January 3, 2018

Dr. Cisco Werner
Director of Scientific Programs
& Chief Science Advisor
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway, Room 14659
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Werner:

The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the Councils to develop five-year research priority plans
and submit them to the Secretary of Commerce. In New England, ideas for research topics have
trickled up through technical teams, advisory panels, and committees prior to Council approval,
resulting in a lengthy catalogue of needs. Our Scientific and Statistical Committee and Research
Steering Committee have both advised that the Council and research community would benefit
from efforts to create a more targeted, prioritized list. We are currently improving our process for
identifying research priorities and data needs.

In developing ideas for process improvements, we learned that Councils appear to vary greatly in
the effort dedicated to creating and updating research priorities. Some Councils have simple lists
with no internal prioritization, while others have an on-line searchable database. No matter the
degree of effort, a common theme is that there has been little feedback from the National Marine
Fisheries Service (NMFS) about what happens with research priority documents once submitted.
There does not seem to be a clear understanding of how the priorities are used to set the national
and regional priorities of NMFS.

Clarification from NMFS about the end use of these priority lists will help determine the degree
of effort that should be devoted to the task. Please also let me know if there are any suggestions
for how the Council's priorities may be better articulated. Please contact me if you have
questions.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Nies
Executive Director

cc: RFMC Executive Directors
    Brian Fredieu