



# FACT SHEET: GETTING INVOLVED

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## WHY GET INVOLVED?

Many different types of people are concerned about fisheries, including commercial fishermen, fishing families, recreational fishers, processors and suppliers, environmentalists, tribal members, chefs, diners, scientists, the tourism industry, and local communities. Whatever their background or motivations, these groups share the common desire to ensure the health of fish populations and the marine ecosystems they depend on.

If you are a member of the commercial fishing community or if your business serves recreational anglers, the best reason to get involved is because this is the process that controls your livelihood. You may not have control over the weather, ocean conditions, or market prices, but if you get involved in the Council process you can have some input into the decisions that affect your business.

Getting involved means commitment and hard work. It may mean reading documents, talking to unfamiliar people, going to meetings, speaking in public, writing letters or emails, joining or forming an association, or joining an advisory subpanel.

## TEN WAYS TO GET INVOLVED:

Many members of the fishing community and the public don't have the time or resources to attend Council meetings. Luckily, there are ways to get involved in management without having to leave the comfort of your home or vessel.

## LEARN

The first step to getting involved in the Council process is to learn about it. Learn how the Council system operates; learn about the context of the problem you are interested in. Learn how Council members see things, and why. Learn what terms and acronyms like "CPUE" and "optimum yield" mean (an acronym and definition list is available on the Council website, and as an information sheet). That way you will be more

comfortable providing input, and your input will be more valuable.

Some ways to learn:

- Browse the Council website ([www.pfcouncil.org](http://www.pfcouncil.org)).
- Get on the mailing list. Go to <http://tinyurl.com/PFMCsignup> to add your name.
- Visit the Council office (address on front page).
- Read the Council newsletter to learn about recent issues and decisions. Both are available on the website ([www.pfcouncil.org](http://www.pfcouncil.org)).
- Read Council fact sheets.
- Follow the Council on Facebook or on Twitter (@PacificCouncil for fisheries news; @PFMCagenda for agenda progress during Council meetings).
- Attend a Council, team, or advisory group meeting. Upcoming meetings are listed on the Council website, and all are open to the public.

## JOIN A GROUP

Join a group that represents your interests. This will give you a greater voice, more motivation, and a larger pool of knowledge to draw from. There are groups organized around environmental issues, fishing gear types, fisheries, communities, and other interests. There are also groups that cut across interests and gear types. If you can't find a group, form your own.

## MAKE INFORMED COMMENTS

Your comments will be most effective if they show that you know about the underlying laws and concepts that the Council must follow in managing fisheries. Try to frame your comments and objections in these terms. Whether writing or testifying, make sure that your comments are relevant to whatever the Council is discussing at the moment. Know what stage of the process the Council is in. For example, are there important deadlines approaching? What political pressures are influencing this decision? (See our "Sample

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Letter & Testimony” for more information on testifying).

## GET TO KNOW SOMEONE

Getting to know someone is one of the best ways to make sure your voice is heard. Get to know your Council representative, other Council members, Committee members, and staff. If possible, get to know your fish and game department’s local port biologists and discuss issues with them. (See the roster on the Council website for lists of Council members and advisory subpanel members).

## TALK INFORMALLY

One of the best ways to interact with the Council is simply to call up a Council member or staff. This provides a more personal way to discuss issues that concern or interest you. When calling, explain who you are, what your question or problem is, and ask for help in understanding what’s going on. Ask for a list of the committees and key council members responsible for your fishery, and ask whom you should call to get more background or advice. You can also talk at meetings and hearings, in the halls during meetings, or at the Council offices. Be sure to attend informal events associated with Council meetings. You may also want to talk with state agency staff and your federal and state representatives.

## ATTEND A MEETING

All regular Council meetings and advisory meetings are open to the public. Advisory body and technical committee meetings are generally more informal than full Council meeting, and may be a better opportunity to express your opinions and ideas.

Council meetings are generally held in Portland/Vancouver, Sacramento, Boise, Spokane, Orange County, or Seattle/Tacoma, because these larger cities have airports and plenty of hotel and meeting space.

Because Council meetings are not convenient for many who live in coastal areas, state agencies and other entities sometimes hold public hearings, meetings and workshops in local areas to inform the public and obtain input on proposed fishing regulations. Local residents may contact the head of their state fish and game department to request that a meeting be held in their community. Summaries of the comments made at Council-sponsored hearings are provided to Council members.

Dates and locations of upcoming meetings are available on the Council website or at the phone number below.

## TESTIFY

Members of the commercial and recreational fishery, the environmental community, and the public are encouraged to testify at Council meetings and hearings. This involves speaking in a formal public forum.

At Council meetings, the Council members and staff generally sit in a “U” formation and everyone else sits in chairs at one end of the room. You will have to walk up to a microphone to make your comments. Because of time constraints, public comment is limited to five minutes for individuals and ten minutes for representatives of groups.

If comments are supplied to the Council by the briefing book deadline before the meeting date, they are included in the packet of information (briefing book) that is posted online and distributed to each Council member at least a week before the Council meeting.

It is best to be well prepared and as calm as possible when providing testimony. Read up on Council decisions related to your topic of interest and make sure that your comments are organized and relevant. Sign-up cards are provided at the entrance of the meeting room for people who wish to address the Council. For more tips, see the information sheet titled “Sample Letter & Testimony.”

## WRITE

The Council reads and considers all letters and emails that arrive before the briefing book deadline, two weeks before a Council meeting. Generally, most letters are addressed to the Council Chair or Executive Director. However, depending on the situation and the stage of the decision-making process, you may write letters or emails to a specific Council member, the Regional Director of National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), or others.

Make sure your letter is legible. When writing, be sure to identify the fishery management plan, amendment, proposed rule, or other measure you are commenting on; then state your position or opinion. Explain who you are and why the reader should pay attention to what you are saying. (For example, talk about your fishing experience or the group that you represent). Clearly state your position and explain why you feel the way you do. Whenever you can, be specific about

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how a proposed rule would affect you. Try to show how your personal interests relate to public or national interests. For an example, see the fact sheet “Sample Letter & Testimony.”

Letters and emails must arrive by the briefing book deadline (on our website) in order to be included in the Council members’ briefing books. You can also write letters to trade magazines like National Fisherman or Pacific Fishing, which many managers read. Since NMFS reviews all Council decisions, it is also effective to write or call the West Coast Region of NMFS.

## **SERVE**

Interested citizens may serve on an advisory body. If you are interested in serving, talk to the Executive Director and the key staff person for the fishery.

## **GET INVOLVED IN RESEARCH EFFORTS**

Occasionally, calls go out for vessel owners to charter their vessels for research efforts. While this is not a direct way to get involved in the Council process, it does help create connections with scientists and managers, and it allows vessel owners and scientists to learn more about each others’ methods. It can also provide some extra income. Information about current research is available at <http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/research/index.cfm>.

## **WILL IT REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

Your influence on Council decisions is related to the amount of energy you put into being involved. Involvement can range from signing an online petition to writing an email or letter to serving on an advisory subpanel or team. No matter what level of involvement you choose, your views will have more weight and influence if you learn about the context of the decisions being made, the timeline for the decision making process, and the best ways to communicate with Council members and advisory body members.

As a member of a fisheries association said, “If you want to get

involved in fisheries management, you should be willing to go to meetings and become an active participant, be willing to listen to others’ views, and communicate clearly your own ideas.” See the fact sheet “Council Testimony” for more info.

## **WHO TO CONTACT**

The Council rosters provide contact information for all members of the Council’s advisory subpanels (which include industry representatives), management teams (which are generally made up of scientists), the Council staff, and Council members. All Council staff can be contacted at 866-806-7204 (toll free) or 503-820-2280.

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