



B1 Executive Director's Report

June 2024

Action Memo

Kenny Down

It is with a heavy heart that I report on the death of Council member Kenny Down on May 5. Mr. Down was appointed to the Council in April 2015, filling the vacancy created



when John Henderschedt departed the Council. Kenny took a leading role for the Council on initiating many fishery program modifications, including changes to the Pacific cod longline fisheries, conservation and allocations issues involving the BSAI crab fisheries, small boat and community issues, and more recently, initiating development of a proposed limited access program from the BSAI Pacific cod pot fishery.

Kenny was also the Council representative on the Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS) Board and served on the AOOS Regional Ocean Partnership (ROP) Steering Committee. He will be greatly missed by all.

A memorial service for Kenny is being held on Saturday at 5 pm Alaska time. The service will be live-streamed on Zoom and we will be projecting this in the Council meeting room for members and public who would like to attend the celebration of life service. I will be attending the memorial service in Seattle to offer our condolences to Kenny's family on behalf of the Council.

Changes on Council Staff

Dr. **Nicole Watson** left Council staff in April to work for the USGS doing field survey work on Lake Superior. Nicole was an analyst for the Council since September 2022. She staffed the Ecosystem Committee and worked as the staff lead on Cook Inlet Salmon, GOA Tanner crab, and other issues.

Mr. **Sam Cunningham** is departing Council staff this summer. Sam has been an analyst for the Council since July 2012, and has worked on a wide variety of economic issues ranging from observer issues, bycatch, adjustments to IFQ regulations, modification and development of LAP programs, and other analyses. We are going to miss him greatly and wish him all the best in the future. Thank you, Sam, for all of your contributions to sustainable fisheries in the North Pacific over the years and for being a terrific staff economist!

Ms. **Sarah Rheinsmith** is departing Council staff after the June meeting for employment as a biologist with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Sarah has been an analyst with the Council since January 2022, and has served as the Plan Team Coordinator for the Scallop PT and BSAI Crab PPT, and worked on a variety of issues including EFH, Snow crab rebuilding plan, unobserved fishing mortality, and other priority issues. Best wishes in you new position Sarah; we are all going to miss you!

Crossing the Bar

Alfred, Lord Tennyson 1809 - 1892

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have cross'd the bar.

Ms. **Sarah La Belle** is departing Council staff after the June meeting to work with the oil and gas industry in Anchorage. Sarah has been instrumental in making many improvements to our process since she joined our staff in 2018. Her technical expertise and ability to problem solve got us through a majority of hurdles as we navigated switching to all virtual meetings during COVID, and she remained the go-to person for technical questions as we returned to in-person meetings. She launched the re-design of the Council website, and took on any variety of roles we asked of her. We will miss you and your quick thinking, and willingness to jump in wherever necessary. Good luck in your next role!

Mezirow's Last Meeting

Mr. Andy Mezirow is terming out in August after 9 years on the Council (2015-2024). He also served as an AP member in 2012 and 2013, and again in 2015 until his appointment to the Council. Mr. Mezirow has led the Council in modification of measures to manage the halibut charter fleet, including development of an RQE program, and other regulatory changes. He served as chair of the Charter Halibut Committee since his appointment as a Council member. He was also the Council's designee to the North Pacific Research Board, where he served as Chair for several years. In addition to his work on the Council and NPRB, Andy was awarded the highly prestigious International Game Fish Association's Tommy Gifford Award in 2022, and has been selected as one of the best charter captains in the U.S. by Saltwater Sportsman and Sport Fishing magazines. Best wishes in the future Andy, and may your fish finder always be stacked with fish sign!

Climate Scenarios Workshop Update

The materials for the Climate Scenarios Workshop are posted to a dedicated [workshop eAgenda](#) that is separate from the June Council meeting eAgenda. Documents include a welcome letter to participants on behalf of Council, SSC, and AP leadership; the final detailed workshop agenda, and scenarios and discussion questions, and additional resources including an "About the Climate Scenarios Workshop" document with answers to frequently asked questions.

No Council decisions about next steps will be made during the workshop. The Council has scheduled a preliminary opportunity to reflect on the workshop at the end of the June Council meeting during staff tasking (Agenda Item E-1) on the Council meeting eAgenda. The workshop report will be available in September, and the Council will discuss potential next steps at the October Council meeting. At that point, the Council will consider how ideas from the workshop may fit into new or existing Council initiatives, and consider how and when to take further action.

Thank you in advance to everyone who plans to participate in the workshop in person and online, and we look forward to a productive discussion!

Call for Applications for American Fisheries Advisory Committee

NOAA Fisheries announced a call for applications for nine new members to the American Fisheries Advisory Committee. Applications may be submitted to nmfs.afac.nominations@noaa.gov until **June 21, 2024**. Information on the nine open positions and how to apply is available on the NMFS website at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/partners/american-fisheries-advisory-committee>. The selection process will be based on thorough vetting of all nominees, who will be appointed by the Secretary of Commerce through delegated authority to the NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator. The Secretary will announce the nine new members of the committee by August 1, 2024.

Once selected, the nine new members will join the existing committee members and evaluate and make recommendations for the annual Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Competition. The committee is responsible for developing the request for proposals, reviewing applications for grants after the technical review, and

selecting applications for approval. As a reminder, Saltonstall-Kennedy funds are used to provide grants or cooperative agreements for fisheries research and development projects addressing aspects of U.S. fisheries, including but not limited to harvesting, processing, marketing, and associated business infrastructures.

Final GOA Pacific Cod Allocation Review available on NPFMC website

The [final draft](#) of the **GOA Pacific Cod Allocation Review** is now available on the Council website, under the program and allocation reviews library [webpage](#). The review was prepared in response to NMFS Fisheries Allocation Policy Directive 01-119 which describes a mechanism and process to ensure fisheries allocations are periodically evaluated to remain relevant to current conditions. Following the Council’s approved [approach](#), the allocation review provides a “dashboard” of identified fishery metrics, and a short discussion of the fishery with respect to FMP and allocation objectives.

In December 2023, the Council reviewed an initial version of the allocation review under the B1 (Executive Director) report. At that time, the Council [accepted](#) the allocation review as complete once staff included revisions to incorporate shoreside processing sector activity and community participation, and a summary of the GOA Pacific cod stock. These revisions have been incorporated into the final version. In addition, interactive versions of the data in dashboard form can be [accessed here](#).

Council Coordination Committee Meeting

Ms. Drobica, Mr. Tweit, Ms. Evans and I attended the Council Coordination Committee meeting, held in San Juan PR on May 21-23. The agenda included updates from NOAA Fisheries on a suite of items including the NEPA revisions, the National Seafood Strategy, America the Beautiful area-based management initiative, guidelines for National Standards 4, 8, and 9, EEJ regional strategic plans, and topics. The Councils discussed budget challenges and long-term funding, anti-harassment policies, IRA funding and projects, and heard reports from the CCC working groups. The agenda, presentations and background materials, and a report of the meeting (when completed), are posted here: <https://www.fisherycouncils.org/ccc-meetings>

NOAA CEFI Summit

Bill Tweit and Diana Stram participated in the [NOAA Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative \(CEFI\) Summit](#) at the invitation of NMFS on May 7-9 in San Diego, CA. The CEFI Summit brought together NOAA builders and users of the CEFI Decision Support System (System) to ensure effective build-out of the System with IRA funding over the next three years. This cross-NOAA effort will build the operational modeling and decision support system needed to provide decision-makers with actionable information to reduce impacts and increase resilience of the nation’s valuable marine resources and resource-dependent communities in a changing climate. The Summit included 140 in person participants (@ 240 total) from four NOAA Line Offices (NMFS, OAR, NOS, NESDIS) and all U.S. ocean and coastal regions, including the Great Lakes. The CEFI Summit (1) affirmed the CEFI purpose, goals, and structure; (2) provided input on products, workflows and timelines for CEFI System Components; (3) strengthened collaborations; and, (4) identified key next steps, including continued engagement with target audiences/users.

NMFS anticipates the Regional Councils, as well as Great Lakes fishery managers, will be a primary target user of CEFI and to that end has placed considerable emphasis and resources in making downscaled climate projections available on a regular basis to regional fishery science centers and other interested scientists. Over the summer, NMFS plans outreach to coastal and Great Lakes states and tribes to determine their interest in CEFI products and decision-support. Much of CEFI is modelled on work done to date by AFSC scientists, in particular the ACLIM project, and the uptake of climate change information into the NPFMC process.

Draft Legislation

Two bills were recently introduced by Representative Peltola that would affect fisheries in Alaska and elsewhere in the U.S. A short summary of these bills is provided below.

“Bycatch Reduction And Mitigation Act Of 2024”

- Would amend the MSA (section 316);
- Would reauthorize the bycatch reduction engineering program at \$10,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2029;
- Would establish a ‘Bycatch Mitigation Assistance Fund’ within the U.S. Treasury to be administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and could be funded through donations;
- Would require that the funds be used to reduce or mitigate bycatch, including by providing financial assistance to fishermen and owners and operators of commercial fishing vessels to purchase fishing gear, equipment, or technology;
- Would require NFWF to consult with the secretary, acting through the administrator of the NOAA, each council, and each of the regional science centers of the NMFS to ensure that, to the maximum extent practicable, amounts in the fund are used in an efficient and cost-effective manner;
- Would require NFWF to within 3 years and every two years thereafter to publish a report on the use of the funds

“Bottom Trawl Clarity Act Of 2024”

- Does not amend the MSA;
- Would require every council that manages a fishery that allows the use of bottom trawl gear to submit to the Secretary of Commerce after public comment and within 18 months:
 - a definition of “substantial bottom contact” as compared to “limited bottom contact”;
 - a monitoring and enforcement plan to ensure that any pelagic trawl fishing activity carried out within a fishery managed by such council has limited bottom contact;
 - a list of each gear type that has substantial bottom contact based on the definition
- Would require that each council that meets the above requirement to submit to the secretary after public comment and within 1 year to:
 - a list of each area within the jurisdiction of such council within which fishing activities using bottom trawls were carried out during the 7-year period ending on December 31, 2024;
 - a recommendation regarding each area identified under subparagraph (a) that is not ineligible for designation under subsection (c) and should be designated as a bottom trawl zone;
 - would require each council to submit a recommendation regarding each area that is “not ineligible for designation”
 - would require the secretary to publish (in the FR) a proposed rule to designate a bottom trawl zone in each council area for designation by each council (as determined to be

- appropriate by the Secretary). The secretary would be required to publish the proposed rule with 9 months after the council recommendations are submitted.
- if a council does not submit a recommendation, the secretary would be required to designate bottom trawl zones first that council area. The Secretary would be required to do this within 1 year.
 - The secretary would be required to accept comments on the proposed rule for 60 days.
 - Would require the Secretary to designate the bottom trawl zones for each region as identified in the proposed rule within 30 days after the close of the comment period and require the secretary to publish the designations.
 - Would authorize the Secretary, in consultation with the relevant council, to designate additional bottom trawl zones if certain criteria are met and using the same designation process.
 - Would prohibit the designation as a bottom trawl zone if there is evidence of the presence of a deep sea coral and sponge ecosystem in the area or if the area is already designated under MSA as a savings area or is otherwise protected for a stock of fish.
 - Would only allow the use of bottom trawls in designated bottom trawl zones once the zones have been designated.
 - Defines “bottom trawl” to include trawl or dredge gear that makes substantial bottom contact with the seafloor when in use.
 - Defines “deep sea corals” as those corals at depths > 50 meters and belong to specific orders in the phylum Cnidaria.
 - defines “deep sea sponges” as those in the phylum Porifera at depths > 50 meters.
 - Defines “deep sea coral and sponge ecosystems” as an ecosystem composed of deep sea corals and sponges, the species associated with these corals and sponges, and the biological, physical, chemical and geologic components that constitute habitat for deep sea corals and sponges.

While these bills have no chance of being acted on this year, the bills could potentially be re-introduced (pending election results) in the next Congress (2025/2026). In preparation for a possible request for comments from the NPFMC, the Legislative Committee will plan on meeting prior to the October Council meeting to discuss potential impacts of these bills on the Council’s ability to meet its conservation and management goals under the MSA, and the objectives specified in its multi-year NOAA Grant.

The text of the bills can be found here:

https://peltola.house.gov/uploadedfiles/bottom_trawl_clarity_act_bill_text.pdf

https://peltola.house.gov/uploadedfiles/bycatch_reduction_and_mitigation_bill_text.pdf

Larry Cotter

Former Council member Larry Cotter passed away on May 9. Larry was a Council member from 1986-1992, and a member of the AP from 1981-1985. He also served as the chair of the NPFMC Steller Sea Lion Mitigation Committee for many years. Larry was the original CEO for the Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association (APICDA), serving in that capacity from 1992-2018.

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 22 days, from May 10 to May 31. No submitted comments were removed.

Recent Staff and Council member activities

- Mr. Andy Mezirow (Chair, NPRB) has completed his term on the NPRB Board, where he served as Chair.
- Council staff attended a joint meeting with NMFS SF staff to discuss opportunities for improved communication and collaboration on fishery management analyses, on April 15-16 in Juneau.
- Dr. Diana Stram attended the Wakefield symposium “Shifting distributions and phenologies: implications for fisheries” on April 16–18 in Sitka.
- Ms. Sarah Marrinan and Ms. Anna Henry (in person) and Mr. Mike Fey (virtually) attended the annual AKFIN Advisory Committee April 17 in Juneau, AK.
- Dr. Kate Haapala attended a virtual workshop, "Best Practices for Equitable, Just and Climate Ready Fisheries," hosted by Environmental Defense Fund on April 24th and 25th.
- Ms. Sara Cleaver and Dr. Kate Haapala attended two virtual Tribal Engagement sessions hosted by NMFS on the Programmatic Evaluation, on April 17th and May 7th.
- Ms. Anna Henry, Dr. Kate Haapala, Ms. Sarah Marrinan, and Mr. Mike Fey (virtually) attended a Socioeconomic Indicators interagency meeting with NMFS AKRO and AFSC Staff. The group met in Seattle on April 29th.
- Ms. Angel Drobica, Ms. Rachel Baker, Ms. Diana Evans, and others attended the North Pacific MREP Steering Committee meeting April 30 in Anchorage, AK.
- Ms. Karla Bush served as the Council’s representative on the IPHC’s MSAB, which met May 1-3. A written summary of that meeting is attached.
- Ms. Sara Cleaver participated in the GOA pollock CIE review virtually on May 7th.
- Mr. Bill Tweit and Dr. Stram attended the NOAA Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) Summit on May 7-9, 2024 in La Jolla, CA.
- Several staff participated in the Citywide Cleanup on May 10.

Committee and Plan Team Meetings

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

- The Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee met in Anchorage and Seattle, on May 13-14. You will receive the report on this under Agenda Item C-1.
- The BSAI Crab Plan Team met May 14-16, in Anchorage. You will receive the report on this under Agenda Item C-2.
- Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee met May 22. You will receive the report on this under Agenda Item D-2.

Other activities this week

The full Council is scheduled to meet in **Executive Sessions** on Friday, June 7 from 8-9 am, and if necessary, on Saturday, June 8, at 4 pm to discuss administrative matters.

NOAA Fisheries Alaska Regional Office and Alaska Fisheries Science Center are hosting a **public meeting on EEJ** on Tuesday, June 4 from 6:30–8:30 pm at the Best Western Kodiak Inn, Harbor Room. Public input collected will be used to continue to develop and refine the Regional Implementation Plan for NOAA Fisheries Equity and Environmental Strategy (EEJ). A flyer is [attached](#).

The Alaska Fisheries Science Center’s Kodiak Laboratory is hosting an **open house** on Wednesday, June 5, from 5:00 – 7:30 pm. A flyer is [attached](#).

There will be a **community reception** on Thursday, June 6 from 6:00 – 9:00 pm at the Afognak Building, and take this opportunity to say thank you to retiring Council member Andy Mezirow. A flyer is [attached](#).

Summary of IPHC’s Management Strategy Advisory Board May 1-3, 2024

The IPHC’s Management Strategy Advisory Board (MSAB) advises the Commission on its Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process by providing expert input on current and planned MSE activities. The MSAB includes representatives for the commercial halibut harvesting and processing sectors, recreational harvesting sectors and management agencies for the United States and Canada. The 19th meeting of the MSAB was held virtually, from May 1-3, 2024, and Karla Bush currently serves as the Council’s representative on the MSAB. The US co-chair is Dr. Pete Hulson and Gwyn Mason was elected at this meeting as the Canadian co-chair.

At this meeting, the MSAB noted that while the estimated stock status of Pacific halibut is above the target relative spawning biomass of 36%, weight-per-unit-effort in the survey and commercial fishery and the estimated absolute spawning biomass are at historically low values. In part, these low values prompted the Commissioners to recommend additional harvest rate reductions when setting the 2024 annual limits. Based on these circumstances, the MSAB recommended the Commission develop an objective and management procedure to address the apparent inconsistency between these key measures of stock status. The MSAB further recommended that an ad-hoc working group of the MSAB consider objectives related to maintaining absolute spawning biomass or CPUE above a “low” level, and potential management procedures to adjust fishing intensity when stock status metrics other than relative spawning biomass are low. The MSAB also made several recommendations for defining “exceptional circumstances” and specific actions that should be taken if an exceptional circumstance occurs. The next MSAB meeting may occur in the fall of 2024, prior to the next IPHC Interim Meeting. The full meeting report is posted on the IPHCs website: <https://www.iphc.int/uploads/2024/05/IPHC-2024-MSAB019-R-Report-of-the-MSAB019-1.pdf>