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## STOCK ASSESSMENTS

### Stock Assessment Prioritization: Guiding decisions on which fish stocks to assess



**What are stock assessments?** Assessments for managed fish and shellfish stocks are an important core activity of NOAA Fisheries. The Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) requires that fisheries management be based on the best scientific information available, thus the need for stock assessments ([Stock Assessment 101](#)). Stock assessments provide the technical basis for determining if overfishing is occurring and if a stock has declined into an overfished state. Proactively, assessments provide forecasts of future catch levels that will implement harvest policies developed by Fishery Management Councils.

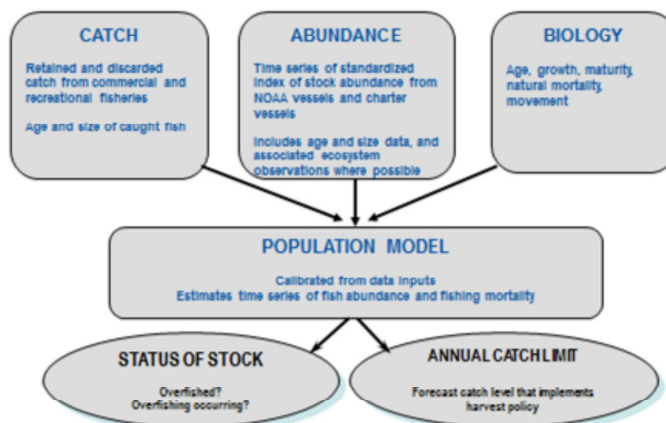
#### Related Documents:

- [Prioritizing Fish Stock Assessment](#)
- [Prioritization Briefing](#)

#### Additional Information:

- [Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act \(MSA\)](#)
- [1998 MSA National Standards](#)
- [Species Information System for assessment summaries](#)
- [More Information on NOAA Fisheries assessment program](#)
- [Annual Report on Status of U.S. Fisheries](#)
- [Stock Assessment 101](#)

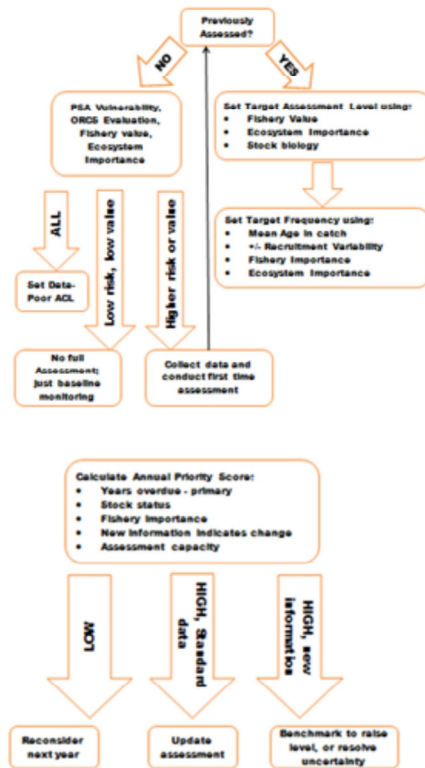
### Stock Assessment Process



**Why is prioritization needed?** There are 478 managed stocks in 46 Fishery Management Plans ([Annual Report on Status of U.S. Fisheries](#)). Presently, NOAA Fisheries has the capacity to update only about 100 assessments each year. This includes annual assessments for some important stocks and less frequent assessments for many stocks, but for some stocks their status is listed as unknown because assessments cannot be conducted, mostly due to lack of sufficient data. NOAA Fisheries strives to provide at least baseline monitoring for all managed stocks, full assessments for important stocks, and assessments that extend to ecosystem linkages where needed and feasible. Historically, there has not been an objective approach to determining a portfolio of assessment activities to achieve these goals. Each NOAA Fisheries Science Center and its respective regional Fishery Management Council work together to decide on upcoming assessment priorities, but they lack an objective support system for their deliberations.

**How will prioritization work?**

- Provides a standardized protocol to set a target "level" for each stock assessment; not all stocks need the highest quality assessments.
- Establishes a target frequency for conducting those assessments; not all stocks need annual updates.
- Bases the target levels and frequency upon factors such as the importance of the stock to commercial, recreational and subsistence fisheries; its importance to the regional ecosystem, and biological factors that determine its tendency to fluctuate over time.
- Bases decisions about assessment priorities on the status of the current assessment relative to these two factors—target level and target frequency. In other words priority for conducting an assessment would be given to those that are overdue relative to their target frequency or which now have new data to raise them to a higher level.
- Considers factors such as whether the stock is on a rebuilding plan, is at risk of overfishing, or seems to be drifting from a previous forecast as part of the prioritization.
- Prioritization is focused on support for decision-making within each region. Between region prioritization is not part of this process.



#### What are the next steps?

The material has been distributed to each Fishery Management Council and other fishery management entities for their feedback. Through this website, NOAA Fisheries also solicits comments from the public. The deadline for comments is May 1, 2014. If you have comments please fill out [this form](#).

For questions please contact: [richard.methot@noaa.gov](mailto:richard.methot@noaa.gov)

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