

Council workshops

In June 2018, the Council received a final report on the Ecosystem Workshop held in February 2018. Feedback from Council members, advisory groups, and stakeholders on the workshop were uniformly positive, especially in relation to the opportunity the workshop provided for inclusive and informative dialogue between stakeholders, experts, and Council participants. As such, the Council made a motion in staff tasking to ask staff to prepare a report on the potential for the Council to hold periodic forums to address ecosystem science or other topics that would benefit from public dialogue. This short paper provides a discussion of how forums could be organized in order to achieve the benefits that the Council identified, and potential topics that could be of interest to the Council in future.

Forums that have been used in the Council process

The Ecosystem Workshop is one example of Council forums for information exchange, but not the only one that the Council has employed. Below is a brief summary of the types of engagement forums that the Council has used in recent years.

2018 Ecosystem Workshop

The 2018 Ecosystem Workshop was the first of its kind held by the Council. It was an all-day affair, it was held in the middle of the Council week, and it was designed around the expected participation of all of the groups that generally participate in the Council meeting (the Council, SSC, AP, and Ecosystem Committee) as well as members of the public. There were two primary goals identified for the Ecosystem Workshop. The first was to provide an overview of current science on the impacts of climate change, and the robustness of the management framework with respect to long-term environmental shifts. The second was to provide an opportunity for Council members, scientific and industry advisors, and stakeholders to discuss how the Council community can stay informed of and provide input into scientific efforts, and use them in the Council process.

The format was purposely designed with a plenary session to give all persons an opportunity to receive the same information (with assigned seating to mix Council-AP-SSC-Ecosystem Committee members at tables), followed by breakout groups that allowed for discussion. The breakout groups at first mixed everyone together, and then broke the participants out into groups defined by their role in the process (e.g., SSC, AP, Council). A final plenary session allowed each breakout group to summarize their discussion for the whole group.

Implementing the workshop took a substantial amount of time and effort. We were fortunate to be able to afford to contract with Fisheries Forum to do a majority of the planning work, to facilitate at the meeting itself, and to write the summary report. Even so, workshop planning took up a considerable amount of time between November and February for the Council staff coordinator (Diana Evans), the workshop Steering Committee (which included representatives from the Council, AP, SSC, and AFSC), presenters, and Shannon Gleason (working with the hotel on logistics).

Evening meetings or workshops at a Council meeting

More frequently, the way in which the Council will engage in dialogue with the public in a less formal way than through testimony is with an evening session. While there are many evening sessions scheduled by other individuals or organizations wanting to convey information of relevance to Council constituents (including those organized by experts in ecosystem science), from time-to-time the Council organizes evening meetings or workshops on issues for which they specifically want to get input.

A recent example, in June 2018, was the informal outreach and listening session on rural participation and entry-level opportunity in the halibut and sablefish IFQ fisheries, held as an evening session during the

Council's meeting in Kodiak. Although this was not convened as an official Council event, it was organized by two Council members and attended by Council staff acting as rapporteurs. Staff summarized the discussion in a presentation to the Council in staff tasking.

The Council has also hosted other workshops in the last few years. In October 2017, there was an outreach session on the Salmon FMP; in April 2016, an IFQ crew workshop; in October 2014, a scoping session on developing the Bering Sea FEP, and in February 2014, two workshops on Bering Sea canyon data and Community Fishing Associations. The Council also held a halibut abundance-based management workshop in February 2017, where the Council and AP adjourned for a half a day to allow members to attend the workshop.

The degree to which these events allow for information exchange among Council members, experts, and the public depends on how the workshop is structured, and whether there is an opportunity for dialogue among participants. In most cases, it is not required that Council members attend, and usually participation from the Council, AP, and SSC is limited to those members whose particular interest is captured by the workshop topic.

The Council also periodically hosts workshops outside of a Council meeting, often when the subject matter requires a longer time period to address. These tend to focus on more technical issues. For example, the Council Plan Teams hosted a two-day stock assessment methods workshop in June 2018 in Seattle.

Outreach trips

The Council has also used outreach trips to engage with stakeholders. These have generally entailed a combination of staff persons and Council members attending a meeting in a rural Alaska community. While the majority of these trips have focused on the Council's actions regarding salmon bycatch, there have also been trips to the western GOA during the GOA trawl allocation deliberations, and in June 2017 to St Paul. These trips can be very effective for learning firsthand about how a Council issue affects rural communities, but generally are limited to only one or two Council members per trip.

What works?

In thinking about the Council's motion to consider how to continue the inclusive and informative dialogue that occurred at the 2018 Ecosystem Workshop, it helps to consider what makes a workshop effective.

- Staff time/contract money for planning: First, while the all-day Ecosystem Workshop was successful, its planning took a lot of time and effort. This either requires having a budget to contract with a planner and facilitator or dedicating a full-time staff position in the lead-up to the workshop to ensure that it will run smoothly and be of value. The longer the duration of the workshop, the more planning time is required.
- Participation: The workshop was also successful because it was scheduled as a non-optional part of the Council meeting, and Council, AP, SSC, and Ecosystem Committee members were highly encouraged to attend and actively participate. One of the difficulties with evening sessions at the Council meeting is that people are often exhausted after a long day of meetings, and find it more difficult to engage, even when the topic is interesting. The Council has occasionally in the past hosted other workshops that occur associated with the Council meeting but during the daytime, with greater participation. The problem, however, is that our Council meetings routinely last 8-9 days as it is and adding a daytime workshop either requires adjourning the meeting to allow everyone to participate, or not allowing some persons to participate (for example, if the workshop occurs on the first Monday or Tuesday, the SSC and/or the AP would not be able to participate).

- Facilitators and small group sessions: The workshop was divided into a plenary session of speakers, and a series of facilitated breakout groups. While there were opportunities to ask questions of the plenary speakers, there was much more opportunity for dialogue in the smaller breakout groups, and participants felt empowered to express their opinions or questions. In addition, having facilitators meant that people who may otherwise not be inclined to speak out in a larger group were specifically encouraged to participate in the group discussion.
- Tangible theme: One particularly effective decision with respect to the Ecosystem Workshop was to organize the general discussion of climate change impacts around a topic that was personally relevant to most participants in the workshop, the GOA cod collapse. Focusing the discussions around an accessible topic allowed all participants to draw on their own experience to make the concept of climate change planning tangible. This made it easier for all parties to engage.
- Outcome: It is important to think about what is the desired outcome of the workshop during the planning process. Is the goal to end with specific next steps and an action plan for how to achieve them (whether actually at the meeting, or through subsequent Council deliberation)? In this case it is very important to have rapporteurs during each of the sessions, and to come up with a report to document the discussions and ideas for moving forward. Alternatively, the goal may be less about a specific outcome, but rather an opportunity to build relationships among different participants in the Council process. This can be focused on relationships between the Council and members of the different advisory bodies, and/or Council members and stakeholders. In this case, the record of the workshop is less important than providing the opportunity for dialogue during the course of the workshop.

Potential topics for further Council workshops

The Council also asked staff to explore potential topics that might be considered for future Council workshops. The following provides a starting point for some potential issues, but further discussion is merited.

Ecosystem topics (from the 2018 Ecosystem Workshop report)

- Shifting stock distributions: The Council could support a focused discussion of changes in stock distribution.
- Gradual vs. abrupt changes: The Council could reflect on the difference between gradual or incremental and abrupt changes, including the implications for scientists' ability to detect changes and red flags and implications for a management response.
- Management flexibility and resilience: The Council could examine whether current management strategies limit or impede flexibility, and how resilience could be enhanced.
- Robustness of management strategies: The Council could consider the robustness of management strategies to abrupt changes in abundance and distribution, and specific challenges that might arise, such as bycatch constraints.
- Management options and scenarios: The Council could consider how to support an iterative process between scientists, managers, and stakeholders to frame management options and scenarios to explore through management strategy evaluation (MSE).
- Prioritization: The Council could examine its priorities with regard to integrating climate and ecosystem-related information and planning for change and identify next steps that are most important to achieving its conservation and management objectives.

- Integrating scientific initiatives with management: The Council could engage in a big-picture strategic discussion of how to integrate scientific initiatives with the management process (including specific projects, funding sources, and research opportunities), as well as how to integrate the full breadth of ecosystem information and considerations into future decisions. (In other words, “connecting the dots” and “putting it all together” to support the management process.)
- ACLIM: The Council could continue to engage in dialogue with AFSC scientists regarding the Alaska Climate Integrated Modeling Project (ACLIM).

Other topics related to Council priorities

- IFQ access opportunities: The Council has heard from stakeholders who perceive a dramatic reduction in opportunities to participate in the fishery that has occurred in the course of a single generation and are interested in the Council exploring potential solutions.
- Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan Action Modules: The Council is reviewing a draft FEP for the Bering Sea at the October Council meeting. As part of the FEP framework, the Council will be considering when and how to initiate specific research projects that relate to ecosystem-based fishery management in the Bering Sea. Some proposed action modules that would merit further stakeholder engagement include:
 - Incorporating traditional knowledge into the Council management process
 - Developing ecosystem indicators (biological and socioeconomic) for monitoring the Council’s ecosystem objectives for the Bering Sea, and that can serve as early warning indicators of ecosystem change.

Staff recommendations

Staff recognizes, along with the Council, the value of events such as the 2018 Ecosystem Workshop for jumpstarting informal dialogue. Given the cost in time and money of planning the workshop, however, staff recommend that such an all-day workshop not be an annual occurrence. There appear, however, to be lessons to learn from the Ecosystem Workshop that could be applied to other Council forums. In the last five years, the Council has generally hosted some kind of workshop or outreach meeting approximately 1-2 times a year.

For example, the Council might consider adjourning for at least part of the day, so that a shorter workshop can occur in the daytime while Council/AP/SSC members are sufficiently refreshed to engage. The Council could actively request members to participate in the workshop. Or the Council might consider hosting evening sessions with a facilitator who encourages all participants to speak. In all cases, the success of these workshops also depends on setting clear objectives in advance as to the goal/outcome of the workshop, and it is helpful to focus in on a specific question or theme that has direct relevance to most participants.

Another option that might be useful to explore is the possibility of using technological tools to extend the opportunity for virtual stakeholder engagement with Council members, during a specific online workshop. Our staff recently participated successfully in a virtual workshop hosted by the National Science Foundation using the Zoom platform; similar services are also offered through Adobe Connect, which we already use for audio broadcasting our meetings. This would have the advantage of affordably being able to connect more Council members with stakeholders who are unable to regularly travel to our meetings. Note that planning for a successful online workshop will still require considerable staff effort, especially until we become conversant with the software, but it could be a useful investment of time if the Council sees value in such an opportunity.