



E Staff Tasking

October 2024 Council Meeting

Action Memo

Council Staff: David Witherell, Diana Evans

- Action Required:
1. Review Committees, Plan Teams, and upcoming meetings
 2. Discuss chum bycatch and programmatic engagement opportunities
 3. Provide direction on tasking priorities, scheduling

BACKGROUND

Committees and Plan Teams Membership and Upcoming Meetings

Membership

Posted on the eAgenda is the updated Council advisory bodies list reflecting changes since June 2024. The list also includes members appointed over the summer to the monitoring committees. Note that there is an open [call for nominations](#) for 2025 Advisory Panel and SSC members, accepting nominations through October 31, 2024. All members of the SSC are up for reappointment, and 9 members of the Advisory Panel. The Council will discuss AP and SSC appointments at the December 2024 Council meeting.

Status of future advisory group meetings

The following Committee and Plan Team meetings are currently anticipated:

Advisory Group	Dates and location	Draft agenda topics (<i>may change</i>)
Charter Halibut Management Committee	October 25, 2024 Virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive final 2023 harvest estimates / preliminary harvest estimates for 2024 • Recommend charter management measures for analysis
BSAI Crab Plan Team	Nov 5, 2024 Virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSRKC harvest specifications
Bering Sea FEP Climate Change Taskforce (CCTF)	Nov 6-7, 2024 Juneau, AK and virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recap workshop, workplan, process, progress, and outcomes • Develop recommendations for moving forward and for a Council climate workplan • Draft a final report
Joint BSAI/GOA Groundfish Plan Teams	Nov 12-15, 2024 Seattle, WA and virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Ecosystem Status Reports (ESRs) • Stock assessment review and final specifications for groundfish
IFQ Committee	end November 2024 (T) Virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review IFQ Program Review Report • Develop Terms of Reference

Advisory Group	Dates and location	Draft agenda topics (<i>may change</i>)
Charter Halibut Management Committee	December 3, 2024 (T) Anchorage, AK and virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommend 2025 charter management measures
BSAI Crab Plan Team Modeling Workshop	January 14-16, 2025 Anchorage, AK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tools for constructing model-based indices of survey data GMACS coding updates, model developments, and simulations

Announcement: Recreational Fisheries Roundtable – December 2, 2024

On the afternoon of December 2, in conjunction with the December NPFMC meeting, NMFS and Council staff will sponsor a recreational fisheries roundtable discussion for charter operators, anglers, affected businesses, and any other interested parties. NMFS Headquarters persons will be present. The discussion will center on refreshing the collective understanding of key areas of interest, priorities, and / or concerns. The discussion will also help inform the agenda of a National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Summit, scheduled for 2025.

Engagement opportunities

The Council has expressed interest in pursuing outreach and engagement efforts on two current Council issues, the chum salmon bycatch analysis and the Programmatic Evaluation. We describe below how we are planning to move forward with these two issues, but are looking for Council direction if we should be considering additional or different opportunities.

Chum salmon bycatch analysis

Staff have prepared a short planning document, posted on the eAgenda, with current plans for engagement on the chum salmon bycatch analysis.

Climate funding and Programmatic Evaluation tasking considerations

The Council has expressed support for a transparent, inclusive, and meaningful process to develop the Programmatic Evaluation. At the April 2024 Council meeting, staff sought input on further tribal engagement activities that could occur prior to formal NEPA scoping. In response to public testimony and input from tribal users, the Council supported delaying the formal NEPA scoping process (which would begin with NMFS publishing a Notice of Intent to prepare the Programmatic EIS) until after the Council has engaged in the initial review of the chum salmon bycatch action in February 2025. The Council also expressed support for the continuation of virtual tribal engagement sessions and NMFS Tribal Consultation(s) that do not conflict with the summer/fall subsistence season.

In response to the Council’s direction, NMFS held two tribal engagement sessions on the programmatic evaluation, on April 17 and May 6, 2024. During the sessions, NMFS and Council staff received questions and feedback regarding timing, scope and goals of the PEIS, and how this evaluation will affect future Council actions. The Council also received considerable public input relevant to the Programmatic Evaluation during the June 2024 Climate Scenarios Workshop. Depending on what steps, if any, the Council takes at this meeting in response to the Climate Scenarios Workshop report, it may be useful to consider how tasking and timing will intersect with next steps on the Programmatic Evaluation. Staff suggestions based on themes highlighted during the workshop include developing some background documents that may help to the Council in refining programmatic alternatives.

At this point, the Programmatic Evaluation is tentatively on the agenda for April 2025. Depending on the Council’s direction, the agency could consider scheduling formal scoping to again immediately follow the

April meeting, and avoid overlap with the summer/fall subsistence season, or the Council may want to consider a schedule that allows for engagement to occur later in 2025.

Tasking and Scheduling

Posted on the eAgenda is an updated version of the 3-meeting outlook. The eAgenda also includes updated versions of the Council staff responsibilities, and the groundfish workplan, as background.

December 2024 and February 2025 Council Meetings

Preliminary December 2024 and special February 2025 agendas are posted to the eAgenda for your review. These preliminary drafts are for the purpose of discussion and feedback, and will be revised after this meeting. Both meetings are in Anchorage; the December meeting is back at the Hilton Hotel, and the February meeting here again at the Egan Center.

Please note that at the special February 2025 meeting, the Council will exclusively focus on Cook Inlet salmon harvest specifications and initial review of the chum salmon bycatch analysis. The Council will take abbreviated B reports if needed, and we have included an ‘other business’ agenda item in lieu of staff tasking, if there are issues that need to be discussed before the April meeting. Scheduling is a challenge for February, in order to avoid issues not being scheduled to occur at the same time in different rooms. **As such, we are proposing that the AP will take up Cook Inlet specifications in February without the benefit of first receiving ABC/OFL recommendations from the SSC.** Based on last year’s motion, this might take the form of the AP recommending TACs that are specified as a percentage lower than than the SSC’s recommended ABC. Alternatively, the Council could choose to remove Cook Inlet salmon from the AP agenda in February, and we would instead do AP training during that time period.

Items not yet scheduled, from the 3-meeting outlook

The Council’s 3-meeting outlook includes all agenda items that are anticipated between now and April 2025, as well as at the bottom, a section of items that the Council has requested but which are not yet scheduled on an upcoming Council agenda. The following provides a reminder to the Council about the projects that are included in this not-yet-scheduled section. **Staff welcome any input from the Council about the priority of items not yet scheduled, compared to other Council tasking.** Please note, however, that while the Council has hired two new staff to fill fishery analyst vacancies, we may continue to have staff capacity constraints while staff are becoming proficient on NPFMC issues.

BSAI Pot cod LAPP: The Council most recently reviewed a discussion paper in June 2024 to explore elements of a potential limited access privilege program (LAPP) for BSAI Pacific cod pot gear catcher processors and catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 ft length overall. The Council [requested](#) staff bring back additional information on particular elements related to developing such a LAPP.

- Status: Due to Council staff capacity constraints and existing workloads this summer, work on this discussion paper has not yet begun. We intend to schedule this for Council review potentially in June 2025.

Pacific ocean perch MRA: In June 2024, the Council [requested](#) analysis of a proposed regulatory amendment to adjust how Pacific ocean perch (POP) catch in the pelagic trawl fisheries is managed, given changes resulting from the implementation of electronic monitoring in pelagic trawl fisheries.

- Status: Work has not yet begun on this analysis. NMFS is considering whether this action can be included in the MRA analysis that is already underway and scheduled for initial review in April.

Charter halibut management measures timing: In December 2023, the Council made two [requests](#) of staff to provide information on the performance of the Charter Halibut Registration program, and to consider alternative timelines for preparing annual charter halibut management measures. To address the first request, NMFS staff will provide a report to the Charter Halibut Management Committee, and

through the committee's report, to the Council, about charter halibut permits. With respect to the current charter halibut management [timeline](#) and options to adjust it, staff intend to collaborate across agencies to consider potential regulatory changes and any management concerns that may arise from the proposed changes in the timeline for charter halibut.

- Status: This has not yet been scheduled, and will depend on availability of Council, NMFS, ADFG, and IPHC staff. Likely the best timing for staff work on this action will be in early 2025, after the IPHC meeting, with a Council agenda item later in the year.

Pelagic trawl gear innovation: In February 2024, the Council [requested](#) a discussion paper to inform a process for incentivizing pelagic trawl gear innovation in the BSAI and GOA to achieve bycatch mitigation, habitat protection, and fishing efficiency and gear adaptability objectives identified by the Council. The Council highlighted that its present focus is on gear innovation and participant-led approaches. This is separate from the February 2024 Council motion prioritizing revision of the pelagic trawl gear definition to be reflective of current practices, an analysis for which the Council took up at this meeting (agenda item C6).

- Status: Due to Council staff capacity constraints and higher tasking priorities, work has not yet begun on this discussion paper.

Pot gear regulation consistency: In February 2022, the Council [requested](#) a discussion paper exploring potential regulatory changes to simplify the regulations describing the use of pot gear, including gear configuration requirements. NMFS proposed this action in recognition of the fact that the Council has authorized several amendments to pot gear requirements for specific fisheries in recent years, and because those individual requirements are spread out in different places among the regulations, it can be difficult for the public to understand what is applicable when.

- Status: NMFS staff will lead the preparation of this discussion paper. While it continues to be worthwhile, other priorities have so far prevented preparation of this discussion paper.

Sablefish motion scales: In October 2023, the Council [requested](#) a discussion paper on an option to allow freezer longliners to use NMFS-approved flowscales to account for their sablefish harvest. The Council would be comfortable for this change to be authorized under NMFS' existing record-keeping and reporting authorities, but understands that NMFS national guidance has determined that any regulatory change would need to be approved by the Council directly.

- Status: NMFS staff will lead the preparation of this discussion paper. While it continues to be worthwhile, other priorities have so far prevented preparation of this discussion paper.

Aleutian Islands golden king crab start date: In June 2021, the Council [requested](#) staff prepare a discussion paper on two issues for the AIGKC fishery, to consider changes to facility use caps and to the start date to allow eastern and western AIGKC IFQ to be issued or fished prior to August 1st. Subsequently, the Council bifurcated these issues and prioritized the facility use cap action (which has since been completed) over the change to the start date.

- Status: Due to Council staff capacity constraints and higher tasking priorities, work has not yet begun on this discussion paper.

Salmon genetics reports: Unlike the other items in this section, this is an annually-recurring item that is usually scheduled for each April. The Council regularly receives reports on the genetic composition of the Chinook salmon and chum salmon caught as bycatch in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. As the Council is reviewing the next iteration of the chum salmon bycatch analysis at a special meeting in February (for which the genetics reports cannot be available), we propose to schedule Council review of the genetics reports for 2025 at the same time as Council final action on the chum salmon analysis, in October or December.

SSC agenda time

The SSC does not have sufficient agenda time to address all the issues on which the Council might typically receive SSC advice. While measures have been put in place with staff and SSC leadership to optimize SSC time on each agenda item in the meeting, the most effective time-savings is to reduce the number of agenda items that go before the SSC. The staff paper posted to the eAgenda identifies which items are typically taken up on the SSC agenda. The paper also identifies the factors that influence Council and SSC leadership when responding to the fact that there is not enough time to get to all the issues. Staff are presenting this document in order to provide more transparency about how those decisions are currently made, and to provide an opportunity for feedback if additional considerations should be included. This is especially relevant in planning for the future, noting that proposed legislation in Congress (i.e. HR8862, Sections 505 and 508), if passed, would substantially add to the duties of the SSC and potentially require increased agenda triage.

Public Comment

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