12.6   Technical Services

General description

A *Technical Service* is the provision of scientific information, or a process that produces scientific information, for the use of managers and policy-makers. The service may include recommendations made by individual, or groups of, scientists, but it does not include a recommendation on behalf of ICES (except to reiterate a recommendation previously made by ACOM or by former ICES advisory committees).

Technical Services thus do not constitute ICES approved advice. They do, however, share the following characteristics:

- Scientific objectivity and integrity;
- Quality assurance, including peer review as appropriate;
- Transparency.

Technical Services categories

1. **Technical assistance**: This service is the provision of information with minimal interpretation and/or subjectivity. It includes the assembly of existing information, such as previously approved advice. It also includes calculations using known or widely accepted methodologies. For example, it could be the provision of additional catch options from an analysis that formed the basis of previously provided fisheries advice.
2. **Clarification of advice**: This service helps users understand ACOM's advice. Clarification is appropriate for technical terms that advice users do not understand, or when there is unintended ambiguity in the advice.
3. **Process services**: This service facilitates the process of delivering, e.g. a report of best scientific understanding of an issue where ICES is not asked to provide an opinion, but rather to provide scientific integrity to the process.
4. **Review services**: This service is a special case of process services, the provision of peer review of scientific activity (including research proposals, survey or sampling designs, or research results). In providing this service, ICES is responsible for selecting qualified experts with no vested interest to provide reviews, but it does not interpret the reviews or recommend actions to be taken in response to the reviews. Review services are provided in the name of the individuals that conducted the reviews. When there are multiple reviewers, a consensus summary of the reviews, factual and without interpretation that goes beyond the views expressed in the reviews, may be prepared by the reviewers or by ICES.

Technical Services processes

The process to deliver the four types of *Technical Services* needs to ensure ACOM ownership, legitimacy, and transparency, while not burdening ACOM with technicalities or jeopardizing the possibilities for ICES to provide timely responses to a wide variety of policy requests. All requests are first discussed in the ACOM leadership and a process agreed for each individual case. This includes a decision by the ACOM leadership whether a full advisory process is required or the request can be answered as a *Technical Service*. If a *Technical Service* is to be used to respond to the request, the ACOM leadership also decides on the process to be used. The request and the process chosen are posted on the ACOM forum[1] for information and comments by ACOM members. If a request is considered a *Technical Service* the following processes apply:

1. **Technical assistance**. The ACOM leadership identifies the expert(s) to perform the required technical analysis. This could be a member of the ACOM leadership, professional staff from the Secretariat, or approaching an expert from the ICES network. The person appointed provides a draft response which is posted on the ACOM forum for information and comment by ACOM members within a specified time period. ACOM is expected to comment on factual errors, if such are identified, and also on whether the quality of the response is consistent with ICES standards. Once the set deadline for comments has expired the ACOM Chair summarizes all comments and arranges for modifications or further work as needed. After final approval by the ACOM Chair the response is sent to the recipient and published on the ICES website.

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[1] The ACOM forum is a SharePoint-based, password-protected forum used by the membership of the Advisory Committee and the ICES Secretariat for correspondence on advisory matters.

2. **Clarification of advice**. Simple clarification issues such as explanation of terms or understanding the advice format can be provided directly by a member of the ACOM leadership or by the appropriate professional staff in the Secretariat. If a clarification question relates to ambiguities or if there is a risk that such clarification may be seen as adding substance to the advice, the ACOM leadership will decide on the answer to be given. The ACOM leadership may, as needed, decide to post the draft response for information and comments on the ACOM forum under the same conditions as for technical assistance.

3. **Process services**. The ACOM leadership identifies the process which will deliver the scientific integrity required. This may include a selection of an expert team to facilitate the process or deliver a report in their own name, and may also involve a peer review. The expert team and reviewers are identified by the ACOM leadership, with the assistance of the Secretariat, and, when confirmed, the names are posted on the ACOM forum together with a description of the process to secure integrity decided upon by the ACOM leadership. The final product is communicated to ACOM for information; there is normally not a process to incorporate ACOM comments as ICES in this case is solely responsible for the process, and not the product.

4. **Peer review**. This follows the same procedures as process services, except that the ACOM leadership may decide that a conclusion or summary by ICES is required. In that case, a summary or conclusion is developed through a normal ICES advisory process, which means drafting in an advisory drafting group (ADG – normally done by correspondence) and confirmation through ACOM.