

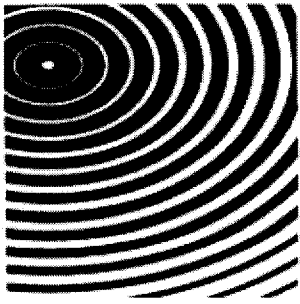
Investing in Trust:

The Council Communication
Enhancement Process Action Plan

5/20/04 Version

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Chapter 1: Terms of Reference and Background

Introduction

In April 2003, the Pacific Fishery Management Council directed a group of agency staff to develop a communication plan. This document includes terms of reference, background, and the first chapter of the action plan for enhancing communication in the Council process. The goal of this effort is to create “best practices” for communication in fisheries management.

This effort was inspired by the publication *An Investment in Trust: Communication in the Commercial Fishing and Fisheries Management Communities*, which is based on a study of communications conducted by Jennifer Golden and Flaxen Conway for Oregon Sea Grant (2002). *An Investment in Trust* describes current communication issues and challenges, and presents a series of recommendations for improving communication in fisheries management.

The current project was spearheaded by an unfunded, informal group of agency and Sea Grant staff. The group has met seven times and has expanded to include representatives from most Council advisory subpanels.

Problem Statement:

Communication Related to Fisheries Management

Many people in the fisheries management and fishing communities feel that communication between the groups needs to be improved. However, improving communication will require effort from both the fishing and management communities. It is neither fair nor realistic to expect one community to single-handedly solve current communication problems.

Challenges to communication, and some potential solutions, were gathered and described in *An Investment in Trust*, which was based on interviews with members of the fishing and fisheries management communities. Chronic and acute crises in fisheries have exacerbated communication problems. Both managers and fishing community members are under stress, increasing their need for clear communication while decreasing their ability to communicate clearly.

In the Council arena, many communication efforts rely on formal methods. Formal communication is the result of procedural mandates, and includes efforts such as environmental impact statements, *Federal Register* notices, public hearings, Council meetings and advisory body meetings. Informal communication includes efforts such as educational outreach materials, websites and newsletters (which do not have Federal mandates), informal meetings and workshops, and person-to-person communication. Both types of communication are suited to particular purposes, and both have pros and cons.

Factors within both the fisheries management community and the fishing community that exacerbate, or are symptoms of, communication problems include the following. (These are generalizations; not all members of either community share these traits.)

- Complex nature of information that must be communicated
- Tendency of the media to simplify and polarize issues
- Distrust and lack of respect for other communities
- Lack of clarity about agency roles regarding informal communication
- Varying levels of awareness about the importance of communication
- Varying levels of personal motivation to communicate
- Fluctuating levels of outreach effort
- Cultural and personal differences that muddle communication

Factors within just the fishing community that exacerbate, or are symptoms of, communication problems include the following:

- Confusion about what federal and state agencies do
- Perception that managers and scientists are not accessible, and/or are not interested in listening
- Beliefs that management wants to shut down the fishing industry
- Need to feel that concerns have been heard, even when management decisions don't fulfill hopes or expectations
- Competition and lack of cohesion, making it difficult to disseminate information or speak with a unified voice
- Economic and social stress, reducing people's capacity or willingness to communicate
- Involvement in management limited to a small, core group of people, while most are disengaged

Factors within the fisheries management community that exacerbate, or are symptoms of, communication problems include the following:

- Overwork and lack of funding, leading to a reactive rather than proactive system
- Low prioritization of informal (person-to-person) communication
- Federal mandates limit available options, resulting in the impression that managers are not listening or reacting to fishing community concerns
- Formal Federal communication methods are not highly successful in reaching average fishing community members
- *Federal Register* notification requirements reduce flexibility in communicating

The people who work and interact with the Council have a wide diversity of expertise and communication styles. This diversity is both a great strength and a great challenge. This project focuses on assuring effective information exchange so these diverse perspectives are heard and considered when final decisions are made.

Composition

As of May 2004, the following people were involved, either directly or as advisors, in the process:

Flaxen Conway	Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Steve Copps	NMFS Northwest Region
Jennifer Gilden	Pacific Council
Fran Recht	Habitat Committee
Suzanne Russell	NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center
Janet Sears	NMFS Northwest Region
Don Stevens	Salmon Advisory Subpanel
Dayna Matthews	Enforcement Consultants
Rod Moore	Groundfish Advisory Subpanel
Heather Mann	Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel
Kate Wing	Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel

The principal responsibility of this group is to carry out the terms of reference for this process, the purpose of which is to help the Council family understand the communication enhancement process, and to ultimately enhance communication.

Improving communication and creating trust will require the involvement of many people, including Council and advisory body members, agency staff, representatives of stakeholder groups, and members of the public. Involvement will need to take place at many levels, from providing suggestions for improving communications to actively creating and implementing the action plan.

Goals of the process

The goal of enhancing communication through this effort is for all people involved in the Council process to:

- Clearly understand how the fisheries management process works.
- Understand how to effectively involve themselves in the process.
- Be able to express their views clearly, and in a timely way, within the process.
- Feel that their views have been heard and respected.

It will take time for these goals to be realized. While improved communication will not solve all fisheries-related problems, good communication is essential for effective fisheries management. Improvements in communication can lead to a better understanding of the management process, more effective involvement and increased trust by participants, and, ultimately, better management of our fisheries.

However, communication should enhance, not hinder, the management process. The suggestions laid out in the Action Plan are guidelines, and should not represent a new level of bureaucracy. Many of the suggestions could require additional staff time and financial resources that may or may not be available. In addition, it is important to note that many of the actions listed here are already being undertaken to some extent by Council staff.

Objectives

The objectives for reaching these goals are to:

- Use the recommendations set out in *An Investment in Trust* as a springboard for improving communication efforts
- Develop a flexible, organic communications action plan that describes specific ways to improve communication
- Involve advisory body members in developing the action plan
 - Propose choosing a lead person from each advisory body to be the liaison between the communications group and the advisory committee
 - For each Council meeting, develop a place holder on each advisory committee agenda to have regular updates regarding communication
- Address communication on the following levels:
 - actions that can be undertaken on an individual level (by Council staff, Council members, advisory body members, and NMFS staff)
 - actions that can be undertaken by the Council (and NMFS) as a whole
 - actions that can be undertaken by advisory bodies
- Conduct the work in a transparent and inclusive manner
- Update the Council consistently on the progress of these efforts

Structure of the Plan

This plan aims to enhance communication by identifying and describing communication tools and processes. Tools include such items as the Briefing Book and printed materials placed on the back table of the Council chamber. Processes include Council decision making and the process of creating and following the Council agenda.

Each element includes a section providing context and a table that contains the core components of the action plan:

1. A description of one or more issues or problems associated with the element. These are issues that could be addressed to enhance communication and improve trust.
2. A list of potential action(s) that address the issues. (Some actions might address one issue while others address multiple issues.)

Once the Council has approved the action plan, the actions should be taken by the Council in a timely manner.

Communication settings

Communication occurs on many levels. In order to simplify the task of improving communication in the Council process, we have focused on communication in three settings. At present, the document only includes Setting One (communication in the Council chamber, while the actual Council session is taking place). Setting II of the plan will focus on communication between advisory bodies and the Council during Council meeting week, including communication within and between advisory bodies and technical teams. Setting III will focus on communication between constituents and Council members and advisory body representatives.

Some final words

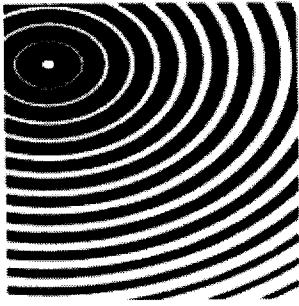
The development of a communications plan is an open and continuous process; therefore, this is a “living document” that may be revised multiple times in the future. Many of the solutions listed here have already been undertaken, or will be undertaken soon by Council staff or others.

Improving communication and creating trust will also require the involvement of many people, including Council and advisory body members, agency staff, representatives of stakeholder groups, and members of the public. Involvement will need to take place at many levels, from providing suggestions for improving communications to actively creating and implementing the action plan. We welcome input from those who participate in and communicate with the Council. Is this effort on track? Are the elements, context, issues/problems, and potential actions described accurately? Should any additional elements or issues/problems be listed? Are the suggested potential actions appropriate or effective? Are there additional potential actions that could help address these problems?

Informing oneself about management is an individual responsibility. However, communicators also need to ensure that their messages are clear and understandable from a wide variety of perspectives.

Definitions

Throughout these documents we use the terms “fisheries management community” and “fishing community.” By “management” we mean the various fisheries management agencies (including, but not limited to National Marine Fisheries Service, the Pacific Fishery Management Council, state fish and wildlife departments, and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission), staff, scientists, Council members, Council advisory body members, and other policymakers. By “fishing community” we mean fishing families, fishing family businesses, fishermen and women, fishermen’s wives groups, industry support groups, processors, and service/suppliers.



Chapter 2: Communication During Council Proceedings

This setting focuses on communication in the Council chamber, while the actual Council session is taking place.

Tools

This section focuses on four major tools:

1. The Briefing Book
2. Presentations and Visual Aids
3. Supplemental Materials
4. Back-Table Materials

1. The Briefing Book

Council members, Council staff and chairs of advisory bodies and committees receive a copy of the Council Briefing Book. The Briefing Book contains summaries of each agenda item (“situation summaries”), reports and materials for each agenda item, and written public comment. Because of the size of the Briefing Book, and the effort required to create it, Briefing Books are not available to the general public, and members of advisory bodies (other than chairs) do not receive them. However, the Council has begun to place Briefing Book materials on its website.

There are two Briefing Book deadlines. The first (and main) deadline is approximately two and a half weeks before the Council meeting (see footnote, page 13). Public comments and reports supplied before this deadline are included in the Briefing Book. The second deadline is known as the “supplemental” deadline. Public comments and reports provided by this deadline are distributed to Council members at the Council meeting.

The Briefing Book is often very large. There is a tradeoff between providing the proper amount of information to advisory body members and providing too much information (in terms of both preparation and information overload). Also, communication needs differ for agency appointees and private citizens serving on the Council. Agency appointees tend to have staff who can conduct research and help the Council members digest the material.

<i>Issue/Problem</i>	<i>Potential Action to Address Issue</i>
The Briefing Book does not include sufficient background information on complex topics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to prepare information sheets (or backgrounders) on timely topics. • Put relevant fact sheets on the back table, next to related Briefing Book materials.
Some meeting attendees are not aware that Briefing Book materials are available to them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicize the fact that the Briefing Book is available on the web site, and parts may be obtained by calling the Council office. • Post a sign clarifying that Briefing Book materials are available on the back table. • Make one or two bound Briefing Books available to the public for reference.
Others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others?

2. Presentations and Visual Aids

The Council often sees presentations by scientists and the public. As with the Briefing Book, presentations face a tradeoff between detail and clarity. The Council and public need enough information to be informed, but not overwhelmed. There are two general types of presentations—those prepared in advance of the meeting (such as presentations by “outside” scientists); and presentations of new information developed during the Council meeting (such as information from advisory bodies such as the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel). In addition, presentations are of varying quality and clarity. Ensure guidelines are not so rigid that they create another level of bureaucracy.

<i>Issue/Problem</i>	<i>Potential Action to Address Issue</i>
Presentations need to be clear to both the Council members and the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Guidelines for Presenters. Describe a) what the Council needs to know in order to make a decision (such as a summary of the issues, methods, assumptions, and conclusions) and b) formatting suggestions (font size, use of acronyms, number of bullets per page, number of slides, how to match amount of information presented with time allocated, etc.).
Presentation and table text is often too small to read.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request that presenters follow the Guidelines for Presenters (above). Use handouts in addition to or instead of overheads or PowerPoint presentations when a lot of detailed information needs to be presented.
Others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others?

3. Supplemental Materials

Two types of supplemental materials are presented to the Council: those that arrive late in the process, and those created during the Council meeting.

<i>Issue/Problem</i>	<i>Potential Action to Address Issue</i>
The public doesn't know when new supplemental materials are introduced into the Council discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chair or staff should point out when new supplemental materials have arrived.
The public and advisory body members get confused when there are multiple versions of the same report or document on the back table at once.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If possible, do not place multiple versions of the same document on the back table at the same time. When there are multiple versions of a report, post the time and date prominently on them (for example, in the upper-right-hand corner) so readers know what time each version was created.
Council members, advisory body members and/or the public don't have time to evaluate newly introduced supplemental materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When practical, the Chair or staff could recommend a short break when materials need to be read.
Advisory body chairs sometimes don't get supplemental reports until after the Council has received them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When possible, distribute supplemental materials to the Council and the public as soon as they are available. (This immediate distribution would need to be weighed against the desire not to interrupt the Council process.)
Others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Others?

4. Back-Table Materials

Copies of situation summaries, agendas, reports, and supplemental materials are placed on a table at the back of the Council chamber.

<i>Issue/Problem</i>	<i>Potential Action to Address Issue</i>
The presence of back-table materials in the Council chamber encourages people to talk during the proceedings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When possible, put back-table materials in the hall outside the Council chamber.
People who are not familiar with the system do not understand the codes in the upper right hand corner of the back-table and supplemental materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an information sheet that explains how materials are coded. Clarify labeling. For example, use "Agenda Item" instead of "Exhibit Number" on labeled materials.

Sometimes there are not enough copies of documents available, especially for important issues (trip limits, proposals, and final reports).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make more copies of handouts for controversial or important issues. (It is Council policy to distribute additional copies of handouts that are likely to be in high demand, but delays can be caused by the limited number of photocopiers.)
Others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others?

Processes

This section focuses on five major processes:

1. Following the Agenda
2. Understanding the Council Process
3. Providing Public Testimony
4. Council Decision-Making; Motions and Justification for Decisions
5. Distractions During Council Proceedings

1. Following the Agenda

The Council works off an agenda that 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.

Agendas for the next Council meeting are usually discussed on Friday of the Council meeting. During the weeks following the meeting, a draft agenda is developed by Council staff. The agenda is then finalized on the first day of the subsequent Council meeting.

At the Council meeting, each agenda item is addressed by the Council as it comes up in the schedule. First, a Staff Officer presents the Council members with an overview of what to expect during the agenda item. This overview is essentially the same as the “situation summary” which is 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.

The agenda is often very full. Overcrowding of the agenda can lead to many problems including schedule changes and limited time for deliberations or public comment.

Keeping the public up to date about the status of the agenda is a challenge. While the Council is making a renewed effort to maintain the agenda schedule, changes are sometimes inevitable and even desired in certain circumstances. Each morning staff are notified about possible agenda changes, and they pass this information along to their advisory bodies. In addition, a sign with the current agenda item is placed in the Council chamber and is updated by staff. When available, the agenda is also posted on an in-house television channel. The availability of this feature depends on the hotel’s facilities.

One challenge in tracking the agenda is that Council staff do not want to either prevent the Council from making necessary schedule changes, or provide a false sense of security to the public regarding the Council's schedule. In other words, there is no way to ensure that the agenda absolutely will not change. This must be kept in mind when providing updates to the public about the status of the agenda.

<i>Issue/Problem</i>	<i>Potential Action to Address Issue</i>
<p>At Council meetings, schedules sometimes slip, so the Council must modify the agenda during the course of the meeting. Such changes to the agenda are not always communicated to the attendees. At times it can be difficult to find out when items are going to show up on the agenda.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a white board or some similar system placed <i>outside</i> the Council room door that notes what agenda item the Council is currently addressing, and the estimated time for other agenda items. • When possible, advise advisory body chairs when the Council agenda changes (this is already done to some extent.) • If possible and financially feasible, use an in-house telephone number to provide a voicemail message that provides updates on Council progress and explains when agenda items are likely to be covered. • If possible, post changes to the agenda and updates on the status of the agenda on a closed-circuit hotel TV channel (both in rooms and on a monitor outside of the Council chamber).
<p>Advisory body members don't always know what the Council wants from them in terms of commenting on agenda items.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the committee Chair walk through the agenda in advance with the committee's staff person to determine what the Council wants the committee to comment on.
<p>Advisory body members would like more detail about agenda items (and Council action) that they are not specifically requested to comment on by Council staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicize the fact that Briefing Book materials are posted on the web. • Consider providing a CD with Briefing Book materials to the advisory bodies as part of their committee mailings. • Ensure situation summaries include a clear description of the action to be taken by the Council.
<p>The advisory body/Council agenda often requires people to be in many places at once.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider implications for advisory bodies when the Council sets the agenda. • Divide advisory bodies into subcommittees or designate representatives to attend other meetings when possible.
<p>Others?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others?

2. Understanding the Council Process

Stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in the Council process at virtually every level of fisheries management. The Council meets for four days, Tuesday through Friday, with advisory bodies meeting on Monday. With the exception of a brief closed session in which the Council discusses personnel and litigation issues, the remainder of the meeting is open to all members of the public.

At the start of each day the Chairman reviews the day's agenda and entertains changes that are required in order to meet scheduling conflicts. Next, the Council moves through the agenda as described under "Following the agenda," above.

Although this process is fairly straightforward, it can be confusing for people who are new to Council meetings or who attend only occasionally.

<i>Issue/Problem</i>	<i>Potential Action to Address Issue</i>
<p>New Council members, advisory body members, and the public need to understand how the Council process works.</p> <p>Note: Some orientation materials are already given to new advisory body members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct orientations or a "Council Process 101" class for all interested parties, with both experienced Council/advisory body members involved. Orientations could be held twice a year on the Sunday of a Council meeting. If it is not possible to schedule such an orientation, create a system where experienced members can orient new members individually. • Create written orientation materials. • Promote the recently-created Guide to the Council Process and print hard copies of the Guide to distribute.
<p>It is unclear how information reaches the Council, and through whom. People need to know when and how to provide input to the Council process in order to be most effective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use handouts, orientations, or a guide to explain how the process works. • Clarify which Council meetings are focused on which fisheries, so people know which meetings to attend. • Emphasize the desirability of getting testimony in on time to be included in the Briefing Book. • Emphasize how members of the public can get involved with advisory bodies.
<p>It is difficult for people in the Council audience to understand the context of agenda items and the decision to be made.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a handout or orientation session to direct people to the "Situation Summaries." • Place fact sheets on complex topics near the situation summaries.
<p>Others?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others?

3. Providing Public Testimony

Public comment during Council meetings is an important part of the fisheries management process and is an important opportunity for stakeholder involvement in the process. Public comments are always accepted before any Council action. While this chapter focuses on events that happen within the Council meeting setting, it is important to note that written public comments received by the Council office by the Briefing Book deadline¹ are included in Council members' Briefing Books, which they review before the meeting. This is one of the most effective ways for stakeholders to communicate their positions on important issues. Written comments provided before the meetings, followed by oral testimony at the meetings, provides an optimal level of input to Council members.

There are two settings at Council meetings where it is appropriate to provide oral public comment. If the comment pertains to an issue that is not on the Council's agenda, comments are taken at a prescheduled time, usually 4:00 p.m. on the Tuesday of the meeting. Members of the public may comment on any issue not on the agenda for the current meeting. Comments related to issues on the agenda are generally taken once advisory body reports have been provided, and before Council discussion and action. Members of the public who request the opportunity to provide oral comment or testimony at the meetings are required to complete a "public comment card." Blank cards are located on the staff table near the entrance to the meeting room. Members of the public must complete the information requested on the card and submit the card to the staff person, who gives all completed cards to the Council Chair before the public comment period begins.

Once public comment has begun on an issue, additional cards are not accepted. Council operating procedures state that individuals shall have five minutes each to provide comments and individuals representing groups shall have ten minutes to provide their comments. Once the comment has been provided, the Chairman will invite Council members to question the commenter as appropriate.

Written public comments are also accepted during Council meetings. Interested persons should bring 40 copies of their written public comment and deliver them to the Secretarial Center. Staff there will ensure that the comments are distributed at the appropriate time.

<i>Issue/Problem</i>	<i>Potential Action to Address Issue</i>
Providing public testimony at Council meetings can be uncomfortable and intimidating. People don't always know the procedure for testifying.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a sign posted outside the Council room that explains how to give testimony, and a handout/outline available for reference.• When the Chair invites testimony, he or she could explain a) the process and function of testifying effectively, and b) what the Council would like to hear from the public.

¹ The Briefing Book deadline falls 2-3 weeks before the Council meeting. The date is posted on the Council website, listed in the newsletter, and is available by calling the Council office.

Members of the public expect to be given their allotted amount of time to testify, and sometimes they are cut off due to time constraints or for other reasons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whenever possible, the Chair should allow the allotted time for public testimony stated on the Council's website (5-10 minutes).
Others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Others?

3. Council Decision-Making: Motions and Justification for Decisions

The text of motions is an extremely important part of the Council process, with implications for both natural resources and livelihoods. Motions need to be clear to Council members, advisory bodies, and the public. All parties need to understand what the Council is voting on, assure the motions accurately capture the language in the advisory body suggestions (if so desired), or otherwise clearly articulate policy direction/decisions.

<i>Issue/Problem</i>	<i>Potential Action to Address Issue</i>
It is difficult to keep track of motions and friendly amendments to motions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place a large screen in the Council chamber to show motion text and have one person whose job it is to update the motion continuously. Require that all major or complex motions be in writing and projected on screen as they are developed.
The justification for the Council's decisions, and a record of how the Council addressed a particular issue, need to be made clear.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having motions in writing would help address this. When possible, explain the rationale for controversial or important motions and votes, either in writing or orally.
Others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Others?

4. Distractions during Council Proceedings

The Council chamber is the center of activity during Council meeting week. People often meet there to discuss issues while keeping track of Council deliberations. However, high noise levels can make it difficult for the audience to hear Council proceedings. While the noise level in the Council chamber is under the control of the Council Chair, some measures may reduce noise before it becomes a problem.

<i>Issue/Problem</i>	<i>Potential Action to Address Issue</i>
People who talk in the back of the Council room distract attention from the Council proceedings. The noise makes it difficult to hear Council proceedings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put back-table documents outside the Council chamber when possible. • Place a closed-circuit TV monitor outside the Council chamber to allow people to watch and talk in the hall. • Post a sign requesting silence. • The Chair could remind people to be quiet when necessary.
Others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others?

References

Gilden, Jennifer D., and Flaxen D.L. Conway. 2002. *An Investment in Trust: Communication in the Commercial Fishing and Fisheries Management Communities*. Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon Sea Grant publication ORESU-G-01-004.