



Backgrounder: **Council Meetings 101**

Council meeting proceedings are not always clear to people who are new to the Council process or who only attend Council meetings occasionally. Some basic facts about the Council meeting process are provided below.

Background

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (also known as the Council, Pacific Council, or PFMC) recommends fishery management measures to National Marine Fisheries Service. The Pacific Council manages fisheries for salmon, groundfish, coastal pelagic species (like sardines, anchovies, and mackerel), and highly migratory species (like tunas and sharks) in the Exclusive Economic Zone, 3-200 miles off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California. The Council also works with the International Pacific Halibut Commission to manage halibut fisheries.

Management in a Broader Context

The Pacific Council is one of eight fishery management councils in the United States. The other councils are the North Pacific, Western Pacific, Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, New England, Mid-Atlantic, and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils. While these councils all operate in similar ways, there are many regional differences among them.

The entire fisheries management process is overseen by Congress, which controls funding for the councils; National Marine Fisheries Service; and the U.S. Coast Guard. States are also involved through their membership on the councils, their legislatures, and sometimes through research and enforcement. Interstate fishery management commissions help coordinate state efforts. For example, the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission coordinates efforts between Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, and regional fishery management councils.

The Council, Staff, and Advisory Bodies

The Pacific Council has three parts: the Council itself, the Council staff, and advisory bodies. The Council is made up of 14 voting representatives from Oregon, Washington, California, and Idaho. Some represent state or tribal fish and wildlife agencies, and some are private citizens who are knowledgeable about recreational and commercial fishing or marine conservation. Except for the tribal representative, these citizens are chosen by the governors of the four states within the Council region, in conjunction with the U.S. Secretary of Commerce. For information on the makeup of the Council, see the Council Roster.

Council staff support the Council by providing information for management decisions, informing the public about Council activities, helping the public participate in the process, coordinating the process and meetings,

creating fishery management documents, and assisting advisory groups.

The Council staff consists of an executive director, deputy director, support staff, and staff officers who focus on groundfish, salmon, coastal pelagic species, highly migratory species, economics and social science, and communication. At present, there are 15 members of the Council staff.

Advisory bodies include advisory subpanels, management teams, technical teams, the Scientific and Statistical Committee, and the Habitat Committee. There are also ad hoc committees which focus on particular, timely topics, then disband. These bodies usually meet during the Council week (and sometimes between Council meetings). Their meetings are open to the public. During the Council meeting, the advisory bodies prepare comments on relevant agenda items and provide them in written and oral form to the Council. For more information, see the information sheet titled “Council Advisory Bodies.”

Fishery Management Plans

The fishery management process is based on fishery management plans (FMPs). An FMP is a set of management objectives and strategies for achieving them. Councils develop FMPs, amend them, and make decisions like setting harvest limits within the framework of existing FMPs. In their decision making, the Councils are required to use the best scientific information available and to meet the national standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. They must also comply with the other Federal laws. The Council currently has FMPs for salmon, groundfish, coastal pelagic species, and highly migratory species.

Council Meetings

The Council meets five times a year, usually in March, April, June, September, and October or November. Most Council meetings take five days, with individual advisory body meetings occurring during the course of the week. All meetings are open to the public, except for a short closed Council session in which the Council deals with personnel and litigation issues. Advisory bodies also meet at various times between Council meetings. Minutes are created for each Council meeting, and are available to the public. Meetings are usually held in large cities where there is adequate meeting space and airport connections.

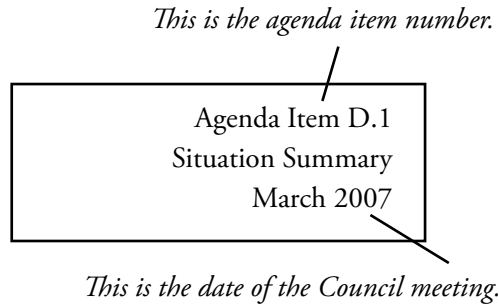
Briefing Books

Council members, Council staff, and chairs of advisory bodies and committees receive a copy of an advance Briefing Book. The advance Briefing Book contains “situation summaries” (brief summaries that provide background for each agenda item), reports and materials for each agenda item, and written public comment. Because of the size of the advance Briefing Book and the effort required to create it, Briefing Books are not available to the general public. However, advance Briefing Book materials are available on the Council website (below), usually as PDF files, two weeks prior to Council meetings.

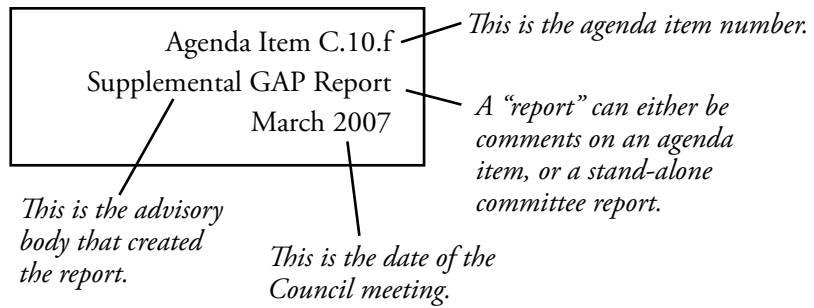
There are two Briefing Book deadlines. The first (and main) deadline is two and a half weeks before the Council meeting. Public comments and reports that are supplied before this deadline are included in the advance Briefing Book. The second deadline, known as the “supplemental” deadline, is four business days prior to the start of the Council meeting. Public comments and reports provided by this deadline are given to Council members on the first day of the Council meeting. Comments can be emailed, mailed, or faxed to the Council.

All materials included in the advance Briefing Book, the supplemental material provided to Council members, and all reports, handouts, and statements generated at Council meetings are available on a table usually located in the back of the Council meeting room or in a hall outside the meeting room.

A “situation summary” is a summary of an agenda item that gives the Council some background and direction. There are situation summaries for most agenda items.



“Supplemental” means that this item did not appear in the Briefing Book, but was provided at the Council meeting (in this case, by the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel). In the case of public comment, “supplemental” may mean the comment was provided after the Briefing Book deadline ended.



Labeling system for Briefing Book materials

Handouts

A long table covered with handouts can be found in the Council chamber, and sometimes in the hall outside the chamber. A code in the upper right-hand corner of the handouts explains where they fit in the agenda.

Agendas and Agenda Items

The Council works off an agenda which is drafted at the previous Council meeting. Agendas are posted on the Council’s website, sent to a large mailing list, and provided on a table at the back of the Council chamber.

The contents of the agenda are set by the Council itself, working in concert with Council staff. To have something placed on the agenda, talk to the Executive Director, Chairman, or an individual Council member; suggest the agenda item during an advisory body meeting; or suggest the agenda item during the public comment period when the agenda is finalized. Draft agendas for the next Council meeting are usually discussed on Friday of the Council meeting. During the weeks following the meeting, the agenda is finalized by staff.

Each agenda item has several parts. First, a staff officer usually gives an overview of what to expect during the agenda item, based on the situation summary provided in the Briefing Book. This may be followed by presentations or discussion of the particular topic, by advisory body comments or reports, and by public comment. Finally, the Council discusses the topic and may vote on it.

Robert’s Rules of Order

The Council meeting process follows “Robert’s Rules of Order,” rules for parliamentary procedure which were first developed in 1876. A “parliamentarian” sits next to the Council chair to ensure Robert’s Rules are followed.

Motions

During discussion, voting Council members may make a motion to take action. A Council member must second the motion before the Council votes on it. (Note: not all Council members are voting members. Representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, Coast Guard, State Department, and Alaska do not vote.) Sometimes Council members will make a “friendly amendment” to a motion. A friendly amendment is a suggestion for a minor change that does not alter the overall intent of the motion.

The Secretariat

The “Secretariat” is the office where reports are processed for Council meetings. It is usually located near the Council chamber. The purpose of the Secretariat is to receive reports from advisory bodies and Council staff to be formally entered into the administrative record, formatted, copied, and handed out to the Council during their proceedings. The Secretariat provides computers for advisory body members and staff to use in writing their reports, and copy machines to produce copies of the reports for use by the Council and advisory bodies. Photocopiers are not available to the public. However, public comment provided to the Secretariat will be formally entered into the administrative record and handed out to the Council when appropriate. The Secretariat does not have email or fax capabilities at this time, and the telephone is for use by staff only.

Public Comment

Public comment is invited for nearly every item on the Council’s agenda (the only exceptions are for “closed session,” when the Council deals with committee appointments, legal matters, and other administrative issues). You can sign up to give public comment any time before the public comment period for the agenda item begins. Go to the staffed desk at the entrance of the Council room and fill out a card with your name, the agenda item you wish to comment on, and your affiliation. Council staff will give this card to the Chair before the public comment period. When your name is called, go to the table that sits before the Council, introduce yourself, and give your testimony. Because of time constraints, public comment is limited to five minutes for individuals and ten minutes for representatives of groups. For more tips, see the information sheet titled “Sample Letter & Testimony.”