



FACT SHEET: COUNCIL TESTIMONY

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The Council provides a forum for managers, fishermen, environmental groups, and others to come together to exchange information and develop policy. In making its decisions, the Council has a number of Congressional and other legal mandates that limit its choices; and in addition to constituents with a direct involvement in fisheries issues, the Council is charged with considering the broader interests of the nation. Inevitably, Council members make decisions that are liked by some and disliked by others.

ALL COUNCIL ACTION ITEMS HAVE A PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD.

Public involvement in the Council process takes many forms. Alternatives are often developed and considered in depth in public committee meetings well in advance of the final Council decision. For information on how to get involved at any of these stages, see our “Getting Involved” fact sheet.

After public testimony is completed, the Council generally moves toward making its decision. Often people wonder whether and how to tell if their testimony was taken into account in the decision. It may or may not be possible to tell. There are several things to listen for in the discussion leading up to the Council decision that may provide some clues.

- Sometimes a Council member will specifically mention the name of someone who made comments that influenced their vote. Other times, they may not name the person but will make statements such as “We heard in public testimony...”
- Sometimes a Council member may provide a reason for their vote that includes ideas covered in public testimony, but will not specifically state that the idea came from, or was reinforced by, public testimony. When testimony is offered for opposing sides of a particular issue, in explaining their position Council

members may mention public testimony they found most persuasive.

- Sometimes public comment influences the Council, but the influence is not apparent. For example, an option supported in public testimony that might otherwise have been set aside may remain under consideration. In such a case, even though the reason for keeping the option was public support, it may not be explicitly stated.

So how influential is public testimony? On one hand, sometimes it appears that testimony is being ignored. For example, testimony supporting actions that the Council cannot legally take may not have much influence other than to let Council members know about the degree of concern regarding a particular issue. Or, testimony may come at the wrong stage of the decisionmaking process (for example, testimony may be directed at a topic or action outside of the scope of the Council’s current deliberations or topics on which the Council has already decided). On the other hand, longtime observers of the Council process know that there have been times when there has been a complete reversal of likely Council action as a result of public testimony.

TIPS ON MAKING YOUR TESTIMONY MORE EFFECTIVE

Identify yourself: who you are, where you live, what your interest in the fishery or Council activity is.

Be relevant: What action is the Council considering? Is the Council thinking about writing a letter of support, adopting some options for analysis, sending options out for public comment, or taking final action? Address that action in your testimony.

Be specific: What would you like the Council to do in response to your concern? State your request with as much specificity as possible. Think about the motion you would like them to pass and tell them what it is. Statements like “You need to consider the hardship this places on fishermen” may influence a vote, but will be more effective if you identify the exact action you want the Council to take, whether it is “Support Option 1,” “Change Option 2 to exempt vessels smaller than 40 feet from this requirement,” “Consider an

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option that would...,” “Ask the advisory panel to consider...,” “Ask for a NMFS report on...,” “Have the Council chair write a letter to... in support of...,” or “Add an item to the agenda for your next meeting to consider...”

Keep in mind what can be achieved at a single meeting and consider whether what you should emphasize is your support or opposition to the program in general or advocacy for a smaller step that will move the Council forward in the process

(for example, asking a committee to look at an issue and report back to the Council on it.)

For more ideas on how to get involved, see the Council fact sheet titled “Getting Involved” at <http://www.pcouncil.org/facts/involved.pdf>.

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