



Bering Sea Elders Group

June 1, 2018

North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 W. 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501

Re: Agenda Items B-1 Ecosystem Workshop and D-2 Community Engagement

Dear Council members,

The Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG) respectfully submits these comments on the June 2018 Working Draft of the Ecosystem Research Workshop Summary and Workshop Discussion Guide and Community Engagement Committee Scope. We are not providing comments at this time specifically on the Community Engagement paper because it was not available on the Council's website in time for us to provide comments. With that in mind, we encourage the Council to consider the following points.

First, BSEG thanks you again for the opportunity to take part in the Ecosystem Research Workshop earlier this year in Seattle. We found the opportunity to share ecosystem observations and concerns in an open dialog extremely valuable. **We encourage the Council to hold this type of inclusive ecosystem workshop as an annual event.**

Second, **we encourage the Council to continue and expand the current opportunities for community and tribal engagement in Council Committees and advisory bodies.** This includes the Ecosystem Committee continuing to welcome community participation when there is discussion of issues impacting their community. This also includes tribal membership and representation on the Council's Committees, including the Ecosystem Committee and Advisory Panel. Direct membership on Council Committees and Plan Teams is one of the best ways to ensure engagement. Therefore the Council should include tribal membership on all Council committees and Plan Teams.

Third, **we encourage the Council to continue to develop additional opportunities for two-way engagement,** as per the discussion under agenda item D-2. As we have previously stated, BSEG is eager to broaden the opportunity for community involvement at Council and committee meetings. We believe it is important for affected communities to have regular input as part of the Council's process. BSEG encourages the Council to commit to an inclusive process that lets affected communities meaningfully participate in the Council and committee meetings. BSEG understands and appreciates the reality that Council meetings have full agendas, but we encourage the Council to incorporate community feedback in a way that does not put strict time limitations on community comments. We would welcome engaging the Council on ways to accomplish this. To this end, **we support the establishment of a new committee dedicated to**

Alaska Native and rural community engagement. This should be a new committee—not a reconstitution of the rural outreach committee—with a focus on two-way engagement. Membership should include tribal representatives and people with expertise in working with communities in tribes. We recommend this committee scopes ideas, rather than an open-ended request for proposals.

The Community engagement work should be in addition to the Council's current outreach work. Developing a multi-faceted approach to community engagement and outreach is key because of the reality that for many of our people, attending Council meetings is a financial hardship. For those of us who live in rural Alaska, traveling to the Council meetings is often prohibitively expensive. It requires not only the funds to pay for airfare and hotel, but also substantial time away from our traditional subsistence practices. In short, we must take time away from feeding our families in order to advocate for our ability to feed our families. Therefore, it continues to be important to have Council members travel to communities and engage directly with a broad cross-section of community and tribal members, many of whom cannot travel to Anchorage.

And finally, **BSEG recommends that the Council create a plan for ensuring that traditional knowledge informs Council documents and decisions.** There is a large volume of Traditional Knowledge that has been documented from Northern Bering Sea communities that is relevant to the Council. BSEG and others would welcome the opportunity to work with the Council to ensure that such knowledge appropriately informs Council processes. We understand that the Bering Sea FEP core document, as well as action modules, may provide this opportunity and we strongly encourage the Council to move forward in this direction. BSEG believes that collaboration and exchange of knowledge will lead to stronger management information and informed decisions. Furthermore, towards that end, BSEG again recommends that the Council consider a co-production of knowledge approach that brings together both science and Traditional Knowledge through an equitable process.¹

BSEG thanks you for your continued work and we look forward to building a more robust relationship between the Council and our communities.

Quyana,



Mellisa Heflin
Bering Sea Elders Group

¹ Behe, C., R. Daniel, and J. Raymond-Yakoubian. 2018. Understanding the Arctic through a co-production of knowledge approach. Workshop at the Alaska Marine Science Symposium, Anchorage, Alaska, January 23-24, 2018.