



Meeting of the Executive Committee and leadership of Science and Statistical Committee and Advisory Panel

REPORT

March 14, 2022, via Adobe Connect

<https://meetings.npfmc.org/Meeting/Details/2857>

Executive Committee: Simon Kinneen (Chair), Rachel Baker, Steve Marx, Glenn Merrill, Bill Tweit

SSC leadership: Sherri Dressel (Co-Chair), Franz Mueter (Co-Chair), Alison Whitman (Vice-Chair)

AP leadership: Angel Drobnica (Chair), Ruth Christiansen (Vice-Chair), Matt Upton (Vice-Chair)

Staff: David Witherell, Diana Evans

Summary

The Executive Committee and SSC and AP leadership recommend that the Council initially prioritize the following ideas for further exploration:

Idea 5: Reevaluate the timing of crab and groundfish harvest specifications in light of fishery needs and stock prioritization.

Ideas 1 and 2: Reduce the number of annual Council meetings from 5 to 4, and drop the February meeting; and consider making 1-2 meetings a year virtual.

Ideas 9 and 12: Changes to the nomination/reappointment process for the Advisory Panel and SSC.

Discussion of additional ideas included in the paper as well as new concepts is included below. The Committee expressed interest in potentially exploring additional ideas in the future. This report will be presented to the SSC, AP and Council at the April 2022 Council meeting, at which time the Council will decide whether to proceed with further staff exploration of any potential change.

Presentation and Testimony

The Chair opened the meeting with a brief discussion of the agenda, followed by a presentation by Diana Evans on the February 2022 staff paper entitled, “Reflections on the Council Process and Ideas for Change.” The paper provides, in no particular order of priority, fourteen ideas for potential changes to the Council process with respect to the Council’s meeting schedule and agenda timing, and the Council’s advisory bodies. For ideas in which the Council might have an interest, staff would do further exploratory work to scope out how they might be implemented and associated tradeoffs. The timeframe for implementation would depend on the scope of the change. Also, it was noted that the ideas in the staff paper are separate from accessibility to the Council process changes that are already being implemented by the Council, both in response to the movement to virtual and hybrid meetings, and in response to the Community Engagement Committee recommendations in 2021. Any exploration of new ideas would continue to occur within the framework of the Council’s accessibility and engagement priorities.

Three written comments were submitted and are available to review on the meeting’s [eAgenda](#). In addition, three persons provided public testimony: Steven Minor (Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee), Heather McCarty (self), and Chris Woodley (Groundfish Forum). Their comments

addressed a wide variety of feedback, including but not limited to concern about avoiding any later start date for the crab fisheries from timing changes; interest in dropping the February meeting and the importance of in-person meetings; and maintaining the size and diversity of the AP and clarifying its function. A caution was also noted, to proceed slowly with any ideas for change, and ensure opportunities for public input. Where appropriate, discussions from public comment or questions during the presentation are integrated below, if they were referenced in the Committee's discussion of each idea.

Discussion

Following testimony, the Executive Committee and SSC and AP leadership (referred to collectively as Committee for the remainder of this report) discussed each issue in order, and also considered new ideas which are described at the end of this report.

1. Reduce the number of annual Council meetings from 5 to 4, and drop the February meeting.

The Committee expressed a high priority for exploring this idea. As described in the staff paper, the short working time between the end of December and the deadline for materials to be posted for February, spanning the holidays, makes it challenging for staff to prepare timely work products for the Council, and gives less time for the public to review materials in advance. It was also noted that reducing a meeting might result in cost savings for the Council and public.

In further exploring this issue, the Committee noted that staff should consider the impacts on how to reschedule recurring February issues, confer with the PFMC to avoid overlapping meeting times to the extent possible, and consider when/how the revised schedule would accommodate a Council meeting in the Pacific Northwest (as currently required in the SOPP). Staff should consider the tradeoffs of a 4-meeting/year standard schedule with respect to meeting length for the remaining meetings, for all groups. Especially for the SSC, staff should assess the annual workload implications of dropping the February meeting in the context of the types of agenda items traditionally covered in February, which often includes a one-day workshop on a particular topic. The SSC's input from February 2022 suggests some support for dropping one meeting, some concern over implications of workload for remaining meetings, and some ideas for potentially keeping a schedule of five SSC meetings if workload cannot be reduced, with one meeting focusing on informational topics that do not require a detailed SSC report.

2. Create a schedule that makes 1-2 meetings per year virtual, and the remaining meetings in-person.

The Committee identified a priority, albeit it more measured, for this issue also, which should be considered in combination with Issue 1. Individual perspectives on how effective they feel virtual meetings have been will affect each person's interest in continuing them. While there are cost savings for virtual meetings, they may not be preferable as a regularly scheduled option if the Council changes to 4 meetings a year, as some agenda items lend themselves better to virtual discussion than others.

Virtual meetings are a very useful tool for dealing with ad hoc or emergency issues (e.g., a special Council meeting to address emergency rule petitions or timely crab harvest specifications.) The staff should explore which other agenda items might lend themselves well to virtual, and some initial discussion suggested agenda items that are primarily informational (e.g., agency and cooperative reports; potentially an SSC workshop). It was also suggested that in-person meetings are better for actions that affect a large and disparate number of stakeholders, communities, and/or sectors, to allow more opportunity for informal dialogue (e.g., controversial final actions, some initial reviews).

As with Issue 1, staff should explore the continued ability to meet regularly in the Pacific Northwest, to allow easier access for those stakeholders. The Council should also consider the burden on staff and Chairs of administering hybrid meetings, about which more will be known after April.

3. Consider issue-specific meetings, whether as virtual or in-person.

The Committee did not address this issue specifically except in the context of candidates for in-person or virtual agenda topics. The staff paper includes the example of a December meeting that focuses primarily on groundfish harvest specifications; as staff explores Issue 5 and the harvest specifications process, and the issue of SSC workload, it may be useful to consider implications for the December agenda and how to optimize for the SSC as well as the Council.

4. Change the timing of the October meeting to avoid government shutdowns.

The Committee noted that shutdowns can occur at any time of year not just in October, and as a group did not prioritize this idea. As an October shutdown is most likely to affect the SSC and review of crab harvest specifications, this issue might be a secondary consideration in the larger exploration of Issue 5.

5. Reevaluate the timing of crab and groundfish harvest specifications in light of fishery needs and stock prioritization.

The Committee prioritized this idea for further exploration, recognizing that thorough consultation will be required as the steps in the timing of assessments, Plan Team review, and SSC and Council harvest specifications are complex and affect a wide scope of agency staff and industry members. At the same time, various factors have changed to make the already tight fall specifications timing even more acute, such as the increased importance of the northern Bering Sea survey data for fall crab species assessments. The Committee highlighted the need for any changes to maintain a robust quality of scientific information in the specifications process, as well as to consider the potential impacts on industry timeframes (e.g., start dates of the fisheries) as well as the impacts of increased or decreased uncertainty on ABCs. The Committee was hopeful that through this exploration, there may be opportunities to address a significant aspect of the SSC workload as raised in Idea 13.

The SSC input from February 2022 provides additional detail on this issue, and ideas that might be explored through further staff work and consultation. Other ideas include various ways to stagger review of some crab or groundfish stock models or assessments and to evaluate the feedback loop between the SSC, authors, the Plan Teams, and CIE or other external reviews.

6. Reconsider the frequency of agency reports.

The Committee did not discuss this issue in detail or prioritize it at their meeting. In returning to an in-person (hybrid) meeting in April, the Council will resume verbal agency reports, and may have further input on this idea after that time. Staff were asked to reach out to agency presenters, especially those not represented on the Council, to get their feedback about the value of in-person interactions with the Council to support their ongoing work in support of fisheries.

7. Consider order of agenda, and how to make time for longer-term planning.

The Committee noted the value of making space for longer-term planning on the agenda, as trying to do this at end of long meeting is challenging, but at least some support was vocalized for keeping the current system of placing final actions at the front of the agenda. One accommodation suggested was to pull informational items out of staff tasking, and rather give them their own agenda item (for example, the Ecosystem Committee report). The Committee also discussed new opportunities for longer-term prioritization as a new issue, below.

8. Consider ways to avoid duplicate staff presentations and public testimony, especially during virtual meetings.

This issue was not identified as a priority, and there was testimony about the value to stakeholders of hearing presentations more than once, and also of the opportunity for testifiers to clarify their thinking

and better communicate their ideas to the Council by first testifying at the AP. A committee member noted that staff might also continue to work internally to finetune what is presented.

9. Changes to the nomination/reappointment process for the Advisory Panel – timing, qualifications, term length.

The Committee prioritized further exploration of the AP nomination/reappointment process, as described in the staff paper. Moving the timing of the call for AP nominations earlier would allow more time for the Council members to interact with potential AP candidates. The paper also references a discussion of whether revised membership considerations might be appropriate for AP, and the Committee discussed better articulating the roles and responsibilities for members in the AP Handbook.

With respect to a further exploration of term length for the AP, staff should examine tradeoffs of a one-versus three-year initial appointment. Committee member comments highlighted the benefit of the longer commitment given the initial steep learning curve, but also that it is sometimes difficult for a new applicant to assess in advance what the workload associated with AP membership will be, and whether they are able to provide that level of commitment. Ways to provide more mentorship to new members, either from other AP members or directly from Council members, should also be included.

10. Reconsider the size and/or composition of the Advisory Panel.

The Committee did not prioritize this idea, but noted public testimony highlighting that maintaining diversity on the AP is important, and more so than the overall size of the group. It was also noted that the Council already has some discretion in the SOPP with respect whether to appoint the maximum number of standing members to the AP, and whether to use issue-specific short-term appointments.

11. Clarify the purpose of the AP, and consider operational changes to agenda, voting.

Members of the Committee spoke in support of the Council first clarifying the purpose of the AP, whether to focus on operational impacts as written in SOPP, or also to encompass policy advice more broadly, prior to considering any other logistical changes. It was suggested that this could be an ongoing and iterative dialogue between the Council and the AP over the next meetings, to identify when the work of the AP is meeting Council needs.

The Committee discussion did touch on issues in the staff paper regarding how the AP operates, but noted that these really flow best following a clarification of whether the AP is meeting the Council's purpose. With respect to the AP's voting structure, concern was expressed about the practice of voting resulting in an overemphasis on being on the winning side of a vote, rather than on articulating the pros and cons of the Council's policy decision. To find a workable alternative, however, would require some trial and error in order to find the best result for the Council. Similarly, the question of whether all current agenda items should continue to be reviewed by the AP, particularly reports from committees that already have diverse representation, can be considered over the longer-term. The connection between evaluating the operational practice of the AP and Idea 14 was highlighted, so if an external review were to be initiated, it could potentially highlight areas for improvement.

12. Changes to the nomination/reappointment process for the SSC – timing, recruitment, soliciting SSC input.

As with Idea 9, the Committee prioritized exploration of the SSC nomination/reappointment process. With respect to the timing of nominations, the Committee acknowledged the benefit of allowing Council members extra time to consider candidates, and the value of communicating needed expertise. Having sufficient members, with expertise that matches the needs of the Council's review items, is a significant factor in managing and distributing the SSC workload. Staff should also evaluate other timing factors as well, including when members decide whether to submit for reappointment, and the degree to which those serving in leadership roles affect the overall expertise available to lead agenda item reviews. In terms of

the recruitment process, it was noted that finding ideal candidates, who are usually busy experts, is challenging and most candidates were made aware of vacancies by their own agency or by existing SSC members. The SSC serves a unique role, and the involvement of long-time members of the SSC is critical to provide guidance to the group on how to fulfill but stay within the role of the SSC in providing guidance to the Council. In further evaluating this issue, the Committee asked staff to speak with other Councils to see whether there are lessons for recruiting new members.

13. Consider how to reduce SSC workload.

Committee members considered this a very important issue, but also noted that other priorities, particularly those in Ideas 5 and 12, as well as ongoing Council staff efforts to provide documents well in advance of the meeting, may be a way to address this. The Committee suggests initially focusing effort on those other ideas, while remaining cognizant of how they can help reduce workload. The discussion also raised other ideas that may continue to be considered, such as working with staff on the length of presentations or streamlined reports, or identifying informational agenda items that could receive a lesser level of detail in the SSC report.

14. Evaluate the purpose and usefulness of all Council advisory bodies, and consider ways to improve.

The Committee did not spend much time on this idea other than to ask whether other organizations have undertaken a similar review (an example was referenced of a third-party review of the IPHC operations). At this initial stage, the Committee has identified other ideas as higher priority.

New ideas

During the discussion, Committee members identified some additional ideas that might be considered in future:

- Identify multi-year Council strategic priorities: the Council might consider an agenda item, with public input, annually or biennially, to identify management priorities for a 2-3 year period, identifying which strategic projects that would be their primary focus for the upcoming period. This would create a more deliberative opportunity for longer-term planning than the current process. The Council might want to consider how to incorporate the SSC into such a process.
- A variation on this idea would be to create a dedicated agenda item for considering new proposals, whether at a specific meeting or as currently, at any meeting. This would make it clear and transparent to the public where to bring forward new ideas, and would also separate out the consideration of new proposals from the staff tasking discussion of how to prioritize among them.
- Explore opportunities for a joint session of the Council and the SSC, or the Council, AP, and SSC, to consider a single topic or couple of topics, to promote cross-fertilization and connections across the groups. This might be particularly relevant for an action that is not time-sensitive, or a longer-term planning discussion.
- Explore ways to engage with new stakeholders as fish stocks and fisheries shift, particularly communities in the northern Bering Sea and Chukchi Sea who have so far not engaged as much in the Council process.