



Local Knowledge, Traditional Knowledge, and Subsistence Taskforce REPORT

June 22, 2023: 8:30am-5pm AKDT

Teleconference

Taskforce members in attendance:

Kate Haapala (co-Chair, NPFMC), Sarah Wise (co-Chair, AFSC-NMFS), Toby Anungazuk Jr. (Golovin), Robert Murphy (APU), Julie Raymond-Yakoubian (Kawerak, Inc.), Richard Slats (Chevak), Simeon Swetzof (St. Paul), Bridget Mansfield (NMFS), and Alida Trainor (ADF&G)

Members absent:

Rachel Donkersloot (Coastal Cultures Research) and Darcy Peter (Beaver)

Others in attendance:

John Ross (Ocean Conservancy), Rose Bennet (Calista Corp.), Mateo Paz Soldan (St. Paul), Curt Chamberlin (Calista Corp.), Ernie Weiss (AEB), Karli Tyance Hassell (APU), Sarah Murrinan (NPFMC), and Jackie Boyer (NPA)

Introductions

The co-Chairs of the Local Knowledge, Traditional Knowledge, and Subsistence (LKTKS) Taskforce opened the meeting with introductions and provided an overview of the agenda. At the April 2023 meeting, the Council authorized one additional meeting for the Taskforce to achieve four distinct goals. The purpose of this meeting was for the Taskforce to 1) review and discuss the input it received from the Council and the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in April; 2) review and discuss input from Council staff regarding the LKTKS Protocol and onramp recommendations; 3) review and discuss the [public comments](#) received during the extended review period; 4) and discuss the resources and capacity needed for implementation.

Review of Council, SSC, and Staff Input

Under this section of the agenda, Kate Haapala provided an overview of the input the Taskforce received from the Council, the SSC, and Council staff.¹ A summary of the input that was reviewed by the Taskforce is available in the [presentation](#) from the June meeting. The primary points of the Taskforce's dialogue are captured below in no particular order of importance.

The Council asked the Taskforce to include additional language under Guideline 1 in the LKTKS Protocol noting the Council is required to balance the National Standards. There was discussion around this request as some Taskforce members noted the Council is required to follow the National Standards

¹ At the April 2023 Council meeting, the Council requested Council analytical staff review finalized materials and provide their input for Taskforce consideration.



rather than balance them. Council staff provided input that the Council and NMFS are required to consider and balance all the National Standards when making management recommendations to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce. Some National Standards are mandatory (like National Standard 2) while others require consideration “to the extent practicable” (National Standard 9) or consideration of other factors like the importance of fishery resources to fishing communities (National Standard 8).

Taskforce members supported the inclusion of additional questions at the start of the template per the Council’s request. Specifically, the Council asked for the analytical template to be modified to include questions like “are there any known impacts to subsistence resources from this action?” and “have any Tribal Consultations or engagement sessions relevant to this action occurred?” Taskforce members agreed that these questions are relevant to the Taskforce’s work, and in particular, the Council’s original goal for this Taskforce in the Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan—understanding how Council actions and removals of commercially important fish stocks impact subsistence resources—prior the Council’s modifications at the February 2020 Council meeting in Seattle, WA.²

In April, the Council asked the Taskforce to discuss whether standardizing the public comment time limit across the SSC, the Advisory Panel (AP), and Council to 5 minutes for all testifiers would address the Taskforce’s onramp recommendation to not start the oral testimony timer until after the testifier has provided introductions. The Taskforce supports standardizing the time allowed for oral testimony to 5 minutes for all three bodies, but this change would not be sufficient to address the Taskforce’s onramp recommendation to start the oral testimony timer after introductions for all members of the public. As such, **the Taskforce recommends the Council standardize the oral testimony time limit to 5 minutes for all bodies and would like to see the Council support the onramp recommendation to direct administrative staff to start the timer after the testifier provides an introduction.**

The Taskforce considered how the Council could demonstrate respect when Western science and TK may disagree. The Taskforce agreed that Guideline 8 in the LKTKS Protocol provides information to this end. Some Taskforce members suggested the Council could demonstrate respect when Western science and TK may disagree, and the Council’s decision reflects the guidance provided by Western science by addressing this choice in its rationale supporting the motion. Providing rationale that explains what knowledge systems the Council’s decision (i.e., motion) is based on, and why, would build a more robust administrative record, provide transparency to the public, and help to demonstrate respect.

Finally, the Council asked the Taskforce to provide guidance on how the Council and analytical staff can build trust and relationships that endure (e.g., beyond turnover in staff or Council membership). The Taskforce noted turnover is an issue endemic to all Federal agencies, decision-making bodies and staff, including Tribal governments and Tribal Consortia. The Taskforce agreed that adopting the Protocol and the LKTKS Policy Statement would provide a starting point for enduring relationships and trust as it indicates a long-term commitment; written statements and adoption of written materials also provide a clear signpost of the Council’s priorities which are often revisited by future Councils, staff, and the public. Some Taskforce members also suggested that, if possible, it would be beneficial to have an overlapping period of outgoing and incoming staff to exchange institutional knowledge and make introductions to build on existing networks.

The Taskforce reviewed the input from the SSC and did not have significant dialogue on their April 2023 report; some issues raised by the SSC are for the Council’s consideration (e.g., support for a 5-year

² The Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan can be found here:
<https://meetings.npfmc.org/CommentReview/DownloadFile?p=c334ad33-4139-4b5a-b205-a8b7c5028562.pdf&fileName=D6%20Final%20BS%20FEP%20Jan%202019.pdf>



review should the Council adopt the Protocol and initiate work on onramp recommendations), while the Taskforce has previously reached consensus on other suggestions. For example, the SSC suggested the Taskforce consider specific decision-informing reports like the Ecosystem Status Report or the Annual Community Engagement and Participation Overview report as onramps. The Taskforce has been consistent in its belief that anywhere Western science is used to inform decision-making, so too is LKTKS information. As such, better including LKTKS information into decision-informing reports is an issue of capacity (i.e., greater social science research focused on LKTKS to incorporate meaningfully into those reports) rather than identifying the right reports.

The input from Council analytical staff largely focused on issues related to capacity and implementation which are covered in the written report below.

Extended Public Comment Period Review

At the April 2023 Council meeting, the Council authorized a 50-day extended public review period of Taskforce materials, namely the LKTKS Protocol and onramp recommendations. Sarah Wise provided an overview of the extended public comment period and a high-level summary of the 34 comments that were received. Public comments shared certain themes including the idea that the Protocol will support the use of the best scientific information available (National Standard 2), enable better representation of diverse knowledge systems and those that hold them, inform decision-making, and improve the overall process.

All public comment letters supported the adoption of the Protocol and implementation of at least some of the onramp recommendations. However, some public comment letters raised issues for the Taskforce to consider. For example, there was a suggestion that “Local Knowledge/LK” should be lowercased which is a more customary approach, but the Taskforce did not agree with this change; instead, the Taskforce decided to leave terminology as it is in the documents to be consistent with its prior approach, noting there are differences between LK and TK but both knowledge systems are legitimate. It was suggested the Taskforce develop a more streamlined version of the Protocol, but Taskforce members felt the LKTKS Policy Statement fulfills that request and that a glossy would require additional staff time that could be used to achieve other goals for the Council in a potential implementation phase.

Capacity and Resources for Implementation

The Taskforce had significant dialogue on the capacity and resources required for implementing the LKTKS Protocol and/or onramps. The Taskforce identified three primary resources needed for implementation: personnel, time, and partnerships. The following section provides more information on each resource.

The Taskforce agrees that, fundamentally, **implementing the Protocol and onramp recommendations to their fullest potential, and in a holistic way, would require additional analytical Council staff and social scientists at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center with experience working with LKTKS.** That said, the Taskforce’s conversation on the capacity and resources needed for implementation was couched in a broader context of current financial constraints limiting the Council’s ability to hire additional staff or backfill retiring staff.³ In light of this reality, the Taskforce discussed the importance of providing analytical staff sufficient (if not additional) time to incorporate LKTKS information into their analyses.

³ In the meeting, the Taskforce also discussed that the current budget issues facing the Council extend beyond a consideration of hiring additional staff to support work related to LKTKS, including the Council’s recent consideration of options to adjust its meeting cycle.



The Taskforce is aware of the tradeoff – allowing for longer analytical timelines (i.e., more time prior to Initial Review) would potentially slow down an action’s timeline which may be undesirable for some Tribes, communities, and fishery stakeholders. However, National Standard 2 requires the use of the best scientific information available which includes LK and TK.

However, one issue raised by analytical staff is what to do if there is no written or documented form of LK or TK available to inform the Council’s action. The Taskforce suggests the analysts explain the approach used to identify and collect sources of LK, TK, and/or subsistence information in the analytical document, and describe what results were returned including the absence of usable information. Related, the Taskforce suggests that Council staff could, internally, keep an informal running list of actions or issues that did not return usable social science of LK, TK, and/or subsistence. This list could be periodically shared and reviewed by the Social Sciences Planning Team, SSC, and funding organizations such as the North Pacific Research Board, during their research priorities process.

In light of the current capacity constraints (e.g., analytical staff, current workloads and tradeoffs with Council priorities, and limited funding to hire additional staff), the Council could consider formal partnerships (e.g., a Memorandum of Understanding) with Tribal Consortia and other organizations that have access to LK and TK. These agreements could function as data sharing agreements which could be discrete and formed for a specific issue or a standing agreement. Forming such agreements could take two to three months at the start of an action.

Onramp recommendations

One onramp for incorporating LKTKS information into the Council’s decision-making process is to host a workshop in concert with its research priorities process to solicit broad public input on core research questions and priorities. If the Council implements this onramp, the SSC suggested the workshop occur earlier in the process than the originally suggested timeline from the Taskforce to allow sufficient time to facilitate the effective inclusion of diverse perspectives on research priorities. **The Taskforce agrees with this suggestion. However, the Taskforce discussed there is a mismatch in timing for the 2024 research priorities cycle.** The SSC is scheduled to take up research priorities at its February 2024 meeting and finalize the research priorities in April 2024. This timeline would require a workshop to be held in January 2024, potentially allowing for three months of planning (October 2023 final action to January 2024). This is not sufficient time to plan the workshop and communicate with members of the public, particularly LK and TK holders.

As such, if the Council implements this onramp recommendation at the October 2023 Council meeting, the Taskforce recommends that Council staff and the SSC research priorities subgroup take a different approach to communicating the research priorities process for the 2024 cycle. Specific ideas discussed at the Taskforce meeting include Council staff creating a post for the Council’s Facebook page which would allow fishing and Tribal organizations to further circulate the post or writing formal letters could be mailed to Tribal governments and Consortia to notify them of the opportunity to participate. The Taskforce also recommended a public workshop in advance of the 2027 research priorities cycle would be effective for better incorporating LK, TK, and subsistence. The Taskforce discussed whether the Social Sciences Planning Team could be an effective forum for soliciting and vetting social science research priorities, particularly those related to LK and TK observations and impacts to subsistence resources or users, but that advisory body does not yet have the capacity to do this.

Finally, the Taskforce recognizes that, should the Council adopt the LKTKS Protocol and/or implement onramp recommendations, Council staff will play a significant role in carrying out that work. Each



onramp recommendation requires a different degree of staff time and involvement and the Taskforce agreed to modify the onramps document to capture these tradeoffs in staff time and resources for the Council's consideration in October.

Public testimony

The LKTKS Taskforce did not receive written public comments in advance of the meeting, nor did it receive oral testimony in the meeting. There was, however, substantial engagement from the public throughout the meeting.