

**Preliminary Comments from Members of the Chartered SAB on the SAB  
Draft Report SAB Recommendations for EPA’s FY2013 Scientific and  
Technological Achievement Awards**

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## **Comments from lead reviewers**

### **Comments from Dr. Taylor Eighmy**

#### **Overall Comments:**

##### **1. General Thoughts:**

The STAA Committee, Chairman Daston, and DFO Hanlon are to be commended for conducting an excellent STAA process for FY2013. This past year for the STAA Committee is perhaps unique given the budget situation for the agency and that fact that no monetary awards could be recommended. The fact that no nominations were selected for the highest-level award is not problematic; rather it reflects a robust process. The recommendations made for EPA to consider around next year's STAA process are all excellent. Further, the recommendation about shortening the time frame of award decision and notification of the award recipient is particularly important.

##### **2. Mapping the Report to the Letter to the Administrator and to the Executive Summary:**

The summary letter to Administrator McCarthy is concise, informative, well crafted and appropriately balanced in its description of the process, the general information about awards made, and recommendations to improve the process.

The letter, executive summary and the body of the report map well with regards to the background of the STAA process, the approach used, the review outcomes, and the recommendations to the Agency.

##### **3. Report Organization:**

The report is well organized and clear to follow and aligns well with the evolving approach used by the STAA Committee to report its outcomes.

#### **Response to the Four Specific Questions:**

##### **1. Were the original charge questions to the Panel adequately addressed?**

Not directly applicable, but the STAA Committee did fully and completely meet its responsibilities.

##### **2. Are there any technical errors or omissions in the report or issues that are inadequately dealt with?**

None.

##### **3. Is the report clear and logical?**

I found the report to be very clear and logical.

**4. Are the conclusions drawn or recommendations provided supported by the body of the report?**

Yes.

## Comments from Dr. Nancy Kim

### General Statement

The Committee's report is well-written and supports its recommendations.

### Questions

1. Were the charge questions adequately addressed?

Yes.

2. Are there any technical errors or omissions in the report or issues that are not adequately dealt with in the draft report?

None that I noticed.

3. Is the report clear and logical?

Yes, except in a few places as noted below.

a. The last sentence of the fourth paragraph in the letter to the Administrator is a recommendation that may not get as much attention as it deserves. The recommendation would have more prominence if it were at the beginning of the paragraph, followed by the supporting information.

b. The last paragraph in the letter to the Administrator includes a recommendation to have scientists "disseminate their work in different forms than traditional print journals." If the Committee's intention is to allow these different forms to be submitted for STAA reviews, specifically noting that would be helpful.

c. Table 1, footnote a, page 3 of the report. The committee should consider referring the reader to the second bullet on page 6 of the report.

d. Page 6 of the report, third bullet. In the last sentence consider changing the words "should be included" to "should be required."

e. The last bulleted recommendation in the letter to the Administrator is on the last page of the report in the last sentence of the second bullet; most of that second bullet highlights a different recommendation. The committee should consider if the recommendation (i.e. the last bulleted recommendation in the letter to the Administrator) should be given its own paragraph in the report.

4. Are the conclusion drawn or recommendations provided supported by the body of the draft report?

Yes.

## **Comments from other SAB Members**

### **Comments from Dr. David Dzombak**

1) Were the charge questions to the committee adequately addressed?

Yes, the charge questions were adequately addressed.

2) Are there any technical errors or omissions or issues that are not adequately dealt with in the draft report?

I found no technical errors or omissions.

3) Is the draft report clear and logical?

Yes, the draft report is clear and logical. The explanation of the absence of Level I awards is appropriate and clearly presented.

4) Are the conclusions drawn or recommendations provided supported by the body of the draft report?

Yes, the conclusions and recommendations are adequately supported in the body of the report.



## Comments from Dr. Robert Johnston

1) Were the charge questions to the committee adequately addressed?

Yes, the report has adequately addressed the charge questions, in this case by providing the required recommendations for *FY2013 Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards*. The committee provided useful guidance for improving future nomination procedures and administration of the STAA program.

There were no Level I recommendations (according to Table 2, there have been at least 3 Level I recommendations every other year since 2003), and a decline in Level II recommendations to the lowest level since 2005. The number of submissions (103) is also lower than the average of the prior ten years (121.6). The committee “does not find this an issue for concern and assures the EPA that its scientists are doing high quality work.” I agree that EPA scientists are doing high quality work. Nonetheless, I would recommend attention to these results in future years to assess whether the 2013 results are indeed an aberration (as suggested by the committee), or rather reflect some sort of trend, for example in the extent to which EPA scientists are submitting their work for publication in peer reviewed outlets.

2) Are there any technical errors or omissions or issues that are not adequately dealt with in the draft report?

There appear to be no technical errors or major omissions in the report. Given the relevance of economic analysis to EPA decisions, I was surprised that none of the STAA categories explicitly address economics or benefit cost analysis. It appears that research in these areas would be placed into broader categories such as “Environmental Policy and Decision-Making Studies,” or “Industry and the Environment.” I wonder whether the absence of a targeted category in this area diminishes submissions from the economic sciences.

3) Is the draft report clear and logical?

Yes, the report is clear and logical.

4) Are the conclusions drawn or recommendations provided supported by the body of the draft report?

The conclusions and recommendations regarding the STAA process are supported by the body of the report.

## **Comments from Dr. Francine Laden**

1) Were the charge questions to the committee adequately addressed?

The committee adequately reviewed the nominations procedures and guidelines for the STAA award process. Their recommendations appear to be right on target in terms of clarifications of and requirements for documentation of nominations, timelines, etc.

2) Are there any technical errors or omissions or issues that are not adequately dealt with in the draft report?

There do not appear to be any technical errors

3) Is the draft report clear and logical?

The draft report is clearly and logically written. However, the charge questions are not specifically referred to.

4) Are the conclusions drawn or recommendations provided supported by the body of the draft report?

The conclusions drawn and recommendations are supported by the body of the report.

**Comments from Dr. Elizabeth Matsui**

1. Were the charge questions adequately addressed?

YES

2. Are there any technical errors or omissions in the report or issues that are not adequately dealt with in the report?

NO

3. Is the draft report clear and logical?

YES

4. Are the conclusions drawn or recommendation provided supported by the body of the draft report?

YES

**Comments from Dr. Amanda Rodewald**

1) Were the charge questions to the committee adequately addressed?

Yes.

2) Are there any technical errors or omissions or issues that are not adequately dealt with in the draft report?

No.

3) Is the draft report clear and logical?

Yes.

4) Are the conclusions drawn or recommendations provided supported by the body of the draft report?

Yes.

**Comments from Dr. James Sanders**

1) Were the charge questions to the committee adequately addressed?

Yes, the committee adequately carried out the charge.

2) Are there any technical errors or omissions or issues that are not adequately dealt with in the draft report?

No.

3) Is the draft report clear and logical?

Yes, the authors have developed a clear and readable report.

4) Are the conclusions drawn or recommendations provided supported by the body of the draft report?

Yes, the recommendations provided are logical and supported by past and present deliberations. I fully support the recommendations for future STAA competitions. While it is not possible to review the decisions, the determinations followed were appropriate.

## **Comments from Dr. Daniel Stram**

1. Were the charge questions adequately addressed?

The report provides a list of recommendations for STAA awards chosen from among the nominees, and suggestions for improving the award procedures and nominations. The selection process (as described in the report) seems to be fair and appropriate, and the recommendations for procedural improvement seem reasonable and aligned with EPA's intentions in the STAA award process.

2. Are there any technical errors or omissions in the report or issues that are not adequately dealt with in the draft report?

N/A

3. Is the draft report clear and logical?

The recommendations procedural improvement are clear and seem to be appropriate.

4. Are the conclusions drawn or recommendations provided supported by the body of the draft report?

Recommendations are withheld pending completion of quality review.

**Comments from Dr. Peter Thorne**

Q1. Charge was fully addressed.

Q2. I find no technical errors or emissions.

Q3. The draft report is clear.

Q4. The recommendations are fully supported in the draft report.

**Comments from Dr. Paige Tolbert**

The report from the SAB provides helpful recommendations regarding how to improve the process for soliciting and compiling nominations. But it begs the question: why weren't any of the nominations recommended for the level 1 award? EPA scientists are doing terrific work and this should be recognized. The report indicates that the lack of level 1 award recommendations should not be taken as an indication that the quality of work is sub-standard but clearly this is the message that will be received. For the qual review, we are not provided the nominations due to confidentiality concerns; therefore it is not possible to assess the quality of the submissions. Regardless, my view is that we should recognize and reward the scientists at EPA for their outstanding contributions. I'd suggest that the STAA committee revisit and recalibrate their assessments and consider moving the top level 2 recommendations into the level 1 category.

**Comments from Dr. Jeanne VanBriesen**

Were the charge questions adequately addressed?

I could not find the exact charge questions, but assuming the charge was to review the award nominations and decisions, this was adequately addressed.

Are there any technical errors or omissions in the report or issues that are not adequately dealt with in the draft report?

I found no technical errors or omissions.

Is the draft report clear or logical?

The draft is clear and logical.

Are the conclusions drawn or recommendations provided supported by the body of the draft report?

Yes, the conclusions are supported by the report.

**Comments from Dr. John Vena**

1. Were the charge questions adequately addressed?

YES

2. Are there are any technical errors or omissions in the report or issues that are not adequately dealt with in the draft report?

NO

3. Is the draft report clear and logical?

Yes

4. Are the conclusions drawn or recommendations provided supported by the body of the draft report?

NO. The cover letter of the report states; "However, none of this year's nominations met the strict criteria for the highest level award." The report merely states that no level I awards were selected. The report should state that none of the nominations met the strict criteria for the highest award and why! In the previous 10 years 2-5% of the awards received level I awards. It seems hard to believe that not even one of the nominations would meet the criteria for a level I award.

