



## North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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### Reflections on Council process and ideas for change

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Over the last two years, the Council process has undergone rapid change to its process and procedures, in order to continue the work of the Council during the global COVID-19 pandemic. In early 2020, it was the approach of staff to try to replicate the Council experience as much as possible, despite the switch from in-person to virtual meetings. Over the past two years, we have, of necessity, pioneered a number of changes to the way we conduct business, particularly focusing on accessibility and meeting efficiency in what we thought would be the short-term virtual environment. As we contemplate again returning to in-person meetings in 2022, it is worthwhile to take stock of our process overall, and see whether there are opportunities to rethink and improve how the Council operates to best meet its mission.

This paper looks at the Council process in two respects – the Council meeting schedule/agenda timing, and Council advisory bodies. It is our intent to provide some background information and reflections to guide a public consideration of how existing Council procedures might be adjusted. **If, after receiving input, the Council is interested in further exploring any of these changes, we anticipate these would be further developed for Council decision at a future meeting.** The inclusion of ideas in this paper should not be interpreted as a staff recommendation; we are trying to start a conversation and solicit ideas.

#### Council meeting schedule and agenda timing

##### Status quo

The Council's typical meeting schedule is to convene five times a year, beginning the first week of every other month, starting in February and skipping August. In accordance with our SOPP, the Council generally meets once in the Pacific Northwest, once in an Alaskan fishing community, and the remaining meetings occur in Anchorage, AK, which is the most central destination for the Alaska fishing community constituents. The SSC, AP, and Council all meet consecutively and have a similar agenda. In person, these meetings generally lasted 7-9 days, beginning on a Monday and ending by the following Tuesday; virtually, the minimum footprint is for these meetings to occur during two consecutive workweeks. The virtual meetings cannot overlap as much as they do in person, primarily because when SSC and AP members are attending from home rather than traveling to the meeting venue, it is harder to multi-task and it takes more time to turn minutes around for the Council.

Table 1 provides an overview of the recurring NPFMC agenda items through the cycle of a typical Council meeting year. Recurring items are primarily reports on various issues, Council actions on harvest specifications, and discussion of tasking priorities and new proposals. In addition to these recurring items, each Council agenda will include proposed management measure evaluations at various stages of review, and ad hoc reports as requested. The Council organizes their agenda in the following order:

- A items – approve agenda, election of officers
- B items – agency reports
- C items – major issues / final action items
- D items – other issues
- E items – discussion of tasking and new proposals

In general, agency reports are only presented to the Council. Time permitting, the Advisory Panel generally reviews all C, D, and E agenda items with the exception of review of requests for emergency action, and industry reports. The SSC reviews C and D agenda items that pertain to harvest specifications, initial review of management analyses, or items that require scientific advice.

**Table 1 Standard Annual Schedule of Recurring NPFMC Agenda Items, pre-pandemic**

STANDARD NPFMC MEETING AGENDA SCHEDULE, PRE-PANDEMIC					
	First week of February	First week of April	First week of June	First week of October	First week of December
	<i>Seattle, WA or Portland, OR</i>	<i>Anchorage, AK</i>	<i>Fishing community in AK</i>	<i>Usually in Anchorage, AK</i>	<i>Anchorage, AK</i>
<b>REPORTS AND EVENTS</b>					
Agency Reports at Every Meeting	Executive Director NMFS Management NOAA GC ADFG Management USCG USFWS	Executive Director NMFS Management NOAA GC ADFG Management USCG USFWS	Executive Director NMFS Management NOAA GC ADFG Management USCG USFWS	Executive Director NMFS Management NOAA GC ADFG Management USCG USFWS	Executive Director NMFS Management NOAA GC ADFG Management USCG USFWS
Periodic Agency/ Other Reports	NMFS: cost recovery AFSC: budget, funding outlook USCG: year in review IPHC Protected Resources	NMFS: EFH consultations, seabird report NIOSH Groundfish, Crab Coop Reports	ED: CCC update NOAA Enforcement	AFSC: science overview	ED: A80 halibut avoidance IPHC (T) NMFS: Final upcoming ADP NMFS: inseason mgmt. year in review NOAA Enforcement
Events	Election of officers at AP, SSC Finance Committee Industry reception		Outreach event Reception for departing Council members	Election of officers at Council	Executive Session for AP/SSC appointments Halibut stock assessment evening presentation (T)
<b>HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS</b>					
BSAI Crab	Crab specs: NSRKC Crab Plan Team report Crab Economic SAFE (SSC only) Model reviews (SSC only)		Crab specs: AIGKC; PIRKC, PIGKC, WAIRKC (triennial) Crab Plan Team report Model reviews (SSC only)	Crab specs: BBRKC, EBS Tanner, EBS Snow; SMBKC, PIBKC (biennial) Crab Plan Team report Final Crab SAFE report	
Groundfish	Groundfish Economic SAFE report (SSC only)			BSAI Gfish Proposed specs GOA Gfish Proposed specs Gfish Plan Team reports Model reviews (SSC only) Prelim. Ecosystem Status (SSC only)	BSAI Groundfish final specs GOA Groundfish final specs Gfish Plan Team reports BSAI, GOA SAFE reports Ecosystem Status Reports
Scallop		Scallop specs Scallop SAFE report			
Halibut					Charter halibut management measures
<b>OTHER AGENDA ITEMS</b>					
Monitoring and data needs	Research priorities (triennial) Exempted fishing permit application review (T)		Observer Annual Report FMAC report Social Science Planning Team report	Observer Annual Deployment Plan PCFMAC report Exempted fishing permit application review (T)	Social Science Planning Team teleconference report
Ecosystem	Marine mammal conservation status (SSC only) Gfish management policy review (triennial)	BS FEP team/ taskforce reports Salmon genetics for BS, GOA Pollock IPA reports			
Tasking	Staff tasking, scheduling, and new proposals	Staff tasking, scheduling, and new proposals	Staff tasking, scheduling, and new proposals	Staff tasking, scheduling, and new proposals	Staff tasking, scheduling, and new proposals

## Reflections and ideas to consider

The following ideas are presented in no particular order; they are enumerated only so as to assist Council members and the public in keeping track while discussing the various ideas.

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

This idea has long been in circulation because of the short working time between the end of the December Council meeting and the deadline for materials to be posted for the February meeting, which is often the first or second week of January. Given that this period spans the holidays, it is expected that some or many critical persons will be taking scheduled leave over this period, among the team of primary authors, specialist experts, collaborators, and internal reviewers. While staff try to plan in advance as much as possible for February deliverables, it is not always possible.

If we were to drop the February meeting, we could move the April meeting to March, and gain more time for staff work preceding both the March and June meetings. Alternatively, we might move the June meeting earlier as well, to late May. We would need to consider which meeting should instead occur in the Pacific Northwest, to meet the terms of our SOPP, and be cognizant of not overlapping with other meetings such as the PFMC. In terms of the requirements of recurring agenda items, we would need to discuss how best to adjust for the needs of the NSRKC fishery specifications, but there would be no other impact. February is typically a lighter agenda for the Council, in part in recognition of the fact that there is little staff time to prepare for the meeting, but also because there is a sense that issues that are primarily of interest to Alaska residents should be discussed in Alaska, where the meeting is more accessible. This latter consideration may not weigh as critically in the future, depending on the effectiveness of remote public testimony at in-person meetings.

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

The lessons of the past two years have taught us that we can run effective Council meetings virtually. Given the cost of in-person travel to Council meetings, both for the Council and for meeting participants, it is reasonable to consider whether we should schedule some meetings in our annual schedule as virtual in the future. We have previously heard from stakeholders that they are concerned about equitable access if some advocates can attend in person while others are limited to remote participation; purposely scheduling some virtual meetings would attenuate this concern, if it turns out to be valid, while still reducing costs.

If the Council is interested in this possibility, we would further explore which meeting(s) make the most sense to be virtual, and whether we should think of this in combination with other changes to the agenda. We know that virtual meetings have a longer overall footprint than in-person meetings. Would it make sense to limit the agenda at a virtual meeting, perhaps in lieu of dropping a meeting altogether? Or perhaps consider which are the best issues to discuss virtually; it might be preferable for the virtual agenda to focus on agenda items that are less controversial or complex, or that do not require reconciling many conflicting perspectives. The Council might also consider the value of alternating virtual and in-person meetings: for example, make the April meeting virtual, interspersed between in-person meetings in February and June. Or a June virtual meeting might provide a participation opportunity for stakeholders that are actively fishing during that time period. An additional factor to consider might be Federal travel policies once we begin returning to in-person meetings; if there is some reluctance to send agency presenters to in-person meetings when they could give their presentation remotely, there may be advantage to considering, especially for recurring agenda items, which are most likely to be delivered remotely and so build a virtual meeting around those items. It may be premature to decide on a formal schedule until we have more experience with hybrid meetings.

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

On a related note, there may be some advantage in setting one of the annual meetings as an issue specific meeting, again in lieu of dropping a meeting altogether. For example, could we make the December meeting exclusively focused on year-end reports, charter halibut management measures, and groundfish harvest specifications, and purposely not schedule management measure analyses during that meeting? That could be beneficial for the SSC, which always has a tight schedule in December. Under this scenario, there might also be value in considering an in-person/virtual hybrid: the SSC meeting in person, but AP and Council meet virtually.

Alternatively, if the Council is taking final action on a major agenda item, would it make sense to do that at an issue-specific meeting, rather than as part of a suite of agenda items? If in person, this would provide the benefit of limiting public and staff travel only to those persons who are specifically interested in the agenda item, and would allow Council members to devote all their focus to the major item. In a similar vein, planning meeting agendas with limited issues that all engage the same stakeholders could also be efficient.

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

The October meeting coincides with the start of the Federal budget year (October 1<sup>st</sup>); if there is the threat of a government shutdown, the disruption requires a considerable amount of advance planning by all involved in the meeting, and if the shutdown actually occurs, it prevents agency staff from presenting at or participating in the meeting. An option would be to hold the meeting earlier, at the end of September; but this would require reconsidering the timing of October information, especially from the summer surveys, and the effect on crab specifications, groundfish Plan Teams, and the observer Annual Deployment Plan. It might also be helpful to move the meeting even a week later, which might also provide some relief to crab stock assessment authors, but that would need to be considered in conjunction with the December meeting timing, and the timing of the crab fisheries (see below).

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

The Council has already identified an interest in reconsidering the timing of the October BSAI crab specifications because any delay as to when the Council can take action on setting ABC and OFL adds pressure on ADFG and NMFS RAM division to set TAC, issue quota shares and open the crab fisheries on time on October 15<sup>th</sup>. Staff will discuss this issue over the coming months and report back to the Council on potential solutions.

Additionally, the SSC has also expressed concern about the timing of the groundfish specifications cycle. Similarly, the timeframe is extremely compressed for AFSC stock assessment authors to complete their assessments and get them internally reviewed in time for the Plan Team meeting, and for the Plan Team to provide the SAFE report and minutes to the SSC with sufficient review time prior to the December SSC meeting. Because of the Thanksgiving holiday, this timing has sometimes given SSC members few to no work-week days to review hundreds of pages of assessments prior to the start of the meeting. With the changes over the last several years in the management structure particularly of BSAI fisheries, and with stock prioritization changing the cycles of assessments, there may be an opportunity to see whether any adjustment is possible. That being said, there are a lot of complex factors that went into designing the timing of the current groundfish specifications process, in order for the regional office to get the final specs implemented in the spring, and no changes should be proposed without a thorough internal evaluation.

### **6. Reconsider the frequency of agency reports.**

There are currently six agency reports that are always scheduled at each Council meeting: from the Executive Director, NMFS management, NOAA General Counsel, ADFG, US Coast Guard, and USFWS. In addition, AFSC and NOAA Enforcement provide biannual reports; and IPHC and NIOSH provide annual reports. The Council also receives an annual report from NMFS habitat division, and has

previously received an annual protected species report, although in future, the Council will likely request NMFS and USFWS to provide this information. Since the Council switched to virtual meetings, these agency reports have largely been provided only in written form, rather than as oral reports; the Executive Director provides a slide summarizing the key topics in the report to jog Council members' recollection, and they have an opportunity to ask questions to agency representatives as desired.

It seems opportune to consider whether the Council would like to resume receiving oral reports from each agency at each meeting, or consider a different frequency. For example, the Council might continue the current practice from virtual where each agency submits a written report and there is an opportunity to ask questions; or the Council might formally change the frequency and request that most agencies provide an oral report only once a year, and provide written briefings as appropriate for the remainder of the meetings unless the agency indicates the Council would benefit from an oral report on a particular issue. For the latter option, the Council could decide whether to concentrate oral reports at a single meeting, for example at the beginning or end of the year, or whether to spread them out over the course of the annual meeting cycle. It would be helpful to identify which reports the Council might always want to receive orally – for example, the Executive Director's report and the NMFS management report frequently include timely information about ongoing Council discussions – and whether written reports at each other meeting would be preferred, or entirely at the discretion of the agency. Note that the Council has also identified an opportunity for organizations to contact the Executive Director to request the opportunity to provide short, informational presentations as part of his report.

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

The discussion of B reports, and particularly those agency reports that provide informational more than immediately actionable information, is also relevant to a broader question about the order of the Council's agenda and the tension between needing to prioritize time for major, controversial actions, and the fresh perspective needed to proactively think through novel and adaptive approaches to longer-term issues, such as ecosystem-based management and climate change response, which are often taken up towards the end of the agenda. The current structure of the Council's C and D items purposely moves non-final actions later in the agenda, to ensure that there is sufficient meeting time for the major actions, especially given the unpredictability of time needed for public testimony. The Council may wish to consider whether a different agenda structure, meetings themed around a subject, or even a dedicated meeting or workshop would provide a better venue for the considerations of long-term planning.

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

With the broadcasting of SSC and AP meetings in virtual, and not overlapping those meetings with the Council as previously occurred, there has been much more opportunity for Council members and the public to listen to staff presentations to other bodies before the issues comes before the Council. It has also highlighted some level of redundancy, particularly at the AP and Council, when staff give the same, often lengthy, presentation with questions, and testifiers provide the same testimony in both places. While this is particularly an issue in the virtual meeting environment, there may be some parallels when we return to in-person meetings as well. Staff have discussed different ways, particularly using online tools, to streamline this inefficiency, but ultimately the issue comes down to logistics and timing – if staff were to give a single presentation to both groups, and testifiers also give their testimony only once, can all members get their questions answered by the presenters and testifiers? And is the Council willing to then table the issue in order to benefit from the AP deliberations before taking action? While we do not have an easy solution, we included this idea in the list of reflections, as it would be helpful to hear whether the Council members have any interest in further exploration. Are there some issues where it might make sense to reduce the overall meeting footprint by reducing redundancy? Or is it actually helpful to Council members to have the opportunity to listen to presentations and testimony more than once? There is also some overlap of this issue with reflections on how best to utilize the Advisory Panel, below.

## Council advisory bodies

### Status quo

The second area that this paper considers is the Council’s approach to its advisory groups. In general, the Council has four types of advisory groups, as illustrated in Table 2. The SSC and the Advisory Panel are both required advisory groups under the MSA. They have a different role in the Council process than any other body, as their scope is broad, providing scientific and operational/policy advice, respectively, on the majority of Council agenda items. They meet in conjunction with the Council. SSC and AP members are appointed by vote of the entire Council in Executive Session. SSC members are appointed for one year and may be reappointed without limit; AP members are generally appointed for three-year terms with a three term limit. Additionally, AP membership is appointed in proportion to the States’ representation on the Council (Alaska, Washington, Oregon; see list of [current AP representation](#)).

The Plan Teams (including the FEP Taskforces) are all science or technical teams that do not focus on policy but provide scientific or technical expertise with respect to a specific Council objective. Plan Team and Taskforce candidates are reviewed by the SSC with respect to their qualifications to join the advisory group. Plan Team members must be agency staff or academics, and are appointed by vote of the Council. Taskforce members may be agency staff or members of the public, but must be experts and willing to take on a workload for the duration of the Taskforce, and are appointed by the Council Chair.

Committees, on the other hand, advise on policy, and can be categorized into two groups. Committees under the category ‘Executive’ are composed exclusively of Council members, or in the case of those with an external focus, Council members interacting with other management bodies (the Board of Fish, or the IPHC US Commissioners). The Council’s other committees are all issue-specific groups that have a narrow remit specific to the objective for which they were created. These committees can be standing committees, or may be created to serve a specific purpose after which they are disbanded. All committee members are appointed exclusively by the Chair of the Council, and a Council member is generally appointed to Chair issue-specific committees.

**Table 2 Council advisory groups**

COUNCIL ADVISORY GROUPS			
Required by statute	Executive	Committees	Plan Teams
Broad scope providing scientific or operational/policy advice to Council	Council members only, or Council members interacting with external management body representatives	Public members, generally with a Council member as chair	Science and Technical Advisory Groups
Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)	<i>Internal only:</i> Executive Committee	<i>Standing committees:</i> Charter Halibut Committee	<i>Stock assessment teams:</i> BSAI Crab
Fishing Industry Advisory Committee (this is our Advisory Panel)	Finance Committee Legislative Committee Crab Interim Action Committee <i>(required under the BSAI Crab FMP)</i>  <i>Interacting with external partners:</i> Joint Protocol Committee (with Board of Fish) Halibut Management Committee (with IPHC US commissioners) Council Coordination Committee (with other regional Councils)	Ecosystem Committee Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee (FMAC) and Partial Coverage FMAC Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee (PNCIAC)  <i>Ad hoc, as needed:</i> Community Engagement Committee Enforcement Committee Halibut Stakeholder Committee IFQ Committee Trawl EM Committee	BSAI Groundfish GOA Groundfish Scallop  <i>Other:</i> BS Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) BS FEP Taskforces Social Science Planning Team

## Reflections and ideas to consider

As above, the ideas provided here are presented in no particular order; they are enumerated only so as to assist Council members and the public in keeping track.

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

Under the current process, the Council calls for nominations for the AP at the conclusion of the October meeting, and nominations are due at the same time as the written public testimony deadline, immediately before the December meeting. Particularly in the virtual environment, this gives Council members very little opportunity to review new candidate applications, research qualifications, and speak to the candidate or their peers about their interest in serving on the AP. The Council's SOPP provides specific guidance for Council members to consider when selecting AP members; while the Council requests candidates submit a letter of interest and a resume, some Council members may wish to have time for direct conversations in order to evaluate the candidates.

A straightforward way to make the nomination process less rushed would be to change the timing of the call for nominations, and to move it earlier. Under our current Council schedule, this would mean that the Council would need to request the call for nominations at the June Council meeting. One downside to this earlier timeframe is that many candidates for the Advisory Panel are busy fishing in the summer months, and may be unable to devote the time to their application during this season. Depending on how much additional time the Council members would like, it might be reasonable to open the nomination period early, but not close it until shortly after the conclusion of the October Council meeting – a final reminder for nominations could go out in the October newsletter. That would still give Council members approximately 5-6 weeks to review nominations received, in preparation for the December decision.

Another aspect of the nomination process for AP members could be to add additional criteria that the Council is interested in seeking for AP members. At present, the following considerations are referenced in the SOPP for AP membership:

- *Of paramount importance is the demonstrated ability of the candidate to be objective and to consider all aspects of an issue.*
- *The AP members should be of top quality and caliber and be committed to full and active participation for each meeting during their term.*
- *The candidate should be considered because of the experience he/she brings to the Council rather than his/her political clout or connection.*
- *The candidate should be an active, involved member of his/her community and business to ensure the best and most pertinent input into the Council and likewise be responsible and diligent in reporting Council decisions and concerns back to his/her community/business.*

The Council is not limited to these considerations, and could identify other qualities to announce as part of the call for nominations. For example, a key function of the Advisory Panel is to work productively with members who may have very different, strongly-held views on fishery management. And since the introduction of virtual meetings, the AP is now broadcast and has wider public visibility than heretofore. The Council might consider recognizing the need for experience or ability to work professionally in a high pressure, public environment which requires problem solving skills and compromise to achieve resolution.

This past December, the Council appointed new AP members for a single year, rather than the traditional 3-year term, while it considers changes such as those discussed in this paper. The Council may wish to consider the value of appointing new members for a single year. On one hand, the Council may be able to expand the pool of potential AP candidates by offering a “trial” opportunity for new members to see whether they can work effectively within the Council system, and contribute both to their constituency and the sustainability of Alaska's fisheries. On the other hand, the learning curve of the Council process is

high, and the Council may be better served investing in candidates who consciously make time for the full term commitment of serving on the AP.

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

The AP is a large group, particularly considering it is a voting body that takes on contentious issues. It might be easier for the AP to make progress and compromise on issues if the group were smaller. The Council's SOPP states that the AP will consist of approximately 20 members, but also provides an opportunity to have a smaller group if the Council prefers. Under the Council's SOPP, the geographic representation on the AP is in proportion to States' representation on the Council (e.g., three-fifths of AP seats designated for Alaskan stakeholder representatives), and without reserving any particular seats, the SOPP also provides that the AP membership should represent the diversity of the Alaska fishing industry, harvesting gear types, and other interests in managing Council fisheries. If the Council is interested in a smaller AP, it should give some thought to how to balance that diversity over a smaller membership.

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

From the Council's SOPP, the Council "relies on the AP for comprehensive advice on how various fishery management alternatives will affect the industry and local economies, on potential conflicts between user groups of a given fishery resource or area, and on the extent to which the United States will utilize resources managed by the Council's fishery management plans." Based on this, the primary functions of the AP are at an operational level, to understand the impacts of management actions on gear sectors and different fishery and constituent groups, to identify potential for conflict among fishermen or better understand the business of fishing; to uncover unintended consequences that staff may not have identified or fully evaluated in an analysis so that they can be considered in decision making. AP members are also ambassadors for the Council within their constituency, and can help encourage public input and disseminate information about Council actions.

If the primary purpose of the AP is to provide an operational perspective to influence decision making, it may be useful to consider whether the Council can reinforce this purpose through changes to AP operations. For example, the SSC only reviews initial review drafts of management actions, not final action drafts, because their input is focused on whether the analysis in front of the Council is sufficient, from a scientific perspective, to be able to make a good decision. Perhaps it might be more effective for the AP to operate in a similar manner – review discussion papers and initial review drafts, where the information that is being collected to support decision making is reviewed and evaluated, and provide a perspective on the quality of that information from an operational perspective, and whether there are gaps or missing pieces that should be included.

The Council may, however, have an additional purpose for the AP, to provide policy input as to how the Council might navigate the tradeoffs associated with a particular management action, based on the collective representation of perspectives on the AP. Or perhaps, to identify in particular the rationale of the pros and cons associated with the various policy options that are available to the Council, from the perspective of different sectors and interests. In that case, reviewing a final action document in order to clarify and crystallize those rationale points provides the Council with an effective tool in support of its final action decision. It may be helpful for the Council to clarify its purpose for the AP, and set expectations accordingly; this would also set the stage for any potential operational changes at the AP.

It has been the practice of the AP to put forward motions and vote on issues, in order to provide guidance to the Council on how to balance options within the often complex management programs that are proposed and analyzed. The practice of identifying motions and voting can be an effective way to organize a path of compromise and problem solving through the fine points of a contentious issue. Sometimes, however, the act of voting can take on too much significance, if the objective to be on the winning side subsumes the value to the Council of highlighting areas that are particularly contentious or not sufficiently well understood. The Council may want to consider whether the AP could still provide the same detailed problem solving without the ability to vote on motions as they are developed.

Another operational change to the AP's workload might be to consider which are the agenda items on which the AP provides the most value. As described above, the AP is purposely designed as a broadly representative group for the Alaska fisheries. There are times when the AP reviews agenda items that have already been reviewed in detail by issue-specific committees made up of interested stakeholders – for example, observer and EM issues, or charter halibut measures. The Council might want to consider the types of agenda items that are considered by the AP, and whether it is productive for the AP to review again those items that have already gone through expert stakeholder review. There may also be other issues for which specialist committees can be utilized.

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

The nomination and reappointment process for the SSC is the same as that for the AP, except that SSC members serve only single year terms and decide each year whether they wish to submit their names for reappointment. SSC members often serve for many years, and the institutional knowledge provided by these long-standing participants adds tremendous value to the SSC's effectiveness. As with the AP, the learning curve is high for new SSC members, and the workload is extensive (detailed review of complex analytical documents, comments and evaluation at the meeting, and lengthy and detailed minutes and ppt summaries). Additionally, since the switch to virtual meetings, SSC members have seen their meeting day commitment increase (SSC meetings were always 3 days in-person, with intensive writing assignments each night to create the report, and are now regularly 4-5 meeting days plus report writing time).

Partly because turnover is low, the recruitment process for new SSC members has never been well established. In the past, SSC leadership or departing members have reached out to individuals to persuade them to submit a nomination letter to replace the departing member. There is not, however, a designated process for getting input from the SSC, or from SSC leadership, on prospective SSC candidates to the Council for consideration in appointments. As with the AP, above, a change in the timing of the SSC's call for nominations could help with this issue. By starting the nomination period earlier, and ending it, for example, shortly after the end of the October meeting, the Council would have the additional time to evaluate nominations and confer with existing members or other scientists about their candidacy.

Additionally, the Council may wish to consider routinely asking the SSC members or SSC leadership for their assessment of reviewer needs in the leadup to a call for nominations. The SSC Chairs, in particular, have unique insight as they assess to whom they can assign particular agenda item reviews, which is influenced both by expertise as well as the potential conflicts when reviewing the work of supervisees. The SSC has voluntarily offered suggestions in this regard the last couple of years and the Council could consider institutionalizing that process for receiving input. The Council may also wish to consider identifying specific expertise or experience in future calls for nominations, in addition to simply identifying who are the departing members. The SSC currently has 18 members; under the SOPP, there is provision for an SSC of up to 20 members.

### **13. Consider how to reduce SSC workload.**

The SSC's remit, under the MSA, is to provide ongoing scientific advice for fishery management decisions and FMP amendments. The workload for members is high. In terms of agenda items, the SSC must review stock assessments and recommend harvest specifications, and review influential and scientific information (ISI) for the Council, which generally constitutes harvest specifications. The SSC also reviews the quality and comprehensiveness of scientific information used for supporting Council policy decisions, which usually consists of initial review analyses, program and allocation reviews, in-depth reviews of particularly impact methodologies; provides guidance on research priorities, national or NMFS science policies or directives, and proposed Alaska exempted fishing permit experiments; and also tracks relevant research.

To address the issue of workload, we need feedback on how to prioritize which are the most critical issues for the SSC. Are there other ways to pare down workload? For example, once the SSC has reviewed the methodology for an allocation or LAPP review, does it make sense to continue to review new program

reviews when they are using the same methodology? Are there other ways to focus the SSC review that reduces workload, perhaps focusing on methods rather than individual actions? When possible, the SSC typically reviews ongoing research, models, or analyses that may become useful for fishery management analyses in the future. Is there another way to get these reviewed, perhaps through AFSC review boards?

One distinct way to help with SSC workload is to provide more time for document review. As much as possible, staff is actively working on getting documents out in a timely manner to facilitate early SSC review. The primary stumbling blocks are the timing of Plan Team meetings for stock assessment reviews, which mostly occur very shortly before a Council meeting. Linking back to suggestion number 4 above, any suggestions for adjusting the timing of the specifications process for crab and groundfish could be fruitful.

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

Ultimately, the purpose of the Council's advisory bodies is to help Council decision-making by having a group of experts – be they science or policy experts – weigh in on the scope of options available to solve a particular problem, and the tradeoffs of the decision. If the group is able to present constructive advice for their consideration, the investment of staff time and resources to support the work of the advisory group is beneficial, and the Council will be able to make better decisions. If the advisory group is not providing constructive advice, perhaps because it is heading in a direction that the Council does not support, or the group as a whole does not identify all the different perspectives needed for an issue, then the Council's resources are not used wisely.

It may be useful for the Council to consider taking a close look at all its advisory bodies, what their original and current purpose is, and use that as a basis to ensure that they are continuing to operate in a way that is productive and useful to the Council. We could put together some initial context for each committee, based on which the Council might consider some or all of the following questions:

- Are the advisory group's purpose, objectives, and tasking clear to both Council members and advisory group members? Does everyone have the same expectation?
- Is there strong leadership keeping the group on track within those expectations?
- Does the breadth of the membership have the ability/expertise to provide the range of perspectives that should be considered with respect to the group's purpose?
- Is there iterative communication back and forth between the Council and each advisory group during the course of their work, to ensure that work products track with Council expectations?
- Does the Council provide feedback about how the advisory group's recommendations get used? E.g., during Council discussion, does the Council reference how the advisory group's input influenced their decision? Are individual Council members reaching out to the advisory group or its members?

### **Next steps**

As described in the introductory paragraphs, these ideas have been compiled by staff in order to begin a conversation about whether changes to the Council process are needed or desirable. None of the ideas included in this paper should be considered staff recommendations at this point. The intent of providing this discussion paper is to solicit public comment and input for the Council to consider.

After receiving input, the Council may identify that they are interested in further exploring some of these ideas, or others that come up as part of the discussion. If so, staff will develop further material in order for the Council to take a more in depth look at a future meeting.