

## Regional Operating Agreements

**Action: Each Region-Council develops a draft Regional Operating Agreement for Council review and signature.**

### IG Report

In January 2013, the Department of Commerce, Office of Inspector General (OIG), issued a final report (OIG-13-011-A) addressing opportunities for NMFS to continue streamlining the rulemaking process for fisheries management and improving the transparency and consistency in fisheries management, and included a recommendation that NMFS finalize regional operating agreements (ROAs) between NMFS regional offices and Councils.

The report identified that implementing ROAs, as identified by the 2005 draft Operational Guidelines, could help improve fishery management processes. The OIG cited the primary purpose of the ROA to provide a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities, and obligations between Councils and NMFS regional offices. The report recognized that each Region-Council pair had developed systems to assign and track tasks and responsibilities that were documented in different formats, but identified that documenting processes and expectations of those individual coordination systems should give NOAA a better opportunity to identify necessary tasks and ensure they are appropriately assigned and completed.

### Action Plan

The Action Plan developed in response to the OIG's report committed to develop and approve ROAs that identify the roles and responsibilities of the Region and Council, communication protocols, and process for working together during the development of fishery management plans, amendments, and regulations, including discussion of how roles, responsibilities, and milestones will be set and communicated for specific actions.

The intent of the Action Plan response was to allow each Region-Council pair to continue using the existing systems and protocols that they had developed to coordinate their work, but to document those existing mechanisms to ensure that the various roles and responsibilities, communication protocols, and processes for working together were clearly understood and communicated. Where appropriate, the documentation should also explain how these systems operate in context of the open, public Council process.

### Deadlines

The Action Plan committed NMFS to working with each Council to prepare draft ROAs for Council review and signature by December 31, 2013.

October 1, 2013: Regional Administrators provide an update to Emily Menashes and Alan Risenhoover on the status of ROAs, including current draft or final ROAs.

December 2, 2013: Regional Administrators submit final drafts or final ROAs to Emily Menashes and Alan Risenhoover. Final draft documents should be substantively complete, although signatures may be pending final review and approval by the Councils. If not yet signed, indicate when final signature is expected.