertaken. The RFP identifies the rationale, objectives and timelines for delivery of the advice. The RFP is intended represent an agreement between the requesting sector and Science Branch on the objectives of the Working Paper.

The RFWP must be approved by Regional Director or designate of the requesting sector. The RFWP also serves to inform reviewers and PSARC meeting participants on the rationale and objectives of working papers.

- Starting in 2005, a summary of PSARC conclusions and recommendations have been forwarded to RMC following each PSARC meeting by the PSARC Chair.
- The formal record of PSARC proceedings is the Advisory Document. It is the responsibility of the meeting chair to ensure that all meeting participants have an equal input into the wording of science advice.
- Once the Advisory Document is finalized they are posted on the PSARC/CSAS internet site and made available to RMEC and meeting participants. With the emphasis on priority setting, RMEC does not routinely meet following each PSARC meeting. There is now no process for reporting back to senior management on science advisory issues.

Current Status:

A process for reporting to senior managers on science advice

- Once the advisory document is finalized, the PSARC Chair will meet with appropriate FAM coordinators or OHAB managers to discuss the PSARC advice and implications for management.
- The PSARC Chair will summarize the outcome of the meeting in a note to affected Regional Directors to alert managers of priority issues.

Advice formulation and wording of PSARC advice

- PSARC advice is one source of information to inform decision making along with policy and socio-economic inputs. To be useful, science advice must identify the biological consequences of plausible alternative management options. That is the primary function of PSARC. Guidelines for the wording of advice are proposed to ensure that advice is useful for management decision making.
- In data rich situations the advice is often in the form of a Decision Table that indicates the consequences of alternative management action on selected biological performance indicators or benchmarks.
- In data poor cases the advice is less quantitative but ultimately the advice should still provide outcomes in terms of consequences to selected biological performance indicators.
- Because of the broader mix of individual perspectives at PSARC meetings the exact wording of the advice is often debated. As a general rule, however, it is important to identify implication of management alternatives so that managers understand the biological consequences of different management options.

- Recommending “*zero harvest*” if the stock projection is below a particular lower benchmark is not consistent with the intent of PSARC advice – that of informing managers of consequences to harvest in a risk management context. Even in cases where stock projections fall below an established fishery cut-off, the wording should inform decision makers of the consequences of harvest to conservation risk or to future production.
- In data-poor situations, the wording of advice is usually qualitative. Again, in order to be useful to decision making, the advice must convey PSARC advice that identifies the implications of human impacts and, to the extent possible, identifies the consequences of alternative management options in qualitative terms. More consistent science advice in this case would be to advise managers and clients that “*Stock projections are below the established fishery cut-off and harvest will likely result in a high risk to conservation and/or compromise sustainable harvest opportunities in the future*”.
- If the data and assessment framework are quantitative, then the advice should specify the consequences of human impacts on population projections in the form of a Decision Table that state the advice in terms of the probability of an outcome given uncertainty.
- Advice is case specific. A review of past advice on a case by case basis is proposed to identify where the language of advice could be improved in order to establish guidelines for PSARC meeting chairs.

Recommendations:

1. Endorse the proposal for closing the loop in the science advisory – decision making process.
2. Endorse the proposal to review the wording of previous PSARC advice and establish guidelines for PSARC meeting chairs in the wording of science advice for decision making.

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Approved by:

Date:

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