

E1 Ecosystem Committee Report

Katie Latanich, June 2026



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Agenda

The Ecosystem Committee met in person and virtually for a full-day meeting on May 8. Discussion topics included:

1. Groundfish Management Policy Review document (June item E1)
2. Climate Resilience Work Plan update and Discussion Paper on Development of Alternative Harvest Control Rules (June item E2)



E1: Groundfish Management Policy Review



Groundfish Management Policy Review

Main recommendations

- **The EC recommended the Council consider modifying the existing Groundfish Management Policy, as resources allow and recognizing that an FMP amendment would be necessary to make these changes.**
- The report includes a redline version of the Management Policy with wording suggestions and additional discussion. See appendix.



Groundfish Management Policy Review

- **The Committee also recommended the Council not finalize changes to the Management Policy in June by initiating an FMP amendment, to allow for additional EC discussion on specific revisions, particularly for**
 - Goal 3: Preserve Food Web
 - Goal 8: Increase Alaska Native Consultation



Groundfish Management Policy Review

Overview of EC wording suggestions

- EC discussion followed Section 3 of the review document, which includes discussion themes and ideas for additional discussion.
 - 3.1 Relationships with other entities and legal requirements
 - 3.2 Durability of FMP guidance over time
 - 3.3 Climate resilience
 - 3.4 Council policy guidance
 - 3.5 Management Approach



Groundfish Management Policy Review

Overview of EC wording suggestions

- A redline version of the Management Policy is provided as an appendix to the May Ecosystem Committee Report
- Includes specific recommendations where the EC was generally in agreement, and identifies priorities for further discussion



Suggested revisions

Management Approach statement

The Council's policy is to apply judicious and responsible fisheries management practices, based on sound scientific research and analysis, proactively rather than reactively, to ensure the sustainability of fishery resources and associated ecosystems for the benefit of future, as well as current generations. The productivity of the North Pacific ecosystem is acknowledged to be among the highest in the world. For the past 25 years, the Council management approach has incorporated forward looking conservation measures that address differing levels of uncertainty. This management approach has in recent years been labeled the precautionary approach. Recognizing that potential changes in productivity may be caused by fluctuations in natural oceanographic conditions, fisheries, and other, non-fishing activities, the Council intends to continue to take appropriate measures to insure the continued sustainability of the managed species. It will carry out this objective by considering reasonable, adaptive management measures, as described in the Magnuson-Stevens Act and in conformance with the National Standards, the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Environmental Policy Act, and other applicable law. This management approach takes into account the National Academy of Science's recommendations on Sustainable Fisheries Policy.

As part of its policy, the Council intends to consider and adopt, as appropriate, measures that accelerate the Council's precautionary, adaptive management approach through community-based or rights-based management, ecosystem-based management principles that protect managed species from overfishing, and where appropriate and practicable, increase habitat protection and bycatch constraints. All management measures will be based on the best scientific information available. Given this intent, the fishery management goal is to provide sound conservation of the living marine resources; provide socially and economically viable fisheries for the well-being of fishing communities; minimize human-caused threats to protected species; maintain a healthy marine resource habitat; and incorporate ecosystem-based considerations into management decisions.

This management approach recognizes the need to balance many competing uses of marine resources and different social and economic goals for sustainable fishery management, including protection of the longterm health of the resource and the optimization of yield. This policy will use and improve upon the Council's existing open and transparent process of public involvement in decision-making.



Suggested revisions

Management Approach statement

- Generally remains durable and relevant over time
 - *The Council's policy is to apply judicious and responsible fisheries management practices, based on sound scientific research, ~~and~~ analysis, **and advice**.*
 - Add “advice” to include standalone products, e.g. risk tables.
 - *All management measures will be based on the best scientific information available, **which includes local knowledge and traditional knowledge**.*



Suggested revisions

The EC did not propose any revisions to the following goals and their associated objectives:

- Goal 1: Avoid Overfishing
- Goal 2: Promote Sustainable Fisheries and Communities
- Goal 4: Manage Incidental Catch and Reduce Bycatch and Waste
- Goal 5: Avoid Impacts to Seabirds and Marine Mammals



Suggested revisions

Goal 3: ~~Preserve Food Web~~ Revise to focus on ecosystems, potentially including climate resilience

- Revised wording to be determined. Additional revisions could be considered, in addition to those identified by the Ecosystem Committee at this time.
- Climate resilience could be captured under multiple goals but fits best under Goal 3.
 - Capture the Climate Resilience Work Plan
 - Tie in healthy fisheries and communities
 - Draw on/complement the Council's Ecosystem Policy



Suggested revisions

Additional suggestions for a revised Goal 3

- Potentially move/add a research objective based on Objective 42:
Encourage a coordinated, long-term ecosystem monitoring program to collect baseline information and compile existing information from a variety of ongoing research initiatives, subject to funding and staff availability
- Consolidate research-focused objectives (16, 29, 42) that are primarily supported through Council research priority setting process
- Connects NMFS science with Council conservation and management responsibilities; complements research priorities



Suggested revisions

Research-focused objectives (for reference)

EC recommendation: Consolidate Obj. 16, 29, and 42 under Goal 3, retain Obj. 24

- *Obj. 16: Encourage research programs to evaluate current population estimates for non-target species with a view to setting appropriate bycatch limits, as information becomes available.*
- *Obj. 24: Encourage programs to review status of endangered or threatened marine mammal stocks and fishing interactions and develop fishery management measures as appropriate. **(retain as is)***
- *Obj. 29: Objective 29: Encourage development of a research program to identify regional baseline habitat information and mapping, subject to funding and staff availability.*
- *Obj. 42: Encourage a coordinated, long-term ecosystem monitoring program to collect baseline information and compile existing information from a variety of ongoing research initiatives, subject to funding and staff availability.*



Suggested revisions

Additional suggestions for a revised Goal 3

- Modify Objective 12: *Continue to protect the integrity of the food web through limits on harvest of forage **fish** species.*
 - Current wording does not specify forage “fish”
 - Adding “fish” is consistent with current practices of maintaining a forage fish species category, receiving biennial forage reports, and maintaining limits.



Suggested revisions

Goal 6: Reduce and Avoid Impacts to Habitat

- Obj. 26: Review and evaluate efficacy of existing habitat protection measures ~~for managed species.~~
 - Council and NMFS have implemented habitat protection measures for non-managed species including corals



Suggested revisions

Goal 6: Reduce and Avoid Impacts to Habitat

2 objectives refer to Marine Protected Areas:

- ~~Obj. 28: Develop a Marine Protected Area policy in coordination with national and state policies~~
- Obj. 30: Develop goals, objectives and criteria to evaluate the efficacy and suitable design of ~~marine protected areas and no-take marine reserves~~ **area-based management** as a tools to maintain abundance, diversity, and productivity. ~~Implement marine protected areas if and where appropriate.~~
 - “Area based management” is a more appropriate term



Suggested revisions

Goal 7: Promote Equitable and Efficient Use of Fishery Resources

- *Obj. 32: Maintain the license limitation program, modified as necessary, and further decrease excess fishing capacity and overcapitalization by eliminating latent licenses and extending programs such as community or rights-based management to some or all groundfish fisheries.*
 - EC members had different perspectives on the phrase “further decrease excess fishing capacity.” Some felt this is dated and others felt there is flexibility in interpretation.



Suggested revisions

Goal 8: Increase Alaska Native ~~Consultation~~ Engagement

Additional revisions could be considered, in addition to those identified by the Ecosystem Committee at this time.

- *Obj. 35: Continue to incorporate local and traditional knowledge in fishery management.*
- *Obj. 36: Consider ways to enhance collection of local and traditional knowledge from communities, and incorporate such knowledge in fishery management ~~where appropriate~~.*
- *Obj. 37: Increase Alaska Native participation and consultation in fishery management.*



Suggested revisions

Goal 8: Increase Alaska Native ~~Consultation~~ Engagement

Additional considerations for revisions:

- Consider impact and effectiveness of engagement, and engagement as a two-way process
- In addition to Alaska Native participation, consider other groups that are not Tribes (e.g. CDQ, rural communities)
- While the Council does not engage in consultations, it's important for information to be available to the Council at an appropriate and effective point in the process.



Suggested revisions

Goal 9: Improve Data Quality, Monitoring, and Enforcement

- *Obj. 40: Improve **data inputs for evaluation** of community and regional economic impact costs and benefits ~~through increased data reporting requirements~~.*
- Revise to improving data inputs to support evaluation of costs and benefits, which can include considering costs/benefits and burden
- Reflects a wider range of data sources and products beyond program-specific Economic Data Reporting requirements



Suggested revisions

Goal 9: Improve Data Quality, Monitoring, and Enforcement

- *Obj. 45: Continue to cooperate and coordinate management and enforcement programs with the Alaska Board of Fish, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and [Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers Fish and Wildlife Protection](#), the U.S. Coast Guard, NMFS Enforcement, International Pacific Halibut Commission, Federal agencies, and other organizations to meet conservation requirements; ...*



Groundfish Management Policy Review

Other discussion topics

- Current approach of restating MSA National Standards and other requirements, and recognizing relationships with other agencies and entities (Section 3.1)
 - No changes needed
 - National Standards reflect core tenets of management; Council can communicate how its work meets these requirements if they are left in
- Role of FMP guidance: To-dos, drivers, long-term guideposts? Can they be interpreted differently over time?



Groundfish Management Policy Review

Other discussion topics

- Outreach and communication – not specific to Groundfish Management Policy Review
 - Especially important in times of rapid change
 - Clearly communicate why planning for climate resilience is important, and how it meets the goals of the MSA.
- **EC recommendation: Council task the EC with a role in developing and reviewing plain language materials related to the Council's climate resilience work, including the HCR work (item E2).**
 - EC can help groundtruth accessibility and support distribution of materials among their networks



Groundfish Management Policy Review

Summary of recommendations

- **The EC recommended the Council consider modifying the existing Groundfish Management Policy, as resources allow and recognizing that an FMP amendment would be necessary to make these changes.**
- **The EC recommended the Council not finalize changes to the Management Policy in June by initiating an FMP amendment, to allow for additional EC discussion on specific revisions.**
- **The EC recommended the Council task the EC with a role in developing and reviewing plain language materials related to the Council's climate resilience work, including the HCR work.**

