

## Council Communications

While each of the eight Fishery Management Councils is very different, the communication staff of each Council has similar roles to inform and educate the public, stakeholders and interested parties in the management of the federal fisheries. The President's Open Government Directive states:

The three principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration form the cornerstone of an open government. Transparency promotes accountability by providing the public with information about what the Government is doing. Participation allows members of the public to contribute ideas and expertise so that their government can make policies with the benefit of information that is widely dispersed in society. Collaboration improves the effectiveness of Government by encouraging partnerships and cooperation within the Federal Government, across levels of government, and between the Government and private institution.

In April 2012, the first in-person meeting of the Communications staff of the Fishery Management Councils was convened in Kona, Hawaii, in conjunction with the Councils Coordinating Committee (CCC) and hosted by the Western Pacific Council. The CCC adopted the findings of the Communications staff including the recommendation that the "communications committee hold a face-to-face meeting annually to discuss shared best practices and ways to improve regional and national communication."

This current meeting in February 2016 is the first in-person meeting of the communications staff since that CCC recommendation was adopted. This meeting will serve as a tool to facilitate collaboration between agencies and FMCs, provide ideas of how to better increase public participation in the Council process, and utilize existing technology and systems to continue to be transparent in the decision making process.

Prior to the scheduled meeting, each of the Councils outlined current technologies, procedures, and outcomes. The results are summarized as follows:

### Digital Platforms

All the Councils have migrated to digital production, presentation, and distribution of information. The platforms are different:

#### Email

Outlook 50%

Gmail 37.5%

Yahoo 12.5%

### Website

WordPress 37.5%

Craft, Squarespace, Drupal 37.5%

Dreamweaver 25%

### Broadcasting meetings

Goto meeting/webinar 62%

Adobeconnect 25%

Ustream 12%

While all Councils broadcast the Council meetings, the NEFMC also broadcasts the SSC, and the CFMC broadcasts the AP. It was noted that providing webinars (or online access and participation) had decreased attendance and is hard to moderate. Other Councils responded that technology challenges, specifically with internet availability and speed, render webcasts ineffective and frustrating. Improvements in technology and equipment may help with this.

### Council Meeting preparation and procedures

All Councils use email to distribute information prior to a meeting, and use email to communicate with the chairs and committees. Five Councils also use regular mail. All Councils post meeting documents prior to the meeting on their websites, and the NPFMC also posts information from other agencies along with their agenda. Generally, paper handouts are discouraged, and 50% of Councils actively discourage paper use. ALL Councils provide wifi for the public attendees, and it's unclear how many have a dedicated network during the meeting just for staff.

### Public comment

All of the Councils have a public comment deadline that varies, usually from 3-6 days, and all Councils allow public comment electronically. (At least one Council's public comments are emailed directly to the ED). 62.5% of Councils have the public comments posted online before the meeting.

Most of the Councils allow submission of late comments, and 87.5% of Councils have a dedicated portion of the agenda for general public comment not associated with an agenda item: the CFMC allows 15 minutes a day for general public comment, and the GMFMC allows 3-4 hours.

There are a few Councils who post documents and decisions in real time, but the actual number was unclear from the responses. The NPFMC post draft motions as they arise, and post the final motion as soon as the amendments and changes are incorporated, although not in real time.

### Post meeting

87.5% of the Councils publish a summary of decisions a few days after the Council meeting in various electronic formats: email, twitter, facebook, website. Some of the summaries are in newsletter format, and some are more technical "decision documents."

### Press releases

Some Councils regularly distribute press releases, and some do none at all.

### Meeting materials

All Councils have meeting materials available electronically, and 87.5% have all the meeting materials posted online.

### Areas to improve

While there was no universally challenging technology or software the Councils were seeking help with, there was a prevailing theme: How can the Councils get the public engaged and informed in an efficient, effective manner?

Among the things being explored by the Councils are the following:

- Ways to increase social media presence, and guidance on social media
- Maintaining effective email distribution lists
- Web/video conferencing, and taking public comment/questions via web conference
- Podcasts and educational videos
- Translating documents into plain English and Spanish
- Making public comment easier to submit and categorize
- Audio databases that are defined by agenda item and searchable by keyword
- Filesystems that are organized and intuitive

While each of the eight FMCs are very different in many ways, the main obligation is to communicate and inform while increasing efficiency in management. This first Council Communications meeting provides the opportunity to collaborate, share ideas on transparency and involvement, increase technical abilities, and provide valuable feedback on what works and what doesn't, while providing a direction for communication in the future.