



# E Staff Tasking

February 2024 Council Meeting

## Action Memo

Council Staff: David Witherell, Diana Evans

Action Required: 

1. Review Committees and Plan Teams
2. Tasking direction to the BS FEP Plan Team, if appropriate
3. Provide direction on tasking priorities and scheduling

## BACKGROUND

### Committees and Plan Teams

#### Membership

Posted on the eAgenda is the updated Council committee list reflecting changes since December 2023, including new Advisory Panel members.

#### Status of future advisory group meetings

The following Committee and Plan Team meetings are currently anticipated:

- **BS FEP Climate Change Taskforce** – February 26, 2024; virtual
- **Scallop Plan Team** – March 5, 2024; Kodiak, AK and virtual
- **BSAI Crab Plan Team** – May 13-17, 2024; Anchorage, AK and virtual

#### Bering Sea FEP Team

The Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) Team met in January to discuss research priorities (see agenda item D7). Included in the report is a request for further direction from the Council with respect to future work for the Team. With the imminent culmination of the two initiated action modules (LKTKS and Climate Change), the Team could consider and present ideas for other Bering Sea FEP action modules that the Council could initiate, or continue work on the Bering Sea Health Report that has been discussed previously. Alternatively, the Council may wish to focus its immediate efforts on the programmatic evaluation and other IRA-funded activities, and pause work on the Bering Sea FEP for the moment. It is possible that work on the programmatic may focus the Council's specific ideas for the FEPs and the Team. **The Team will look to the Council for direction before scheduling future work.**

## Tasking and Scheduling

Posted on the eAgenda are updated versions of tasking documents for background material: the 3-meeting outlook, Council staff responsibilities, and the groundfish workplan. A preliminary April 2024 agenda is posted to the eAgenda for your review. Please note that these preliminary drafts are for the purpose of discussion and feedback, and will be revised after this meeting.

## Expectations for the Chum Salmon Bycatch Analysis Initial Review at the April Council meeting

The Council has scheduled the Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and accompanying Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for initial review at its April 2024 meeting in Anchorage, Alaska. When the Council initiated this action and adopted a set of alternatives for impact analysis in October 2023, Council staff noted an April 2024 initial review timeline would be challenging to meet given **1)** the amount of inter-agency support and cooperation required for this action; **2)** the scope of work required for a DEIS and SIA; **3)** staff workloads directing resources to other, and immediate, priorities (this includes Council, NMFS, and ADF&G staff, among others).

This update is intended to set expectations on what analytical staff are able to prepare for the upcoming April meeting in relation to the Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch preliminary DEIS and SIA. The following items are not listed in any particular order of priority.

- **Analytical staff will not have time to prepare an Executive Summary for either the preliminary DEIS or the SIA.** Staff are working to provide a “Roadmap for the Reader” in the preliminary DEIS. This section will summarize how to locate information (including in appendices) and a summary of decision points or policy considerations before the Council. An executive summary will be included in a future draft of the analysis.
- **Analytical staff will not have been able to participate in substantial outreach and engagement on this action prior to April.** Outreach and engagement were a primary tradeoff the Council considered at its December 2023 meeting when it finalized the initial review schedule. There are both formal and informal means of outreach and engagement that have been affected by this timeline which impact the documents being prepared for April. Formal outreach and engagement include NMFS-led Tribal Consultations and engagement sessions or Council staff participation in outreach meetings (the latter of which would require direct, formal tasking from the Council).

In terms of informal engagement, which the analysts conceptualize as opportunities to talk with Tribal representatives beyond the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission in their role as a cooperating agency, representatives of the pollock industry, and other members of the public, has been limited. The analysts have had to prioritize inter-agency meetings to develop the alternatives, methods for impact analysis, and coordinate data analysis and writing. The volume of base-level meetings required to efficiently coordinate this project, combined with a need to write the analytical documents, is leaving little time to ground truth particular elements of the action. This will affect the level nuance and detail analytical staff will be able to provide, so the Council and the public can expect the impact analysis to be at a somewhat high-level.

- **Analytical staff will not be able to prepare visualizations and infographics for this action under the April timeline.** There is not sufficient time between when the analysts will have the document near complete and when it is posted to be able to create infographics based on the analytical content.
- **Analytical staff will not be able to provide a full impact analysis on Alternative 4.** The Council has asked industry to submit proposals for potential changes to the Incentive Plan Agreements (IPAs) under Alternative 4. Council staff will describe how Alternative 4 could work based on the proposals received and try to describe some directional level of impact to the extent practicable.
- At the time of writing the staff tasking update, analytical staff are continuing to pull together information and make requests of agency partners. **Depending on data availability, and the timing of when data is available, as well as staff workloads (including inter-agency partners), it is possible that some sections of the preliminary DEIS and SIA may not be complete.** In these instances, staff will leave section headings in the main document to signal the information the Council and the public could expect to see in the future.

### Future meetings

**June 2024 Council Climate Scenarios workshop:** As described in the Executive Director’s report under B1, the Council will be holding a Climate Scenarios workshop during the June Council meeting, on Wednesday-Thursday (June 5-6) of the first week. The SSC, AP, and Council will all pause during those days to be able to attend the workshop.

**No February 2025 meeting scheduled in-person:** At the Council’s direction, we are no longer planning to hold an in-person February Council meeting in future. The single time-sensitive agenda item for February, harvest specifications for the Norton Sound Red King Crab fishery, will instead be rescheduled to be taken up in December 2024 (a virtual BSAI Crab Plan Team meeting will occur in November 2024). The Council will have the opportunity, in October, to decide whether any issues warrant scheduling a virtual Council meeting in February 2025, otherwise the next Council meeting after December will occur in April 2025 in Anchorage. It should be noted, however, that under the IRA climate readiness funding, there is provision to hold potentially two Council workshops in 2025; it may be that one of these workshops is scheduled for February.

### **Public Comment**

Written public comments that have been submitted to the Council are available on the eAgenda.