

Toward a common policy for writing Team minutes

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The following ideas are intended to help the Groundfish Plan Teams develop a more consistent, and more helpful, approach to writing Team minutes. An earlier draft was reviewed, and in some cases modified, by the Team co-chairs and coordinators, but the present draft still may not describe consensus views of those individuals. All suggestions are open for discussion.

General

Bear in mind that the Team chairs/coordinators will need to be able to respond to questions about statements in the minutes when making their SSC, AP, and Council presentations. Statements should be clear enough that chairs/coordinators can figure out what they mean (i.e., the fact that the rapporteur knew what he/she had in mind at the time when the minutes were written is not sufficient).

Use complete sentences, except (perhaps) in bulleted lists.

After the first reference at the beginning of the minutes, use “Team” (capitalized); not “PT,” “pt,” “Plan Team,” or “plan team.”

For topics other than standard assessments, topic headers should be reasonably detailed (e.g., “Modeling sablefish depredation by sperm whales” is better than “Groundfish”).

For the final draft at least, minutes should be arranged in topical order (i.e., grouping similar items together), even if this is not the order in which the items appeared on the agenda. In the case of stock assessments for the November minutes, summaries should be listed in SAFE chapter order.

In Google Docs, use “suggesting mode” except for truly non-substantive edits, especially in the context of a recommendation.

In Google Docs, be careful about rejecting suggestions without any discussion.

Format for topic headers: capitalize first word only, except for proper nouns.

Format of minutes for each topic (subheaders are not necessary, unless the section is especially lengthy):

- *Brief* summary of presentation (focus on points that do not appear in the Powerpoint file; there is no need to write down every bullet in the presentation, as those should be accessible elsewhere)
- Discussion
- Recommendations

Writing discussion summaries

Along with recommendations, discussion summaries are the most important parts of the minutes. The summaries should reflect any substantive discussion, especially any points pertinent to recommendations. A bullet list of points made during the discussion is acceptable.

Leave recommendations *out* of discussion summaries; discussion summaries should be devoted to listing questions/comments from Team members, presenters, and the public; not drawing conclusions unless needed specifically to provide rationale for an accompanying recommendation (i.e., try to avoid including

sentences in the discussion such as, “The Team concluded that dome-shaped survey selectivity is never appropriate for this stock,” if this conclusion is not reflected in the recommendations or if it simply repeats what is contained in the recommendations).

Try to avoid attributing comments to specific individuals, particularly if they are not Team members, as such individuals will not have an opportunity to review the comments being attributed to them in the minutes.

In the event that Team members have divergent recollections of comments made during discussion, the person who made the comment should have the deciding vote regarding what he or she said.

Team members should be allowed to clarify or retract their own comments after the meeting concludes.

During the meeting, at the conclusion of each topic, the chair should ask the rapporteur to summarize key discussion points, to make sure that everyone is on the same page (although exact language is not necessary at this point).

Writing recommendations

In the context of communicating with the analysts, the point of including recommendations in the minutes is to provide clearly identifiable guidance, not to disguise guidance as something else for the purpose of generating “gotcha” moments when analysts fail to uncover the disguised guidance.

This is why the Teams have adopted the following rules for distinguishing recommendations from everything else contained in the minutes:

1. Must be stand-alone paragraph(s)
2. Must use bold font (except that, if the recommendation includes a list of bulleted items, only the text introducing the list needs to be in bold font)
3. Must use the phrase “Team(s) recommend(s)”

Therefore, rapporteurs should be careful not to confuse analysts by including “pseudo-recommendations” in the minutes; for example, by embedding within the main text sentences that begin with:

- The Team agrees...
- The Team supports...
- The Team endorses...
- The Team requests...
- The Team suggests...

Direct recommendations to “the analyst” rather than using the analyst’s name.

As with key discussion points, at the conclusion of each topic, the chair should ask the rapporteur to summarize any recommendations, to make sure that everyone is on the same page (although exact language is not necessary at this point).