



B1 Executive Director's Report October 2024

Action Memo

New Council Members

Two new Council members (Mr. Brian Ritchie and Mr. John Moller) were appointed by the Secretary of Commerce on July 31, and will serve from September 14, 2024, through August 10, 2027.

Mr. **Brian Ritchie** is a charter fishing captain and owner of two charter companies in Homer, Alaska. Brian holds a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in environmental science - Fisheries from Alaska Pacific University focused on spatial dynamics of halibut. Brian was appointed to the Council's Advisory Panel in January 2020 and has served as AP chair since October 2022. Mr. Ritchie is also co-chair of the International Pacific Halibut Commission conference board and vice-president of the Alaska Charter Association.

Mr. **John Moller** owns and operates a commercial fishing vessel in Southeast Alaska, and owns a consulting firm advising clients on a broad array of topics. John previously managed a fish processing plant in Adak and was the general manager of a Western Alaska CDQ Organization where he oversaw fish plants and vessels. Mr. Moller served on the Advisory Panel to the NPFMC from January 2004 through December 2008.

Additionally, the Secretary of Commerce appointed Ms. Jamie Goen to the obligatory seat on the North Pacific regional fishery management council, formerly held by Kenny Down. Ms. Goen will serve from October 4, 2024, through August 10, 2026.

Ms. **Jamie Goen** is Executive Director of Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers, a trade association representing commercial crab harvesters. She holds a Master of Marine Affairs from the University of Washington. Jamie previously worked for NOAA Fisheries and the International Pacific Halibut Commission. Ms. Goen serves as the non-voting secretary on the Council's Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee.

Welcome aboard! We also welcome back Ms. **Anne Vanderhoeven**, who was reappointed for another 3-year term.

New Council Staff

Ms. **Taylor Holman** joined the Council staff as a Fishery Economist at the end of July. Ms. Holman holds a bachelor's degree in justice and economics, and is currently working to complete a master's degree in public policy at the University of Alaska Anchorage. She has experience working on economic research with the Alaska Department of Revenue, and most recently as an Economist with the McKinley Research Group here in Anchorage, where she worked on a wide variety of projects including the Economic Value of Alaska's Seafood Industry report and a 10-year review of the CDQ Program. Her initial tasking includes preparing a discussion paper on revising eligibility requirements for receiving

Crab C-shares and increasing C-share use caps, per the June 2024 motion, and tracking the IFQ program review.

Ms. **Anita Kroska** joined Council staff as a Fishery Analyst in early September. Ms. Kroska holds a master's degree in environmental science from Alaska Pacific University. For the past 5 years, Anita has been the Program Manager and Research Associate at APU's fisheries, Aquatic Science, & Technology (FAST) Laboratory here in Anchorage, where she provided leadership, research contributions, project management, and collaboration with researchers, academia, and fishing industry representatives. Her initial tasking is to serve as coordinator for the BSAI Crab Plan Team.

Ms. **Alaina Plauche** joined the Council staff as our Alaska Sea Grant Fellow, and she will be serving as a Fishery Analyst on staff. Ms. Plauche holds a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in public policy from the University of North Carolina. Alaina has broad experience, most recently working as an analyst for the Alaska Community Foundation and as a Congressional intern in Washington D.C. Ms. Plauche will be working on a wide variety of projects during her fellowship.

Ms. **Danielle Mercurief** joined the Council staff as an Administrative Specialist. Ms. Mercurief holds an associate degree and a bachelor's degree in business administration from the Alaska Pacific University. Since 2016, Danielle has experience working for the Alaska Native Health Consortium as a travel coordinator and a case manager and referral coordinator, and she is looking to apply her technical, customer service, and problem-solving skills to this position.

Welcome aboard all new staff!

Plan Team Nominations

The Alaska Fisheries Science Center has nominated two scientists to serve on the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Plan Team. Nomination letters and resumes are attached. The SSC will review these nominations and report back to the Council on their qualifications.

Dr. **Sofia Wassermann** is a Research Fish Biologist in the groundfish assessment program in the RACE division at the AFSC. She has a background in quantitative ecology, stock assessment, resource management and hands-on survey experience. Dr. Wassermann has worked on expanding mixed-species management strategy evaluation for BSAI groundfish, conducted research to evaluate the effects of cannibalism on hake dynamics using the CEATTLE model.

Dr. **Jim Thorson** is a Research Fish Biologist in the RACE division at AFSC. He has a background in spatial statistics, quantitative ecology, stock assessment, resource management, and ecosystem modeling. He has worked on multiple AFSC programs, including co-lead of the Arctic IERP synthesis project, and has developed numerous statistical methods for ecosystem synthesis. Dr. Thorson has also developed new software and other products for use in stock assessments.

Legislative Issues

The Legislative Committee met on Wednesday, October 2, to review a draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Committee, and to review several recently introduced bills that could impact the Council's ability to meet its responsibilities under the MSA and the terms of its operating grant.

The draft legislation, and the initial comments provided by the Executive Director, can be found on the eAgenda for the Committee meeting. A report of the Legislative Committee meeting will be posted to the

E-1 Staff Tasking agenda item before the end of the meeting, so the Council can provide further direction regarding the TOR and potential comments on the various bills.

MREP accepting applications for 2024 Workshop

The Marine Resources Education Program (MREP) is hosting a third workshop in the North Pacific, from April 28 – May 2, 2025, in Kodiak, AK. MREP North Pacific is a 5-day educational workshop for fishery users to learn about how the North Pacific Fishery Management Council process works, and how to engage effectively and get their voice heard. Applications to participate can be found at: <https://mrep.gmri.org/apply>. Seats are limited, and the workshop is free to participants, with travel, meals, and accommodation paid for. Preference will be given to applications received by **November 1**. The posted flyer provides more information.

GAO Review of NMFS Fishery Disaster Assistance

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) is reviewing NOAA’s Fishery Disaster Assistance Program and is conducting a site visit to Alaska this week (Oct. 1st – Oct 3rd). As part of this visit, GAO is meeting with several fishing stakeholders about their experiences with the program. GAO is also open to hearing from other parties that received fishery disaster assistance to hear about their experiences and challenges with the program. GAO provides Congress, the heads of executive agencies, and the public with timely, fact-based, non-partisan information.

Members of the GAO review team will be attending the Council meeting on Thurs. 10/3 at 8am, and will be available to answer any questions. Please contact Kelsey Sagawa (SagawaK@gao.gov), Monica Alvarez-Scott (AlvarezScottM@gao.gov), or Angel Cui (CuiA@gao.gov) if you would like to share your experiences with the fishery disaster assistance program.

New Publication

The peer-reviewed paper I prepared with Michael Fey, “Fish Bycatch in the North Pacific Halibut, *Hippoglossus stenolepis*, and Groundfish Fisheries”, was recently published in Marine Fisheries Review. You can access the paper here: <https://spo.nmfs.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf-content/mfr851-43.pdf>

Inflation Reduction Act Funds

In September, we finally received IRA funds based on our approved grant proposal. Of the \$2.5 million that we applied for in our proposal, we have received \$1.45 million to date. We can apply these funds to the IRA activities specified in our grant, back to the start date of January 1, 2024. This is great news! We anticipate that additional funding will be made available in FY25.

Council Written Comment Policy

At every meeting, staff reports publicly to the Council on any comments removed from the commenting system, and the rationale for removal, so that we can monitor and revise the process as needed to address unanticipated events. The comment period was open for 19 days, from September 9 - 27. No submitted comments were removed.

Recent Staff and Council member activities

- Following the Kodiak Council meeting in June, Mr. Bill Tweit visited Old Harbor at the invitation of Freddie Christensen.
- Several staff participated in the Alaska Responsible Fisheries Management surveillance review of the halibut and sablefish fisheries being done by the Global Trust assessment team in July.

- Ms. Maria Davis and Ms. Diana Evans participated in the Council Communication Group meeting held August 6-8 in Portland, Oregon.
- Dr. Kate Haapala provided presentations on salmon bycatch management and performance to the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group, remotely on August 14 and 28.
- Ms. Anna Henry participated on the NPRB Science Panel August 20-21.
- Dr. Diana Stram, along with NPFMC SSC representatives, attended the SCS8 meeting, “Applying Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rules in a Changing Environment,” held August 26-28 in Boston. A report from that meeting will be presented under Agenda Item D-2.
- Council staff joined NMFS staff for Media & Presentation Training from The Communications Center on August 29 in Anchorage.
- Several Council members and staff on the MREP Steering Committee participated in curricula development meetings over the summer.
- In September, I attended the 154th AFS Annual Meeting that was based on the theme “Conserving Fishes and Fishing Traditions through Knowledge Co-Production.”

Committee and Plan Team Meetings

The following Committee and Plan Team meetings have occurred since the June meeting:

- The BSAI Crab Plan Team met September 9-12 in Seattle. You will receive the report on this under Agenda Item C-1.
- The Partial Coverage Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee (PCFMAC) met in Anchorage, on September 16. You will receive the report on this under Agenda Item C-2.
- The Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee (FMAC) met in Anchorage, on September 25. You will receive the report on this under Agenda Item D-1.
- The Groundfish Plan Teams met virtually September 17 and September 18-19. You will receive the report on this under Agenda Item C-3.
- The Legislative Committee met in Anchorage on October 2. You will receive the report on this under Agenda Item E-1.

Other activities this week

An Executive Session of the Council is tentatively planned for Saturday, October 5th, to discuss administrative matters.

Update on Killer Whale avoidance research

At the April 2024 NPFMC meeting, the Alaska Seafood Cooperative reported on Amendment 80’s plans for implementation of modifications to flatfish nets to avoid killer whale entanglements and in the Bering Sea deep water flatfish fishery. That report also outlined plans for cooperative research to improve understanding of killer whale behavior around nets/vessels fishing for deep water flatfish. At this meeting, the ASC will summarize 2024 killer whale interactions, what is known about efficacy of gear modifications, and some preliminary information from the hydrophone/photo ID research from this year’s fishery.