

Proposed Topic for the ESMWG

Socio-Economic Dimensions of Integrated Ecosystem Assessments (IEAs): IEAs within NOAA are evaluations and decision-making processes that consider all components of an ecosystem, including humans, to enable managers to balance tradeoffs and determine which actions are most likely to achieve desired goals. The recent symposium reporting on 10 years of IEAs at NOAA repeatedly emphasized the need for improved considerations of socioeconomic (human) dimensions within IEAs, including emphasis on non-fisheries human dimensions. Among the data needs is information on human uses of marine and coastal resources, including those in National Marine Sanctuaries. Other important issues concern human dimensions of emerging and sometimes conflicting uses of marine and coastal resources, such as transportation, energy production and tourism. This proposed report will review IEAs conducted within NOAA and make recommendations considering whether and how the assessment of socio-economic dimensions might be improved, and the potential advantages of doing so. In doing so, it will evaluate both information needs and the capacity to obtain this information with available resources. It will also consider how newly available “big data” sources might be leveraged to provide relevant information (e.g., on human use patterns).

The proposed report relates directly to the Terms of Reference for the ESMWG and the SAB. It responds to the ESMWG's mission to “provide scientific advice and broad direction to the NOAA Science Advisory Board (SAB) regarding NOAA’s ecosystem related programs [and to] focus on the broad research, monitoring, and management components of NOAA’s ecosystem portfolio...” The report will give explicit attention to how improved coverage of socio-economic dimensions can improve the capacity of IEAs to support ecosystem-based management, the coastal blue economy, and sustainable uses of marine and coastal resources—all topics emphasized in the most recent SAB Work Plan. This topic emerged from discussions with the ESMWG's NOAA Line Office (LO) Liaisons during the working group’s May 2019 meeting, with strong support and interest voiced by NOS, NMFS and OAR. Drafts of this proposal were also reviewed by LO representatives in June 2019, to ensure that the proposed report will provide science-based advice of high value to NOAA.

If supported by the SAB, this effort would be led by ESMWG Co-Chair Robert Johnston, with assistance from other ESMWG members including Co-Chair Mike Castellini and Molly McCammon. The ESMWG will also work closely with the IEA Human Dimensions Working Group, with assistance from other ESMWG members and in coordination with ESMWG contacts from NMFS, NOS and OAR. Deliverables will include a final 10-15 page report and recommendations to be delivered to the SAB, along with interim progress reports delivered during SAB meetings.