



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

SEP 21 2011

Raymond J. Ban  
Chair of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
Science Advisory Board  
Consultant, Weather Industry and Government Partnerships  
The Weather Channel  
300 Interstate North Pkwy  
North Atlanta, GA 30339

Dear Mr. Ban:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) requests the Science Advisory Board (SAB) to grant approval of a proposal to have the Ecosystem Science and Management Working Group (ESMWG) validate external reviewers for NMFS science reviews.

Discipline-based scientific reviews of NMFS Science Center activities will be conducted annually to ascertain the quality, relevance, and performance of NMFS science programs relative to both internal and external requirements. This will help strategically position the NMFS science enterprise to be responsive to existing and emerging requirements. These reviews are intended to ensure that NMFS science continues to provide the underpinnings for its legislated stewardship mandates, is linked to the NOAA Strategic Plan, and is consistent with the evolving NOAA strategy execution and evaluation (SEE) process.

The proposed reviews will take place on a five-year cycle:

Year 1: Strategic Planning

Year 2: Research supporting the Magnuson-Stevens Act (Program 1)

Year 3: Research supporting the Endangered Species and Marine Mammal Protection Acts (Program 2)

Year 4: Strategic Research (Program 3)

Year 5: Emerging Issues and other major science programs not included above (Programs 4)

The breadth of programs under these categories is large, thus it will be necessary to break the programs down into themes (e.g., Program 1: survey techniques, population abundance and distribution models, biology and life history, stock structure, ecosystem considerations, etc.) from which three themes will be chosen to be reviewed that year. Every fifth year, NMFS will suspend Science Center and Program reviews and engage in a one-year internal strategic planning effort.

As currently envisioned, each of the NMFS Science Centers will conduct a separate review of its thematic programs annually. Given that each of these reviews is likely to require two to three external reviewers, NMFS will provide the ESMWG the names of four to six individuals to be considered for "validation," thus taking into account the inevitable scheduling conflicts and the, hopefully, rare occurrence when some reviewers may not be deemed appropriate. Considering all six NMFS Science Centers translates to roughly 24-36 CVs and biographic sketches evaluated by the ESMWG in any given year.



Evaluation Criteria for selecting reviewers will at a minimum meet the standards of the draft NOAA Administrative Order for Optimizing Research and Development Enterprise Portfolio Handbook: Evaluation Chapter, specifically:

- a. The Assistant Administrator should ensure representation of high-ranking and broadly experienced scientists, science administrators, and stakeholders who are qualified to evaluate the quality, relevance, and performance of the science covered. Experts should be chosen via an objective process and provide adequate coverage of the science topics under review. If NOAA employees are considered for the review panel, they should be employed by a different Line Office and have no vested interest in the work within the Program.
  
- c. Conflict of Interest: Reviewers should have no financial or professional conflict of interest with the Program being evaluated and must submit a conflict of interest disclosure form prior to participating.

**ESMWG commitment:**

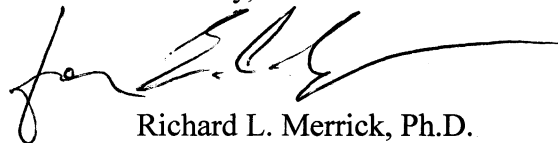
During the first ESMWG meeting of the year, review a maximum of 24-36 CVs and biographic sketches provided by NMFS and present NMFS with a list of validated external reviewers (years 2-5 of cycle).

Time line for validating external reviewer qualifications:

- February/March: NMFS will provide the ESMWG information packets for each of the approximate 24-36 external reviewers to be considered.
- April 15: ESMWG provides NMFS a list of validated reviewers, from which NMFS begins to match reviewer to programmatic review and make logistical arrangements.
- June: Reviews commence

NMFS appreciates the NOAA SAB's consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,



Richard L. Merrick, Ph.D.  
Director, Scientific Programs and  
Chief Science Advisor