

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Council Members
FROM: Jim H. Branson
Executive Director
DATE: August 9, 1985
SUBJECT: Council Chairmen's Meeting

ACTION REQUIRED

1. Summary of Chairmen's meeting.
2. Assign workgroup for FY88 budget series.
3. Approve Council liaison position in Washington, DC.

BACKGROUND

Council Chairmen met at Alderbrook Resort on Hood Canal on July 29-31. Discussions were wide-ranging and covered such topics as reauthorization, a NMFS-sponsored evaluation of operations under MFCMA, a Council/NOAA task group study, budgets, and administrative matters. They also considered having a full-time liaison representative for the Councils in Washington, D.C. These topics are summarized below with the exception of reauthorization which is under agenda item III.

A. Council/NOAA Task Force Study

Last February in Hilo the Council Chairmen and prospective NOAA Administrator Calio agreed to establish a small NMFS/Council task group to examine the present fishery management process and the respective roles of the Councils and involved federal agencies. The main purpose is to determine if the current arrangements best satisfy the mandates of the Act. The task group was instructed to:

1. Review the Magnuson Act to clearly define goals and objectives.
2. Determine tasks necessary to achieve these goals and objectives.
3. Identify institutional ways to accomplish these tasks.
4. Determine how to most effectively and efficiently accomplish these tasks.

Dick Roe (NMFS Central Office), Bob Martin and John Green (Chairmen, Mid-Atlantic and Gulf Councils) were named to the task group. They developed and sent questionnaires focusing on each section of the Act to all Councils, SSCs, APs, and NMFS Regional Offices. The responses were reviewed at Alderbrook and they generally indicated that the present Council/NMFS system seems to be the best arrangement to carry out the goals and objectives of the Act though some fine tuning could be useful. The task group will meet August 28-29 in Washington, DC to consolidate responses and the Council Chairmen's discussion into a working document for NOAA. After the Councils' review of this final report it will be used by NOAA as input to the broader OMB/NMFS Fisheries Study noted below.

B. OMB/NMFS Fisheries Study

OMB apparently has directed NMFS to do a broader study of fisheries management in the United States and its cost effectiveness under current institutional arrangements. The study is estimated to cost \$200,000 and an RFP will be released shortly. This study will be completed by next summer and its recommendations will be presented to the Secretary of Commerce for use in recommending possible changes in MFCMA and related institutions.

C. Inspector General's Report

Council Chairmen reviewed the Office of the Inspector General's final report entitled, "Opportunities for Cost Reductions and Operational Efficiencies in Managing Fishery Resources." An earlier version openly critical of Council operations and based on little Council input was reviewed at the Chairmen's meeting last February. Among other things, the report concluded that the present structure of the Councils may not be the most efficient or economic and that action should be taken to (1) determine if some Councils should be combined; (2) establish whether the Councils' administrative staffs should be reduced by using NOAA administrative support; and (3) obtain assurance from the Councils that they will use existing technical resources whenever possible to support their plan development and modification efforts.

Responding to Council complaints about inaccuracies in the first draft, Acting NOAA Administrator Calio said he would stop the report from being published in final form so that a small task force could study Council operations, and would request the IG's office to contact each of the Councils.

Council Executive Directors and Administrative Officers met on Friday before the Alderbrook meeting to review Council operations with NMFS and NOAA administrative support personnel. They concluded that although the system could be fine tuned, changes recommended in the IG report would not produce any significant savings. Ann Terbush of NMFS was requested to write a suitable response to the draft IG report.

Unfortunately, this response will come too late because, as the Council Chairmen found out during their meeting, the IG had already printed his final report with little additional Council input. In the final report the IG did not change his recommendations but merely rebutted arguments against assertions in the earlier draft. So the report will stand as a final document without much recourse by the Councils.

D. Budget Review

Bill Gordon reviewed fisheries budgets and presented the typically bleak picture of level funding with little left over for programmatic requests. He stressed the need for defining measurable Council goals and objectives by which performance could be evaluated and he encouraged Councils to become involved in the early NMFS budget process for FY88.

The Councils discussed strategies for assuring adequate funding, including whether it was best to be within the NMFS budget, have a special appropriation, be a line item in the Commerce budget, and other alternatives. No conclusions were drawn but a small committee was established to work with NMFS on its FY88 budget. Nominated to the committee were Joe Easley (Pacific), Wadsworth Yee (Western Pacific), O'Neal Sanders (South Atlantic) and John Winther, Chairman of our Finance Committee. They will meet over the next four-to-six months to hammer out funding priorities for fisheries.

The Council should establish a small workgroup to concentrate on budget needs and make recommendations that John can carry forth to the inter-Council group.

E. Council Liaison in Washington, DC

The Chairmen discussed having a Council liaison staff in Washington, DC to bird dog changes to the Act and shepherd FMPs and amendments through the review process. The person would be funded cooperatively by all eight Councils and housed in the NMFS-DC office. The Chairmen agreed to discuss the idea with their respective Councils and attempt to secure agreement that if at least five of the eight Council approve the concept, all Councils will provide their share of the required funding.

Our Council's Finance Committee will review a budget and job description. We need Council approval of the concept and to provide our fair share of the funding.