



# North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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## Executive Committee Meeting Summary April 2023

The Executive/Finance Committee (EC) met in Executive Session on April 5. The agenda included the conducting the Performance Evaluation for the Executive Director, approval of revised SOPP (and concomitant changes to the AP and SSC Handbooks), a review of council finances, and a discussion of future meeting dates and locations. The Council may wish to formally approve or take further action on the Committee recommendations.

**SOPP:** The EC reviewed and adopted proposed revisions to the Council SOPP (Statement of Organization, Practices, and Procedures). The EC thanked the staff and NOAA GC for their efforts to bring the SOPP up to date. Major revisions to the SOPP, as recommended by the EC included:

1. Clarification that only members appointed by the Secretary are required to take the oath of office. (Section 2.0)
2. Addition of revised AP appointment language, including the Alaska Native Tribal Seat, as previously discussed by the Council. The additional language suggested by the EC would limit AP members to 3 consecutive terms, or 9 years maximum, for members appointed in 2023 and beyond. Also, causes for removal of an AP member now include violations of the Council's anti-harassment policy. (Section 2.3.2)
3. New language that describes the normal Council procedures for changing Federal fishing regulations (Section 3.2.3)
4. Clarification of what constitutes the meeting record pursuant to Section 302(i)(2)(f) the MSA. (Section 3.3)
5. Removal of criteria (transportation, lodging, meeting space, and broadband requirements) for Council meeting locations. These requirements are likely to change over time, and the EC decided that these details and requirements would be best described in the policies and procedures section of the Council website. (Section 3.6)
6. Removal of outdated policy directive guidelines for stakeholder involvement (Section 3.011).
7. Adoption of new Anti-harassment policy language, and detailed policies (Section 4.8 and Appendices)
8. Increase the retirement/death payout of accumulated sick leave for staff to 150 days to be more consistent with other fishery management councils. (Section 4.10.3)
9. Clarification of travel requirements to allow the Executive Director to authorize Council/AP/SSC members to travel from locations other than a member's home location, in extenuating circumstances. (Section 4.12)
10. Other language clarifications and additions to be consistent with the MSA and current regulations. (Multiple sections)

**AP and SSC Handbooks:** The EC noted that the staff provided suggested revisions to the AP and SSC Handbooks to be consistent with the revised SOPP and current practices. The EC recommended that the revised draft Handbooks be reviewed by the AP and SSC, in anticipation of final adoption in June.

**Council Meeting Locations and Timing** – The EC reviewed the meeting schedule for the next 5 years, and information on alternative meeting locations.

In the “reflections on the Council Process” discussion paper that the Council reviewed last year, one unresolved issue was the possibility of dropping the February meeting given that it is typically a light agenda, due to the limited staff time available to prepare and post materials in advance of the meeting. In preparation for a more thorough public review, the EC discussed several variations including dropping the February meeting entirely, holding it every other year, and holding the February meeting virtually only. If we dropped the February meeting, the April and June meeting timing could be adjusted to accommodate additional time between meetings.

The staff noted that the Council may be able to meet in person in some communities that have limited hotel or meeting space, or are costly to visit, by having just the Council meet in person. We now have the flexibility provided by the ability to have remote participation and the technology to hold virtual AP and/or SSC meetings separate from Council meetings. For example, Dutch Harbor now has high-speed internet, but due to high airfare costs, it is very expensive (~ 100K more than other areas) to hold a full SSC/AP/Council meeting, and Unalaska has limited meeting space and hotel rooms available. However, if the SSC and/or the AP were to meet virtually, the Council may be able to hold a meeting there in-person. Similarly, new meeting locations might be possible (e.g., Utqiagvik, Petersburg).

The EC recommended that staff prepare a discussion paper on meetings and timing for review and public comment at an upcoming Council meeting.

**Finance Report** - The EC reviewed the status of council finances and provided direction to the Executive Director. A brief summary of the report is provided here.

The Council is currently in year 4 of its 5-year (2020-2024) grant. The regional councils are allocated funds annually through Congress (as a line item shared with the marine fisheries commissions), and further supplemented with additional funding through NOAA Fisheries. The Council received a total of \$4.7 million in FY 22. Because actual expenses were below annual funding in 2020-2022 (primarily due to Covid related virtual meetings), we have accumulated a substantial amount of unspent funds that can be spent during the remainder of the grant period (and potentially rolled over into year 1 of the next grant period, i.e., 2025, which can be used to fund unfinished projects detailed in this budget). However, due to inflation, our annual costs have substantially increased in the past year (meeting, travel, salary, health insurance, etc.), and is expected to increase further in 2024. As a result, costs are projected to exceed annual funding in 2023 and 2024 (*i.e., we will be operating “in the red”*), unless additional funds become available. This is an unsustainable situation, and the EC will assist the Executive Director in evaluating ways to reduce costs.

The Council has greatly expanded our hybrid meetings and ability for remote testimony and presentations, which requires additional administrative resources. Over the past two years, we have been able to contract for additional administrative help for Council meetings, but there are very few companies or people who are willing to take on the steep learning curve for only a few weeks of work per year, and without benefits. Hiring an additional administrative position has been identified as a priority.

In sum, what this means is that

1. We have unspent funds available for contracting through 2024 (possibly 2025). Completing the required LAPP program reviews would be a good use for these funds, along with other contracting for analytical work as needed.
2. We cannot hire additional staff, or backfill retiring staff at this time, as necessary funding does not appear to be available starting in January 2025. As such, existing staffing vacancies and needs will remain unfilled, unless additional funding becomes available. Further, any new initiative developed by the Council will require re-prioritizing existing staff to get the work done.

**Executive Director Performance Review** – The EC completed a performance review for the Executive Director and provided feedback.