

Report to the Southern Division
American Fisheries Society
Ad Hoc Committee on Technical Committees

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the Southern Division's annual business meeting in 1998, President Reggie Harrell approved an ad hoc committee to review the technical committee system (Review Committee). The Review Committee was composed of Mike Allen, Larry Cofer, Kim Erickson, Gary Martel, Michael Meador (chair), and Greg Summers. The Review Committee chose to seek information from technical committees and state agencies, and relate that information to the Prosser Report created by the Ad Hoc Committee on Technical Committees in 1988. Based on a synthesis of questionnaires distributed to technical committees and state agencies, the Review Committee noted at least three major issues:

1. Not all technical committees have well-defined goals and objectives and committee reports generally are not prepared in terms of stated objectives.
1. Possible conflicts exist in perceptions of the function of technical committee between state agencies and technical committees. Technical committees may view themselves as more information-transfer oriented whereas state agencies may view technical committees as more product-oriented.
1. Communication between technical committees and state agencies regarding committee activities may not be as effective as it could be.

To address these issues, the Review Committee offers the following recommendations:

1. Technical committee functions should be defined in terms of using information exchange as a means of developing problem-solving activities that produce products.
2. Technical committees should develop statements that clearly define committee purpose or mission.

3. Technical committees should develop specific objectives related to committee function and mission and committee reports should be stated in terms of objectives.
4. Technical committee chairs should be proactive in communications with state agency fisheries chiefs in requesting input and providing state agency fisheries chiefs with information about committee activities, at least annually.
5. State agency fisheries chiefs should evaluate and, if necessary, take steps to improve the effectiveness of their ability to provide technical committees with input regarding technical information needs and their ability to stay informed of committee progress to meet those needs.
6. In addition to a thorough review of an assigned technical committee, the Vice President Southern Division should request from all technical committees a copy of the technical committee's goals and objectives for the upcoming year, and annually report to the Division.
7. The President Southern Division should provide state agency fisheries chiefs copies of committee annual reports, goals and objectives when communicating with fisheries chiefs regarding state representative appointments.
8. The Southern Division bylaws Section VII, (i). should be changed from "Technical Committees of the Division shall include: Aquaculture, Marine and Estuarine Resources, Pollution, Reservoir, Small Impoundments, Striped Bass, Trout, and Warmwater Streams. These committees shall provide a forum for the resolution of important professional problems within the Division", to read "Technical Committees of the Division shall provide a forum for the resolution of important professional problems within the Division."

The Review Committee concluded that the functions of technical committees listed in the Prosser Report continue to be important and appropriate but that the focus of a technical committee should be structured more to encourage the development of definable products. The present report of the Review Committee re-affirms the recommendations of the Prosser Report that technical committees develop mission statements, specific objectives, and annual reports defined in terms of objectives. The Review Committee concluded that a recommendation to have the Vice President provide an annual review of all technical committee objectives in addition to the current plan for periodic review of individual technical committees, may provide the opportunity for more timely evaluation of committee focus and direction.

Statements by some technical committee chairs and agency fisheries chiefs indicated that the Division membership should enact a stronger role in managing technical committees, including a sunset clause to disband technical committees. However, the Review Committee has interpreted from the majority of responses that the Division's role relative to technical committees be largely one of facilitation rather than management. The Southern Division already has a mechanism in place to disband technical committees and that mechanism has been implemented.

Finally, technical committees are made up of dedicated volunteers. The successes to date regarding the technical committee system have been accomplished as a result of the commitment of these volunteers. The Review Committee wishes to thank all members of Southern Division technical committees, past and present, for their time and talents.

Draft Report to the Southern Division

American Fisheries Society

Ad Hoc Committee on Technical Committees

Mike Allen, Larry Cofer, Kim Erickson, Gary Martel,

Michael Meador (Chair), And Greg Summers

BACKGROUND

The technical committees of the Southern Division have a long history of service to the membership, the profession, and our science. Historically, strong state agency support and commitment from members of the university community, private sector, and federal agencies have played significant roles in the success of the technical committees. There have been as many as eight technical committees. Currently, the Division has two ad hoc committees also functioning as technical committees. Combined, these ten committees had over 300 members on their rosters at the beginning of 1998. Clearly, Division members value technical committee affiliation. The technical committees today exist in an environment that is very competitive for resources dedicated to some of the committees' traditional purposes. AFS chapters, sections, and the Division itself offer alternative venues for highly focused, quality information exchange and professional networking. The technical committees will have to continue providing unique services valued by the Division membership and their employers to remain viable.

In 1988, Southern Division President Fred Harris established an Ad Hoc Committee on Technical Committees to review the technical committee system because of concerns that some of the technical committees may have been losing some of their

effectiveness, and that the original functions of some committees were no longer justified. The resulting Prosser Report provided a number of recommendations to the Division regarding the functions and appropriateness of technical committees. It has been over a decade since the Prosser Report was released. However, concerns persist regarding technical committee effectiveness, structure, and function. At the Division's annual business meeting in 1998, President Reggie Harrell, based on the recommendation of Past-President Scott Van Horn, approved an ad hoc committee to review the technical committee system (Review Committee). It was determined that the Review Committee should be composed of representatives from state agency administration and current technical committee members with recent leadership experience. The committee was composed of Mike Allen, Larry Cofer, Kim Erickson, Gary Martel, Michael Meador (chair), and Greg Summers.

CHARGE

The charge of the Review Committee as presented by President Harrell was to prepare recommendations to the Division that consider questions such as the following:

1. Are the technical issues confronting our members (and their employers?) today best addressed by the Division's current mix of technical committees? Determine if a more organizationally flexible technical committee system would better serve the membership. If so, recommend a strategy that might guide the Division in choosing and adjusting a committee mix through time to maintain active productive technical committees.
2. There currently is a mix of "standing" technical committees (mentioned in the bylaws) and ad hoc committees doing technical committee work. This type of

committee organization has consequences for the committees and the Division.

Review the role of the technical committee system within the Division and recommend appropriate committee organizational structure within the provisions of the Division bylaws.

3. Successful committees have strong leadership and participants committed collectively to accomplishing the committees' tasks. Membership interests that are too diverse may make agreeing on a task difficult. Mismatches between identified tasks and participants' interests can hurt technical committee performance. Review the procedures for making technical committee appointments and make recommendations for membership selection that will enhance committee performance. Identify potential committee organizational changes that might improve the match between committee tasks and participant commitment.

REVIEW COMMITTEE'S APPROACH

The Review Committee found the above charge similar to the charge given to the Ad Hoc Committee on Technical Committees in 1988. Instead of re-creating the Prosser Report, the Review Committee chose to seek updated and additional information from technical committees and state agencies, and relate that information to the Prosser Report. Based on a synthesis of information exchange with technical committees and state agencies, the Review Committee would develop recommendations.

There are currently seven technical committees in the Southern Division including: Pollution, Warmwater Streams, Trout, Small Impoundments, Striped Bass, Reservoir, and Aquaculture. The Review Committee developed a questionnaire to solicit information from each technical committee. Each technical committee chair was

contacted to complete the questionnaire, based on their own assessment of the technical committee and incorporating the views of committee members. Additionally a questionnaire was developed to solicit responses from state agency fisheries chiefs. Information from the Prosser Report was also assessed in comparison with questionnaire responses from committees and agencies. A draft report was prepared and the draft was distributed to technical committee chairs and state agency fisheries chiefs for comment.

RESULTS

Individual responses to questions contained in the questionnaires sent to the technical committees (Appendix I) and state agency fisheries chiefs (Appendix II) were compiled. All seven technical committees responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to 14 state agency fisheries chiefs, and 12 responses were received. The Review Committee contacted respondents, where necessary, for clarification of responses. The Review Committee concluded that at least three major issues were revealed in the responses:

1. Not all technical committees have well-defined goals and objectives and committee reports generally are not prepared in terms of stated objectives.
2. Possible conflicts exist in perceptions of the function of technical committees between state agencies and technical committees.
3. Communication between technical committees and state agencies regarding committee activities may not be as effective as it could be.

The Review Committee developed recommendations to address these issues and the role of the Southern Division related to these issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Clarifying Committee Function, Mission, and Objectives

a. Technical Committee Function.

Before a technical committee can define its mission and develop objectives, committee members must understand the committee's function. A committee's function is based largely on external expectations that may change over time. There appear to be differences in perception of the function of technical committee between state agencies and technical committees. Technical committees largely view their role as primarily facilitating communication and information exchange. Agencies tend to be more product-oriented and driven and they may view technical committee function as product oriented. A lack of more tangible product development by technical committees may be perceived as ineffectiveness of technical committees by state agencies.

In the past, physical technical committee meetings to exchange ideas were critical for information exchange and networking. However, given opportunities in today's world for electronic mass communication (email, conference calls, video conferencing, etc.), technical committees may have to look beyond communication and information exchange as a primary function. While this function is extremely important and should underlie all technical committee activities, technical committees should move toward addressing regional and national issues with tangible products. Examples of tangible products could include, for example, symposia, publications, resolutions, etc. The scope and scale of products will vary and depend on the resources of individual technical committees. Some but not all technical committees appear to have shifted their function from primarily information transfer to product development.

Recommendation:

1. Technical committee functions should be defined in terms of using information exchange as a means of developing problem-solving activities that produce products.

- b. Technical Committee Mission

A clear mission provides technical committees with a sense of purpose. Without a clear sense of purpose, committee members may not know how they can contribute effectively. While a committee's function is determined largely on external expectations, a committee's mission is developed from within by the individual members. A written mission statement can be a helpful declaration of a committee's purpose. Most but not all technical committees reported that they have developed a mission statement and those that have not should be directed to do so by the Vice-President as a part of a technical committee's review process.

Recommendation:

2. Technical committees should develop statements that clearly define committee purpose or mission.

1. Technical Committee Objectives

Clearly stated, specific objectives should be developed based on investigation of emerging technical issues and needs. The investigation, which could include solicitation

of suggestions from various parties with interest in the technical area of the committee, should provide the committee with information from which to build a consensus of committee membership. Such information will be valuable in assessing the relative importance of focusing on one issue with full time and resources as opposed to focusing on multiple issues with divided time and resources.

Recommendation:

3. Technical committees should develop specific objectives related to committee function and mission and committee reports should be stated in terms of objectives.

II. Communication

There may be a lack of communication regarding technical committees that may influence how technical committee effectiveness is perceived. This lack of communication may be occurring both between technical committees and agencies, and within agencies.

Technical committees rely on members to communicate with their respective employers regarding committee activities. Both state agencies and technical committees indicated that relying on this form of communication alone may not be effective. While state agency fisheries chiefs responded that they request information about technical committee activities from their representatives, some fisheries chiefs admitted that they were still uninformed about committee activities. In some cases this may be due to the fact that agencies chose not to send representatives to participate on a particular committee (in some cases because of a perceived lack of committee effectiveness), and

then had little or no way to provide input to that particular committee or gauge the committee's effectiveness. Thus, technical committees may not be receiving input critical to solving problems and agencies may not be as aware of committee efforts as they should be. Some but not all technical committees indicated that committee chairs periodically contact fisheries chiefs directly to communicate information about committee activities.

Recommendation:

4. Technical committee chairs should be proactive in communications with state agency chiefs in requesting input and providing state agency fisheries chiefs with information about committee activities, at least annually.
5. State agency fisheries chiefs should evaluate, and if necessary take steps to improve, the effectiveness of their ability to provide technical committees with input regarding technical information needs and their ability to stay informed of committee progress to meet those needs.

III. Role of the Division in support of technical committee activities

a. Review and assessment of technical committee function

There may be times when technical committees have met their goals and may have outlived their function. Some agency administrators have suggested a need to sunset technical committees when those committees are no longer productive. However, a mechanism to accomplish this is not only already in place but has been implemented.

The incoming Vice President Southern Division is charged with conducting a thorough review of a technical committee. Based on the results of that review and the request of a technical committee, a decision to abolish a technical committee can be brought to a vote at a Division business meeting. This process has occurred and in 1998 the Marine and Estuarine Resources Committee was disbanded as a result. However, with seven technical committees, such a detailed review of any given committee occurs approximately every seven years. This is an unacceptable length of time if the Division is to become aware of issues that are affecting technical committee function. The incoming Vice President could request a copy of each technical committees goals, objectives, and plans for the coming year. While a detailed review of a particular technical committee should still be conducted, it would be important for the Vice President to briefly assess the organization and planning of all technical committees.

Recommendation:

6. In addition to a thorough review of an assigned technical committee, the Vice President should request from all technical committees, a copy of the technical committee's goals and objectives for the upcoming year, and annually report to the Division.

- b. Communication.

It is the task of the President Southern Division to contact state agency fisheries chiefs regarding the appointment of state agency representatives to technical committees.

This provides an opportunity for the Division to facilitate communications between state agency fisheries chiefs and technical committees.

Recommendation:

7. The President Southern Division should provide state agency fisheries chiefs copies of committee annual reports, goals and objectives when communicating with fisheries chiefs regarding state representative appointments.

RESPONSE TO CHARGE

Charge #1:

Are the technical issues confronting our members (and their employers?) today best addressed by the Division's current mix of technical committees? Determine if a more organizationally flexible technical committee system would better serve the membership. If so, recommend a strategy that might guide the Division in choosing and adjusting a committee mix through time to maintain active productive technical committees.

Response:

The Review Committee concluded that the technical committee system concept can be an effective means of addressing the technical issues confronting the Division membership. The effectiveness of the system is dependent upon efficiency and timely communication to address emerging issues. The committee mix should be determined by the issues raised by the membership and the need to address the issues.

Charge #2:

There currently is a mix of "standing" technical committees (mentioned in the bylaws) and ad hoc committees doing technical committee work. The type of committee organization has consequences for the committees and the Division. Review the role of the technical committee system within the Division and recommend appropriate committee organizational structure within the provisions of the Division bylaws.

Response:

As new issues develop, the Division membership can organize technical committees to confront these issues. However, the effectiveness of a newly formed technical committee may be related to commitment of one or two individuals. The Review Committee concluded that recommendation #7 of the "Technical Committees Goals and Objectives" section of the Prosser Report:

“All proposals for new technical committees should be reviewed by the Oversight Committee in terms of the written purpose-goals-objectives statement (prepared according to guidelines), and any new technical committees created should be special committees established for a three-year initial period. Change to a standing committee status would depend on the evaluation of the Oversight Committee after the initial three-year period”

provides clear guidance to allow flexibility in the formation of new technical committees with a clear sense of purpose. The Review Committee also noted that the Division bylaws specifically list existing technical committees by name (Section VII, i.). Such

specific listing would require periodic changes to the bylaws each time a new technical committee is formed or an existing technical committee is disbanded.

Recommendation:

8. The Division bylaws Section VII, (i). should be changed from “Technical Committees of the Division shall include: Aquaculture, Marine and Estuarine Resources, Pollution, Reservoir, Small Impoundments, Striped Bass, Trout, and Warmwater Streams. These committees shall provide a forum for the resolution of important professional problems within the Division.” To read “Technical Committees of the Division shall provide a forum for the resolution of important professional problems within the Division.”

Charge #3:

Successful committees have strong leadership and participants committed collectively to accomplishing the committees' tasks. Membership interests that are too diverse may make agreeing on a task difficult. Mismatches between identified tasks and participants' interests can hurt technical committee performance. Review the procedures for making technical committee appointments and make recommendations for membership selection that will enhance committee performance. Identify potential committee organizational changes that might improve the match between committee tasks and participant commitment.

Response:

The Review Committee concluded that based on technical committee input to the Prosser Report and to the questionnaires, technical committees have indicated that the Division should not set term limits for participation on committees. Rather, terms should be dictated by the interest of members. In some cases committee size was a concern, with some committees having so many members as to possibly impact effectiveness while other committees having a very limited number of members. There were also concerns about the appointment of state representatives, with some states electing not to appoint representatives to committees. Both technical committees and state fisheries chiefs noted that low state agency participation has impacted effectiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

The Prosser Report identified four specific functions deemed both appropriate and important to the beneficiaries of technical committee activities with the recommendation that these functions be uniformly recognized and adopted conceptually by technical committees:

1. The technical committees should facilitate exchange and dissemination of information among professional fisheries workers and among research and management entities.
2. Technical committees should serve to identify problem areas related to data and procedural deficiencies commonly shared by participants.
3. The technical committees should serve to advance science by providing a forum for the coordinated and cooperative resolution of identified problem areas.
4. As subunits of the professional Society, the technical committees should originate and evaluate the Society's positions on technical issues of importance.

The Review Committee concluded that these functions continue to be both appropriate and important but that the focus of technical committees should be structured more to the development of definable products.

The Prosser Report provided specific recommendations related to technical committee goals and objectives. Specifically, the Prosser Report recommended the development of a mission statement, a statement of objectives, and the production of annual reports in terms of stated objectives. However, not all technical committees have developed mission statements and objectives. Thus, the present report of the review Committee re-affirms these recommendations of the Prosser Report. The Prosser Report also recommended the creation of an Oversight Committee to evaluate the activities and accomplishments of technical committees every six years. Evaluation of technical committees by an Oversight Committee (chaired by the Vice President) was enacted. However, in the seven-year interim between evaluations, a technical committee may overlook the development of clear objectives for several years. The Review Committee concluded that a recommendation to have the Vice President provide an annual review of all technical committee objectives in addition to periodic review of individual technical committees, may provide the opportunity for more timely evaluation of committee focus and direction.

Statements by some technical committee chairs and agency fisheries chiefs indicated that the Division EXCOM should enact a stronger role in managing technical committees, including regulating the number of technical committees and the frequency of committee meetings. The Prosser Report attempted to address such concerns by providing recommendations designed to regulate the number and structure of technical

committees. The Review Committee concluded that the response to these Prosser Report recommendations and the majority of responses to the present questionnaires appear to suggest that technical committees and state agencies do not support arbitrary regulation by the Division EXCOM of the number and structure technical committees. However, the Review Committee has interpreted from the majority of responses by technical committees and agencies that the Division EXCOM's should play a stronger role in reviewing the goals and objectives of technical committees. After thorough review, it may be deemed by a technical committee and the Division necessary and beneficial to disband a technical committee to free Division members and resources to more effectively address technical issues.

Finally, technical committees are made up of dedicated volunteers. The successes to date regarding the technical committees and the technical committee system have been accomplished almost entirely as a result of the skills and commitment of volunteers who have made themselves available despite the competing demands on their time. These volunteers that make up technical committees deserve recognition for the work that they do. The Review Committee wishes to thank all members of Southern Division technical committees, past and present, for their time and talents.

APPENDIX ONE

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE RESPONSES

Some responses were similar and combined. Numbers in parentheses indicate number of responses. Committees elected to not respond to some questions or to provide more than one response.

1. Technical committees view their most important function as:
 1. Communication and information exchange (6)
 2. Supporting professional development
 3. Developing policy (2)
 4. Standardize methods and develop new approaches
 5. Developing research initiatives

2. Most important strengths:
 1. Skills and continuity of membership (5)
 2. Ability to effectively address the committee's mission through communication and information exchange (2)

3. Biggest weaknesses:
 1. Inability to effectively address emerging issues due to demands on time of members (2)
 2. Poor meeting attendance (5)
 3. Meeting attendance is often too large to be effective

4. Challenges:
 1. Poor meeting attendance (3)
 2. Limited funding
 3. Limited time and resources to commit to new projects
 4. Inability to quickly develop proactive cohesive responses to emerging issues (5).
 5. Remaining on leading edge of scientific methods regarding technical expertise (2)
 6. Reduced efficiency due to committee size
 7. Limited response/interest by members to deal with certain issues (2)

5. Suggestion to meet challenges:
 1. The annual meeting of the committee combined with interim work by members. (2)
 2. Prioritize and address one issue more completely rather than multiple issues less completely.
 3. Innovative ways to generate funds.
 4. Increased communication through use of committee list servers and web pages.
 5. Evaluate criteria for committee membership.

6. Critically evaluate the need for continuing the committee as presently scoped.
6. Is limited meeting attendance a concern?
 Yes (5)
 No (2)
 Two of those expressing concern related their concerns to attendance by state representatives; some states have strong representation, some irregular, and others have no representation at all.
7. Does the committee have a mission/purpose statement?
 Yes (5)
 No (2)
8. Does the committee have developed goals/objectives?
 Yes (4)
 No (3)
 NOTE: Two committees reported that action items are developed at each meeting but not regular goals/objectives
9. Was annual report prepared in terms of stated objectives?
 Yes (2)
 No (5)
 Most replied that reports are prepared for the annual meeting briefing book and describe the committees activities but may or may not describe how those activities related to the goals and objectives of the committee.
10. Is membership adequate to achieve goals?
 Yes (6)
 NOTE: Two committees stated that some states do not choose to provide representation and this has an effect on their committees.

 No
11. Limits on technical committee membership?
 No (4)
 Yes (3)
12. Term limits for members?
 No (7)
13. Criteria for membership:
 Open to anyone interested (7)
14. Do you believe you are addressing state agency needs and issues
 Yes (6)

As state representatives, the expectation is that they convey to the committee the agencies' needs and issues to be addressed. With one exception, chiefs are not contacted directly. In that exception, a committee distributed a survey to state agencies regarding committee activities.

15. Inform state agencies of committee activities?

1. Representatives responsibility to provide information on committee activities to their state (5)
2. Contact state chiefs directly (2)

16. Technical committees represent broad technical interest of the SDAFS?

- Yes (5)
Maybe (1)

17. Technical committee system meets the needs of the Division membership?

Yes (4)

No

Maybe (1)

- a. Some committees should consider combining to increase effectiveness.
- b. Number of ad-hoc committees should be reduced
- c. Division should play a stronger role in making recommended changes to the technical committee system.
- d. There is a need to evaluate the long-term goals of each committee and determine if those goals justify the continued existence of the committee. If not a sunset clause should be in affect by the Division to manage the growth of committees.

18. Meetings, how often and where?

- Mid-year (7)
SEAFWA (2)
Summer (2)

APPENDIX TWO

STATE AGENCY RESPONSES

Some responses were similar and combined. Numbers in parentheses indicate number of responses. Agencies elected to not respond to some questions or to provide more than one response.

1. View of function of technical committee:
 - a. Accomplish tasks to address agency needs more efficiently and effectively than the state can address those needs/regional approach (4)
 - b. Information sharing and problem solving (5)
 - c. Information sharing and problem solving toward a goal of a tangible product (2)
 - d. Professional development (1)
2. Most important strengths of the committees?
 - a. Ability to combine resources regionally and information exchange. (6)
 - b. State participation (2)
 - c. Commitment of committee members (2)
3. Biggest weaknesses?
 - a. Many don't appear to be effective.
 - b. Lack of focus/long-range planning and not having specific objectives to address real needs in a timely manner. (3)
 - c. Maintaining interest by having meaningful projects that justify a committee.
 - d. Low state participation (3)
 - e. Unequal state participation such that opinions/recommendations of committee are driven largely by selected states members.
 - f. Too many meetings per year.
4. Is technical committee meeting attendance a concern for your agency?
No (5)
Yes (4)
One state limited technical committee participation to 4 technical committees.
Proliferation of committee meetings at different times and locations is a concern that could be addressed by joint meetings.
5. Are financial/travel restrictions an issue for state's participation on technical committees?
No (generally but at whim of budget and may be more so in the future) (5)
Yes (4)
6. Criteria for selecting state agency representative
 - a. Expertise, interest and AFS membership (3)
 - b. Compatibility of the assigned duties of the individual and the mission of the committee (4)

c. Individual interest and area of responsibility. (3)

7. Do you feel informed about committee activities?

No (3)

Yes (6)

In most cases employees are asked to report on meeting attendance but this information may or may not be adequate. One state indicated that a more formal reporting process would be desirable.

8. Do you request information from state representatives regarding committee participation?

Yes (9)

9. Does the technical committee system meet needs?

a. Uncertain (2)

b. No (2)

c. Yes (4)

10. Suggestions for changes to technical committee system:

- a. Need for broader and timely communication from committees regarding their activities and products. (2). This includes providing copies of meeting minutes via the Division Newsletter and web site and direct communication to State Fisheries Chiefs.
- b. There is a need to evaluate the long-term goals of each committee and determine if those goals justify the continued existence of the committee. If not a sunset clause should be in affect by the Division to manage the growth of committees. If so, then clearly defined short-term objectives should be communicated to justify travel and meetings. (6)
- c. The number of committee meetings should be reduced to increase attendance and focus.
- d. Stand alone committee meetings not part of conferences draw attention to travel expenses and time commitments.
- e. The Division should play a stronger role in managing committee meeting times and locations, possibly coordinating them with the SEAFWA Program Committee meeting.