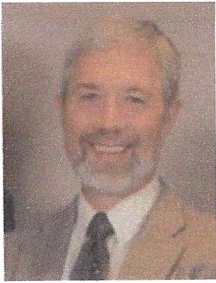


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COUNCIL MEMBER 9/94 – 8/03

Over the last 40 years the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC or the Council) has established itself as a national and arguably global leader in implementing an Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management (EBFM). Maybe it had a lot to do with the unique opportunity afforded because the early Council was managing a fishery largely dominated by foreign fishing nations. Scientists and managers like Lee Alverson, Donald McKernan, Jim Branson, Don Bevan and many others clearly articulated that the NPFMC decisions for management should be science-based and that the Council should manage sustainably. The early NPFMC wanted to rein-in the apparent overfishing under the previous international fishery. This principle led to requirements from the start for accurate catch accounting with scientific observers on every fishing vessel, if only to collect the fees charged foreign fishing vessels for fishing in US waters off Alaska. More importantly, as the first decade of management of North Pacific fisheries led to the Americanization of these fisheries, that same principle was applied to the rapidly developing US fleet. What is more fundamental to EBFM than conservative, science-based management of fisheries?

A big part of the Americanization of the North Pacific fisheries was creating market access for developing US fisheries in the North Pacific. Americanization meant that we prioritized allocation to those fisheries entities that were either totally US or were engaged in joint ventures with US participants. The critical development that allowed this to have teeth was the determination that stock assessments would determine how much fish could be sustainably caught. The step forward by the NPFMC was to consider the results from ecosystem models developed by Taivo Laevastu in addition to traditional single-species yield

information in the determination of long term sustainable ecosystem yield for the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. This resulted in caps being adopted by the NPFMC on total removals from these areas. Even if the sum of Allowable/ Acceptable Biological Catches for these regions was greater than the caps, the Council chose uniquely to adopt total quotas below the caps. Some might argue as well that such caps were essential at drawing the line on how much fish could be allocated to foreign fishing entities. The caps helped to establish limits on harvests against which Americanization could be measured, and by 1990, Americanization of the fisheries was complete. While there has not been a retrospective analysis done on the ecological or economic effect of the caps, it is safe to say that these have been a hallmark of NPFMC success in managing fisheries conservatively.

The next development in EBFM came in 1995 as a result of the NPFMC Groundfish Plan Teams, particularly the contributions by David Witherell and Richard Merrick, and their early recognition of the need to educate and inform the Council on the newly emerging literature and issues in ecosystem-based fishery management and marine mammal and seabird population trends relative to the groundfish fishery. NMFS Alaska Fishery Science Center scientist Pat Livingston, who worked with Laevastu in the development of various ecosystem models, was inspired in 1999 to develop a more structured and comprehensive Ecosystems Considerations Chapter in the annual Stock Assessment Fisheries Evaluation (SAFE) process. This detailed information about what was happening in the North Pacific ecosystem relative to fisheries was intended to provide stock assessment scientists and Plan Teams with ecosystem information useful to interpret what was happening in their fisheries. There were several motivations to the enhancement including tracking EBM efforts and efficacy, tracking ecosystem changes, bringing ecosystem research efforts to the attention of stock assessment scientists, providing a link between ecosystem research and fishery management, and providing an assessment of the past, present, and future role of climate and humans in influencing ecosystem status and trends. Certainly, the ecosystem changes that resulted from the 1977-78 regime shift in the North Pacific was an important piece to include. This got the attention of the Council family and there were eager ears to explain what happened / happens in ecosystems.

I was a new Council member in 1994 and was very impressed by the Ecosystem Considerations Chapter of the SAFE. However, I was disturbed that it did not seem to have much traction in the Plan Teams or the Council process. Despite the overall commitment to scientifically-based management the Council process did not seem sufficiently keen on bringing ecosystem indicators into management. I discussed this with Pat Livingston and Anne Hollowed, with Plan Team leaders, Council members like Wally Pereyra and Clem Tillion, Council Staff – Dave Witherell especially, and representatives of the fishing industry, including interested organizations like the Alaska Marine Conservation Council. There was pretty universal agreement that there was an opportunity to do more with ecosystem science to engage fisheries management in the North Pacific. What to do?

As many in the Council family know, it is the corridor conversations and the late night trips to the bar where a critical mass of ideas, individuals

and inspiration strikes. Council meetings in Anchorage are held at the Anchorage Hilton which has a sky-top bar with compelling views. I found myself drawn to a night cap to console my nerves after the usual Council meeting tensions. There I met Terry Quinn from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Over a few (or more) courses of Lagavulin single malt scotch [try it you'll like it or hate it] we devised a strategy we thought would be beneficial to the Council process. The elements of this scotch infused mix included the establishment of an ecosystem committee that would be non-regulatory and focus on and carry EBFM into the Council processes. Quinn agreed to discuss the formation of such a committee with the SSC and seek its recommendation that an Ecosystem Committee be formed. I agreed to discuss this with the Council Executive Director Clarence Pautzke. Sure enough, the SSC made the recommendation. My initial conversation with Pautzke was a bit difficult. Like any good Executive Director he was reluctant to commit to additional expenses, wanted there to be a clear justification, and wanted to be assured there was a clear benefit to the Council process. Once we negotiated the size, purpose and operational approach of the Ecosystem Committee, I made the motion and the Council established the Ecosystem Committee, and Council Chairman Rick Lauber asked me to chair it. The purpose of the Ecosystem Committee was to provide advice to the Council, to serve as an educational forum on ecosystem issues, to interact with the groundfish Plan Teams and to provide direction and feedback for specific ecosystem related research projects.

Our first big impact as the Ecosystem Committee was to hold a workshop organized by Pat Livingston and others. The basic idea was to explore what EBFM meant and how it could benefit the NPFMC management. This presented the Council family an opportunity to explore the concept and how it could be used to better manage fisheries—the bottom line being more sustainable fisheries to benefit stable conditions for the fishing industry [of course with a dose of climate variability thrown in]. We were on the cutting edge of EBFM!

In the reauthorization of the Magnuson Fisheries Conservation and Management Act in 1996, Congress asked National Marine Fisheries Service to convene a committee to consider how ecosystem principles were being employed in US fisheries management. Somehow, I got committed to serve as chair for that group of 21 folks in preparing recommendations to Congress. It really helped to have a peer review paper authored by David Witherell, Clarence Pautzke and David Fluharty to assert the NPFMC approach on which those recommendations were patterned. Not long after, both the US Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission were convened and each recommended an ecosystem approach to management of our oceans. Asked where this concept derived, many members said it was the Ecosystem Principles

Report that prompted their recommendation—thus, indirectly NPFMC efforts have influenced national policy.

In 2004, the Council reconstituted its Ecosystem Committee with a new membership, and then-Council Chair Stephanie Madsen as chair. The committee's mission statement was to discuss current ecosystem-related initiatives and assist in shaping Council positions relative to developing guidelines for ecosystem-based approaches in the region, and coordinating with NOAA regarding ecosystem-based management. During the next several years, the Committee was instrumental in guiding the development of the Aleutian Islands Fishery Ecosystem Plan, and the memorandum of understanding creating the Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum. The Committee also advised the Council on the Arctic Fishery Management Plan, Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), and habitat of particular concern.

In February 2013, the Council once again rearticulated the Committee's purpose, and added two new members to the Committee, including a new chairman, Council member Bill Tweit. In response to Committee discussions, the Council requested the Committee both to continue to provide advice on immediate Council issues, but also to take a longer-term view of how the Council could take a leadership

role in the continuing evolution of ecosystem-based management. Currently, the Ecosystem Committee is active with respect to revisiting the EFH policies, the development of a Bering Sea Fisheries Ecosystem Plan and responding to the NMFS EBFM Policy and Roadmap Implementation initiatives. Always looking ahead, a key issue is how climate change will affect the North Pacific ecosystem relative to fisheries. Information on the Ecosystem Committee can be found at: npfmc.org/committees/ecosystem-committee.

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