

Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel Working Group
Webinar Meeting Summary
September 6, 2023

Working Group Attendees: Kathryn Ford, Dan Salerno, Wes Townsend, Jim Garland, Robert Ruhle, David Goethel, Eric Reid, Philip Politis

Additional Attendees: Hannah Hart, Alex Dunn, Drew Mankiewicz

The Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP) created a new Working Group at their July 20, 2023, meeting in Baltimore to address contingency plans for when the NOAA Ship Henry B. Bigelow is not operational or for other reasons that it cannot be used to complete the federal bottom trawl survey. The Working Group met for the first time via webinar on Tuesday, September 5, 2023, to discuss several topics including terms of reference, a potential timeline, and possible contingency options.

Key Discussion Points and Working Group Recommendations

- The group agreed on principles and terms of reference:
 - *Describe vessel platforms that can support completing the NEFSC spring and fall BTS when the Bigelow is unavailable.*
 - *Assess the viability of the platform(s) and platform deployment needs from logistical and scientific perspectives and identify where additional information is needed to fully develop a given option.*
 - *Consider options that at a minimum meet stock assessment needs.*
 - *This effort should produce a relatively high-level overview of options and identify information gaps.*
- The group agreed to meet virtually roughly every two months to meet the tentative timeline below.
- Engagement of non-NTAP members was encouraged, particularly additional NEFSC (e.g., Population Dynamics Branch, etc.) and NOAA Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) subject matter experts.
- The group agreed that the general approach and organization of the draft contingency option document is acceptable, but it was noted that it will be hard to determine how many data requests will be needed or can be accommodated in a timely matter.
 - It was noted that they will have to treat data requests on a case-by-case basis and keep pushing along given the short timeline.
- There was discussion of an industry vessel option and the scope required to consider this option:
 - To the extent this option would use the same design as the current survey this option would be within the agreed upon scope of the group.
 - To the extent it would use a new design and be more along the lines of designing a new/future multispecies survey it would not be within the agreed upon scope of the group.

- However, it was noted that the group should not limit themselves as to what they suggest for future work to the Councils.
- Understanding the key parameters that must be collected to be considered a “Bigelow contingency” would be helpful - does everything need to be collected or can less data be collected and still provide data useful to assessments?
 - The assumption is that some data is better than no data.
 - This topic needs to be assessed and further discussed.

Tentative Timeline for Working Group

- August 2023: Determine NEFSC staff participants; check with NTAP to see if anyone else wants to participate; send doodle poll for first working group.
- September 2023: First virtual meeting with working group.
 - Write the TOR and review scope of the project.
 - Review process and calendar.
 - Discuss how to communicate.
 - Discuss outline for contingency options.
 - Plan next meeting.
- October/November 2023: Request comments on the draft contingency plan outline.
 - Comment deadline prior to November working group meeting.
- November 2023: Working group meeting (3-4 hours).
 - Discuss the outline and describe each option.
 - Assess the need for another meeting to discuss options.
- Send Draft 1 to working group by January 5, 2024
 - Comment deadline about 45-days
- Between January 5 and February 16, 2024: Working group meeting.
 - Follow up on questions from November.
 - Discuss first draft of the contingency plan document.
- February 16, 2024: Working group draft 1 comments due.
- Week of March 4, 2024: Working group meeting to discuss changes and assess need for a 2nd draft.
- April/May 2024: Finalize document; determine distribution list and process.