

# Report of the Community Engagement Committee: Recommendations to improve Council engagement with rural and Alaska Native Communities

February 2021<sup>1</sup>

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## 1 Introduction

The Community Engagement Committee (committee) was authorized and formed by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in June 2018 to identify and recommend strategies for the Council to provide effective community engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities. The committee was formed after review of a discussion paper requested by the Council in April 2018 that presented an assessment of ideas for improving engagement by rural and Alaska Native communities in the Council process. The discussion paper had been tasked by the Council after they heard requests to either reconstitute the Council’s Rural Outreach Committee or develop a new ad-hoc committee to consider community engagement strategies.

In June 2018, the Council approved the following charter for the committee:

*The North Pacific Fishery Management Council’s Community Engagement Committee is established to identify and recommend strategies for the Council and Council staff to enact processes that provide effective community engagement with rural and Alaska Native Communities. Effective community engagement may involve two-way communication between the Council and communities at additional stages of the Council process or a project and allow for community concerns, information, perspectives, and priorities to be shared clearly with the Council, whether part of an active Council action or not.*

Also in June 2018, the Council solicited nominations from rural and tribal representatives and people with the necessary expertise to accomplish the committee’s goals of assisting the Council in developing

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Steve MacLean, Council staff.

successful engagement and outreach tools and processes. The committee was selected over the summer and formally appointed in October 2018. The initial committee appointees are listed below:

- Simon Kinneen (Co-chair)
- Theresa Peterson (Co-chair)
- Mellisa Heflin
- Jennifer Hooper
- Robert Keith
- Nicole Kimball
- Marissa Mercurieff
- Tom Panamaroff
- Becca Robbins-Gisclair
- Rob Sanderson

Ms. Peterson no longer serves as Co-chair, but remains on the committee. At its first meeting in March 2019, the committee approved Terms of Reference (Appendix A) and established a draft schedule of meetings necessary to meet the committee's objectives.

The June 2018 Council motion forming the committee stated that it will assist the Council in further developing successful engagement and outreach tools and processes to facilitate improved communication and understanding between rural communities and tribes and the Council, but not develop specific policy recommendations. It also stated that this committee should provide recommendations to augment, not replace, the Council's existing community outreach efforts. The committee task is to prepare a report that identifies recommendations that the Council can consider to improve engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities. The committee is not intended to carry out engagement on behalf of the Council.

Although there are legal, logistical, and cost constraints within which the Council must make decisions regarding adopting community engagement strategies and activities, it is not the intention of the committee at this point to apply any constraints to the potential strategies and ideas. The Council will consider those constraints when they make their decisions.

## **2 Meetings**

This section provides brief summaries of the in-person and teleconference meetings. Details of the suggestions from the committee, discussed at various meetings, will be provided in Section 3. Reports of each meeting are included in Appendix A.

### **2.1.1 March 2019**

The committee held its first meeting on 20 March 2019 in Anchorage, AK. The purpose of the first meeting was to review the draft Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures, review the purpose and charter of the committee, and develop tentative plans for the committee to meet its objective. The committee identified an approximately one-year timeline for the committee to develop recommendations to the Council and suggested that the schedule could include four in-person meetings and at least one teleconference. Additional meetings would be considered if necessary. The committee recommended that at least one of the in-person meetings should be scheduled in a rural community, potentially in association with meetings of other rural or tribal organizations. At that first meeting, the committee requested that staff provide a list of communication, outreach, and engagement tools that are currently in use by the Council. The committee felt that a comprehensive list of tools currently in use would better enable them to identify potential gaps or deficiencies in the Council's engagement strategies. The committee also requested that NMFS staff provide information about NMFS' tribal consultation and co-management efforts, and noted that other organizations such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Advisory Councils or other fishery management councils may have unique tools for engagement that the Council should consider.

### **2.1.2 April 2019**

The committee met via teleconference on 29 April 2019 to review the list of engagement tools and strategies that are currently employed by the Council. The teleconference was an opportunity for the committee to ask questions of the staff about each item. The committee elected to discuss the existing tools and strategies at the next in-person meeting.

### **2.1.3 June 2019**

The committee met on 4 June 2019 in Sitka, AK. The purpose of the meeting was to review the list of existing engagement tools and strategies employed by the Council and begin to develop recommendations to augment the current approach. The committee noted that much of the work that the Council and staff currently engage in are focused outreach around specific Council actions, rather than general community engagement. The CEC recognized the usefulness and effectiveness of these activities, and agreed that focused outreach should continue, where appropriate. The committee also suggested that strategies and programs to improve two-way engagement strategies, as the committee is tasked, are important. The committee identified a number of possible tools and strategies for the Council to consider, identified in Section 3 of this report. Final consensus recommendations are provided in Section 5.

### **2.1.4 October 2019**

The committee met on 1 October 2019 in Homer, AK. The purpose of the meeting was to continue to review existing Council engagement strategies and develop recommendations for new strategies and tools to improve the Council's engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities. After the June committee meeting, the Council began to implement some of the improvements that the committee identified. Those improvements were presented to the committee and included development of flyers and other materials designed to introduce the Council to community members that may not be familiar with the Council or its process. The committee was also informed of the evening "Introduction to the Council" session that was held on the evening of 1 October 2019. This session was implemented at the recommendation of the committee and is intended to be available whenever the Council holds a meeting in an Alaskan community outside of Anchorage or Juneau. Council staff also informed the committee that the introductory session was intended to be a learning opportunity and the presentations can be modified, as appropriate, for different communities. The committee was also informed by staff that Council staff, Council agency partners, and Council members will be receiving cultural awareness training in November and December, also as recommended by the committee.

The committee also received a summary of tribal consultation policies and procedures in place at NMFS Alaska Region. Although the responsibility for tribal consultation lies with NMFS and not the Council, the committee was interested in identifying policies and practices that may be utilized to improve the Council's engagement procedures. Some CEC members regularly request tribal consultations from agencies and have relevant experience with those requests at either the national or regional level. Both the committee and NMFS noted the importance of early notice to fully engage tribes, and some wondered whether the appropriate action to initiate consultation was during the Council process or after Council action when the agency considers regulations or rulemaking. The committee noted that Tribes receive many letters from Federal agencies about issues on which they may wish to request consultation. The volume and complexity of information can sometimes make it difficult to discern what information is relevant for each Tribe. In earlier meetings when tribal consultation was discussed, the committee noted that it is important to understand that although there are likely to be tools and processes that may be useful to the Council, it is well outside of the scope of the committee to address the Agency's consultation processes.

### **2.1.5 December 2019**

The Committee met on 2 December 2019 in Anchorage, AK. The Committee received a presentation from Todd Loomis and Jennifer Hooper, representatives of the bottom trawl groundfish industry and

Alaska Native Organizations on the Chinanik Qaluyat Nunivak (CQN) Working Group, a joint organization of the Bering Sea Elders Group, Association of Village Council Presidents, and the Alaska Seafood Cooperative. The working group provides opportunity on ongoing dialogue and active participation in research decisions regarding commercial fisheries near the Kuskokwim Bay, Etolin Strait, and Nunivak Island regions. The CQN Working Group is seen by many as a more inclusive and efficient way to address concerns than working through the Council process.

The majority of the CEC meeting was devoted to reviewing and revising the draft report. Details of the committee discussion are reflected in the report from December 2019, and are reflected in this final report. The committee developed a list of potential ideas based on previous committee meetings and discussions, the list is attached as Appendix 1.

Although at least one more meeting in early 2020 was envisioned by the committee the global COVID-19 pandemic precluded any in-person meetings. The committee initially elected to wait to have another meeting, anticipating that in-person meetings would resume in short order. However, the ongoing pandemic necessitated a virtual meeting to complete the committee's business.

#### **2.1.6 January 2021**

The Committee met on 12 January 2021 to identify final recommendations from the committee and to develop rationale for each recommendation. The meeting was held online due to the constraints caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The committee received a discussion paper identifying opportunities for cultural awareness training, and developed rationale for the consensus final recommendations to the Council. The recommendations are presented below.

### **3 Recommendations to improve Council engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities**

This section presents the recommendations by the committee to improve the Council's engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities. These recommendations are the result of a series of meetings where ideas were generated and discussed with input from the public. Not all ideas that were discussed were chosen as consensus recommendations of the committee. Although the committee recognized that there are cost, logistical, and other constraints that might preclude some of these recommendations, the committee chose to present these recommendations to address perceived shortfalls in the Council's engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities without considering those constraints. This allows the Council to consider any constraints as they chose whether and how to implement any changes.

The committee encourages the Council, throughout its process, to consider Tribes as sovereign governments that have government to government relationships with the National Marine Fisheries Service and other branches of the U.S. Federal government. The committee further encouraged the Council to consider treating Tribes equally to the States of Alaska, Washington, and Oregon in its proceedings.

Throughout the process, the committee noted that the outreach (information from the Council to the public) is a good process and should continue. The committee many times expressed that the intention is to enhance outreach efforts to engagement (two-way transfer of information), where appropriate.

The following sections identify the consensus engagement recommendations developed by the committee for the Council to consider. The engagement ideas are presented here in a list in no particular order and relative order does not indicate priority.

### 3.1 Tribal and Rural Community Liaison

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the Council add a full-time Tribal and Rural Community Liaison position to Council staff.**

At several meetings, the committee discussed whether the Council should develop and hire a Tribal and Rural Community Liaison position. The preference of the committee is that the Tribal and Rural Community Liaison would be a stand-alone position. The liaison would connect rural and tribal citizens and organizations to the Council process and act as a point of first contact to help rural and tribal citizens and organizations navigate the Council process. The committee suggested that the liaison should work across Council actions to provide information and guidance for rural and tribal stakeholders that wish to become engaged generally or on specific Council actions. The committee noted that many Federal agencies that engage with rural and tribal communities and are required to undertake tribal consultation have a tribal liaison on staff (e.g., USFWS), and suggested that those job descriptions could serve as a model from which the Council could design their own position.

The committee recognized that a stand-alone position would require additional funding, and suggested that if funding were preventative, the duties of a tribal and rural community liaison should be added to an existing staff member as part of their Full Time Employee duties. Some expressed concern that several staff members are now engaged either in outreach activities or the Council's current social science efforts. Combining these responsibilities for a single staff member may require rewriting job descriptions and may cause disruptions with other staff responsibilities. However, the committee expressed that while disruptions might affect short-term responsibilities, the long-term benefits of a tribal and rural community liaison on staff would be worth the short-term disruptions.

### 3.2 Cultural Awareness training

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that all Council members and Council employees should receive cultural awareness training, and further recommends that First Alaskans Institute provide that training. The committee recommends that Council members and Council employees should be prioritized for training, but that AP and SSC members should also receive cultural awareness training, when possible. The committee endorses the list of topics identified in the discussion paper, but also recommends that the Council add additional priorities, as necessary, to meet the Council's needs.**

One of the recommendations from the community engagement committee was that Council members and Council employees should receive cultural awareness training because many of the members and employees are unfamiliar with rural Alaska and Alaska Native cultures. In 2019 Council leadership determined that cultural awareness training was one of the recommendations that could be implemented immediately rather than waiting for the final committee report. Council staff, therefore, began a search for an organization that could provide training for Council staff, Council agency partners, and the Council members within the time and budget constraints of the Council. In general, the Council was seeking one-day training for Council staff and agency partners, and 3-4 hour training for Council members. Although multiple organizations were contacted, none had training materials that met the time constraints (most training was 40 hours). One proposal from a company recommended by resource development companies operating in rural Alaska met the constraints and the company was contracted to provide training. Unfortunately, the company was unable to meet the contract requirements and the contract was cancelled.

The discussion paper presented by Dr. Haapala in January 2021 identified a number of possible providers and a list of training topics that the Council could consider. After review, the committee recommended the training offered by First Alaskans Institute. Committee members noted that First Alaskans Institute works with Alaska Native organizations and communities throughout the State and provides flexibility and timing to meet the Council's needs.

### 3.3 Co-presentation from Tribal representatives on all agenda items

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the Council formalize a process to solicit presentation and co-presentation from Alaska Native communities, organizations, and co-management bodies on actions that may affect rural and Alaska Native communities.**

The Council periodically receives reports from industry cooperative members at the request of the Council on issues of importance to the cooperatives, bycatch management, or other management issues. Some committee members felt that it would be useful for the Council to receive similar reports from Tribal organizations on actions that may affect rural and Alaska Native communities. The committee stated that it could be a responsibility of the tribal and rural community liaison to work with Council analysts and tribal and rural citizens to determine when tribes and rural communities might wish to provide a report. The committee also noted that a standing Tribal Advisory Committee (see 3.3, below) could serve as an opportunity to identify actions that could affect rural and Alaska Native communities, and provide some information to the Council.

### 3.4 Standing Community Engagement or Tribal Advisory Committee

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the Council establish a standing Community Engagement or Tribal Advisory Committee that can provide continued recommendations regarding the Council's engagement efforts.**

The committee noted that much of the discussion that has occurred has suggested the need for a standing committee to provide input and review issues for the Council. As example, a standing committee could act as an initial review of actions for which the Council may seek Tribal input or co-presentation (see 3.2). The committee also noted that a standing committee could work closely with a Tribal and Rural Community Liaison.

### 3.5 Tribal Consultation

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that:**

- a. The Council form a working group to address the issue of Tribal Consultation inputs into their process and request that NMFS staff participate in those efforts. This should include recommending a process for ensuring that Tribal Consultation is used to the best, highest, and intended effect and is regularly and meaningfully included in the Council process.**
- b. The Council request that NMFS engage in Tribal Consultation on issues related to the Council in a regular and ongoing fashion.**
- c. Council staff participate in relevant NMFS Tribal Consultation meetings.**

The committee spent a great deal of time on the concept of Tribal Consultation. The community engagement committee was formed because the Council is not responsible for Tribal Consultation, as all Federal agencies are. Rather, the Council develops policy and NMFS, as the action agency, is responsible for Tribal Consultation. The committee noted that there is a time disparity between a decision made by the Council and when NMFS' tribal consultation occurs. NMFS must, by necessity, conduct consultations after the Council has identified a Preferred Alternative for a particular action. However, the committee noted that consultation could begin early in the analysis and decision-making process to allow for more meaningful input as alternatives are analyzed and discussed. The committee recognized that the Council has the opportunity to encourage NMFS to initiate consultation early in the process, and the committee felt that there is also an opportunity for the Council to create their own process whereby information from tribal and rural communities could be incorporated as the Council is reviewing analyses and deliberating decisions. Some committee members noted that this is precisely the reason that the community engagement committee was formed, and noted that the Council has created the Social Sciences Planning

Team and the Local and Traditional Knowledge and Subsistence Action Module for the BS FEP specifically to consider ways to incorporate social and local and traditional information into the Council decision-making process.

### **3.6 Modifying Public Comment Procedures**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the Council:**

- a. Provide an opportunity during B reports for public comment on any agenda item.**
- b. Allow public comment via teleconference or videoconference.**
- c. Summarize oral public comment in committee meeting minutes.**

Members of the committee and members of the public from rural communities have expressed that providing public testimony is a challenge that can prevent their voices from being heard at the Council. Some of the contributors to making public testimony a challenge include significant costs and logistical challenges of traveling to meetings, a lack of understanding of terminology and acronyms used by the Council, a lack of historical knowledge of fishery management in Alaska, and fear of testifying in an unfamiliar and potentially unfriendly setting.

The Council has taken many steps to make testifying in writing easier for all stakeholders. Each committee meeting, advisory body meeting, and Council meeting has an electronic agenda that is available via [meetings.npfmc.org](https://meetings.npfmc.org) and contains links to allow stakeholders to provide written testimony on any agenda item. An option discussed by the committee could be to also accept an audio recording of comment that could be attached, as is done for a written comment file. Some stakeholders, however, may not have regular computer or internet access or may still wish to provide testimony in person to be able to answer questions and fully engage in the process. The community engagement committee considered several possibilities to allow tribal and rural stakeholders to provide oral testimony from their communities, or in person testimony during the meeting. The committee's consensus recommendation is to encourage the Council to allow public comment via teleconference or videoconference from rural Alaskan communities. Many communities have teleconference and videoconference services. Travel from outlying communities to the hubs could substantially reduce travel costs for stakeholders compared to travel Anchorage or other communities in Alaska, Washington, or Oregon where the Council meeting is held. Committee members noted that other meetings have provided opportunities for teleconference or videoconference testimony. Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has necessitated remote meetings, that include public comment via phone. Committee members acknowledged that this has added considerable time to Council meetings, and the Council has not been able to include as many agenda items as normal during the pandemic. However, the committee felt that as in-person meetings resume, most people who regularly attend Council meetings will again participate in-person, and allowing teleconference or videoconference comments will provide continued opportunity for participation from rural communities.

To address logistical and cost issues, the committee considered providing opportunity on the Council's agenda (e.g., during B Reports) to allow testimony on any agenda item from those stakeholders who are unable to stay for the entire Council meeting. This could provide opportunity for stakeholders to be present for committee, SSC, and AP meetings and provide testimony to the Council in a few days rather than remaining at the meeting for a week or more. The committee considered whether this could be offered only to rural citizens or must be made available to all and acknowledged that limiting the opportunity to only rural Alaskan citizens could be logistically or legally challenging.

The committee also suggested that Council staff should summarize public comment provided by each commenter in committee minutes. In other committees, staff have summarized public comments. However, some commenters have complained that summaries in committee minutes have, sometimes, not adequately conveyed what was intended by the commenter. Therefore, there is currently a staff policy that staff do not summarize public comment in committee reports. The multiple opportunities for the

commenter to provide their own oral or written comment removes the potential for misinterpretation and misreporting.

However, some committee members noted that some elders or other community members have provided oral comment to committees, but not provided written comment. In these cases, their comments are not provided to the SSC, AP, or Council, as written comments would be. Although some committee members acknowledged the difficulties associated with interpreting public comment in minutes, and the multiple opportunities for written comment, the committee chose to recommend that oral comment be summarized in committee meeting minutes.

### **3.7 Travel support**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the Council provide scholarships or funding for Tribes to participate in Council meetings.**

Committee members and public comment made it very clear that Council meeting logistics are a major impediment for rural Alaskan participation. The costs associated with air travel to Anchorage or other city in or outside of Alaska, food and lodging, and other associated costs make it very difficult for individuals to attend, and can make it prohibitive for representatives of communities or organizations to attend Council meetings in or out of Alaska. Many of the suggestions considered by the committee focused on ways to either reduce direct costs to rural Alaskan attendees, particularly for individuals and organizations without financial means to send representatives, or alternatives to attending a Council meeting that still allow participation by rural Alaskan residents.

The committee recommended that the Council scholarships or direct travel funding to allow direct participation by Tribes in Council meetings. The intention is to reach Tribes and people who are not already part of the Council process, those that have not previously been able to participate, and those without the resources to attend a Council meeting.

In previous committee meetings, the committee considered possibilities for scholarships that included Federally funded scholarships operated through the Council, and non-Federally funded scholarships operated through regional Alaska Native regional corporations, CDQ groups, or other non-profit organizations. Regional corporations and CDQ groups have, at times, funded travel for representatives from specific communities to attend meetings on issues of particular importance to those communities. However, committee members noted that those instances are few and did not consider regional corporations or CDQ groups to be reliable funding opportunities for Council meeting travel.

The committee acknowledged the logistical hurdles associated with travel support, including criteria for scholarship eligibility, how decisions are made about which applicants receive funding, the goal of the scholarships (educational for new participants or subsidizing regular participants), and whether scholarships are available only for Tribal members or for all rural community members.

### **3.8 Council travel to rural communities**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the Council:**

- a) Continue holding Council meetings in rural and Alaska Native communities.**
- b) Encourage Council members to visit rural and Alaska Native communities.**

The committee recommended that Council members travel to rural and Alaska Native communities in order to allow Council members to understand living in rural Alaska. The last Council members' trip to St. Paul Island was noted as a successful model for Council member visits, but the committee also stressed that it is important that multiple Council members attend along with Council staff. In the past, such travel has been associated with outreach on specific action items that are important to rural communities. At several meetings, the committee expressed the importance of getting Council members

to visit rural or Alaska Native communities at least once per year, outside of the Councils regular meeting schedule. The committee stressed that the Council should consider visiting both hub communities and smaller communities beyond the hubs. The committee also noted that holding meetings in hub communities provides citizens from outlying communities greater opportunity to connect with the Council and participate in the Council process.

The committee also suggested that the Council should expand the list of communities where regular Council meetings are held. The committee recognized that there are logistical constraints (hotel space, etc.) for communities to host full meetings, but also suggested that the Council experience with hosting online meetings could relax some of the logistical constraints by allowing some participants to attend remotely.

### **3.9 Measuring success of engagement efforts**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the Council develop qualitative and quantitative metrics through which the Council can measure the impact of its engagement strategies.**

The committee discussed ways that the Council can record what the Council has done to encourage engagement and track the effects of any engagement efforts that are ultimately enacted. For example, the committee has previously recommended using social media (e.g., Facebook) as a way to reach rural communities. Although Council staff tried multiple times to create a Council Facebook profile, the effort was not successful. The committee suggested that there should be some way to record these efforts, including whether engagement goals were achieved, and whether there were challenges in achieving goals. No specific metrics were provided, but the Social Sciences Planning Team and the LK/TK/Subsistence Task Force, and potentially a standing Tribal Advisory committee (see 3.3) may be able to consider and develop those metrics during their processes.

### **3.10 Outreach**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the Council continue current outreach practices and improve them to include information delivery and strategies to foster two-way engagement.**

The committee has consistently stated that they recognize the difference between the outreach that the Council is already doing and two-way engagement. Although this committee was established to improve the Council's engagement with tribal and rural communities, the committee has repeatedly expressed that the current outreach strategies are helpful and should continue.

The Council's current outreach strategies were developed by the Outreach Committee which was active from 2009-2011. The outreach committee designed a three-pronged strategy for informing communities of actions that the Council was considering at the time (e.g., Chinook salmon bycatch reduction). The strategy consisted of direct mailings to rural communities and tribal organizations, attendance at regional meetings, and direct report to the Council. As an example, for the initial Chinook salmon bycatch reduction measures Council staff sent direct mailings in 2009, 2010, and 2011 to more than 600 stakeholders, including community governments, regional and village Native Corporations, regional non-profits Native corporations, Tribal entities, Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils, Community Develop Quota corporations, ADF&G Regional Coordinators, and other community or Native entities. Council staff also hosted a statewide teleconference in 2010 to inform the public of the suite of alternatives that the Council was considering and allow the public to ask technical questions of the analysts. Council members and Council staff attended several meetings, often in rural locations, of the Yukon River Panel, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Regional Advisory Council, Western Interior Regional Advisory Council, Eastern Interior Regional Advisory

Council, Bristol Bay Regional Advisory Council, and Tanana Chiefs Conference<sup>2</sup>. Council staff continue to visit Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils annually, upon request, to provide the latest updates to salmon and halibut bycatch management measures.

A list of the communication, outreach, and engagement practices that the Council employs was provided to the committee in April 2019, and is included as Appendix B. The committee recommended that those practices should continue and be augmented by improvements to information delivery and strategies to foster two-way engagement.

### **3.10.1 Outreach recommendations already enacted by the Council**

In June 2019, the committee identified a list of actions that the Council could consider. While this list was intended to inform this final report of the committee, Council leadership determined that some of the recommendations could be implemented immediately, without need to wait. In October 2019, Council staff identified a number of initiatives that the Council had enacted, based on the committee's recommendation in June, including: new flyers and information materials prepared to support the "Introduction to the Council Process" informational session hosted by the Council on a Tuesday evening before the Council meeting started, a three-meeting outlook with staff leads identified, a brief summary of agenda items to quickly communicate the purpose of each agenda item, and the Council meeting press release that was distributed to print, radio, and television media outlets to inform the local community of the Council meeting. The committee commended Council staff for the work done and provided some feedback and potential improvements to the materials. Updates to the materials are being prepared and a second "Introduction to the Council Process" informational session was planned in association with the community engagement committee meeting in Bethel, AK in April 2020. However, restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic precluded the committee meeting in Bethel.

### **3.11 Co-Production of knowledge**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the Council encourage co-production of knowledge and incorporate LK and TK, and information from Tribal Consultation, and results from outreach and engagement with Alaska Native communities meaningfully in analyses, recommendations, and data so that they are clearly factored into Council recommendations and decision-making.**

The committee at several times briefly discussed co-production of knowledge, a relatively new process to develop a body of knowledge that equally considers western scientific knowledge and Indigenous knowledges. Several other Council committees (Ecosystem Committee, Social Sciences Planning Team, BS FEP LK/TK/Subsistence Task Force) have considered or encouraged co-production of knowledge. The Council is not in a position to develop co-produced knowledge, but those other Council committees have expressed the value of co-produced knowledge, and this committee also encouraged the Council to consider co-produced knowledge on an equal footing as western scientific knowledge during its decision-making process.

### **3.12 Additional positions at NMFS**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the Council work with NMFS Alaska Region to:**

- a) Establish a dedicated Tribal Liaison position at NMFS.**

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<sup>2</sup> Described in Council discussion paper: Review of Council Rural Community Outreach. Available at <http://npfmc.legistar.com/gateway.aspx?M=F&ID=19ac55aa-5238-46f3-9d17-4e8dcb504b52.pdf>.

**b) Recommend that AFSC increase non-economic social science staff, particularly with expertise working with Alaska native communities and their knowledges.**

The committee recognized that the Council has limited authority to recommend positions at NMFS Alaska Region or AFSC, but felt that those positions would help to provide involvement and engagement of Alaska Native organizations in the fishery management process.

### **3.13 Indigenous inclusion in Council advisory bodies**

**Recommendation: The committee recommends that the Council include indigenous representation from each region (GOA, BS, Arctic) on the AP, and indigenous representation on every Council body (SSC, AP, etc.).**

The committee noted that there are many Tribes in Alaska and it is difficult for one or a few people to represent all of them on the Council advisory bodies. The committee noted that there was frustration amongst Alaskan Native communities when one of the Alaska Native representatives on the AP was not reappointed, and some were concerned that the engagement efforts took a step backwards. Committee members noted that one of the best ways to build trust in a process is to include more people in the process, which also serves to expose more people to the Council process.

## **4 Potential constraints for the Council**

The introduction to this paper noted that there may be logistical, legal, or cost constraints that the Council would consider as any recommendations are implemented. The recommendations of the committee are presented without regard to those constraints to accurately reflect the intention of the committee, who recognized that some of these recommendations would be considered aspirational and may not be immediately implementable. The intention is not to address any and all constraints now, but to identify some of the known constraints to allow the committee, the public, and the Council to be aware of them as they consider this report.

### **4.1 Legal constraints**

Legal constraints, if they exist, may be the most challenging for the Council to address. General Counsel will likely be involved in any decisions that are taken by the Council that have legal implications. Although these recommendations may not be considered management measures, National Standard 4, which prohibits discrimination between residents of different states, may apply to some. Special dispensation for public comment, travel, or other matters may not be authorized under the Council's funding grant.

### **4.2 Logistical constraints**

Some of the recommendations from the committee may result in logistical challenges that could extend Council meetings or involve complicated travel arrangements. The Council will have to consider the expected benefits of some actions compared with the expected challenges for meetings that are already logistically complex. Other recommendations may involve telecommunications or internet bandwidth challenges that may preclude some communities from hosting Council meetings or advisory body meetings. This may be particularly true for some outlying communities which the committee has prioritized for engagement. As internet connectivity is improved throughout Alaska, this constraint may become less important.

### **4.3 Cost constraints**

Some of the recommendations from the committee involve either new or modified staff positions, or additional travel for staff and Council members. The current budget climate creates challenges to increases in staff or travel costs. The committee recognized the challenges that level funding or declining budgets create, but encourages the Council to consider the recommendations from the committee as staffing, travel, and other issues are considered.

## **5 Conclusions**

The community engagement committee was established by the Council in June 2018 to consider opportunities to improve the Council's engagement with tribal and rural Alaskan communities. The committee first met in March 2019, and through five in-person meetings, one teleconference, and a virtual meeting over the course of two years the committee has prepared this list of recommendations for the Council to consider. Recommendations were made by consensus of the committee, and each is designed to address difficulties for tribal and rural Alaskan participation in Council activities, to augment current approaches, or to remedy perceived deficiencies in Council policy or procedure. Some of the recommendations are complementary, for instance a standing Tribal Advisory committee could address some of the other recommendations made by the committee.

The community engagement committee encourages the Council to continue to strive to achieve equal participation from rural and urban stakeholders and continue to seek strategies and technologies to encourage participation from tribal and rural communities.