



FACT SHEET: COUNCIL MEETINGS 101

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Council meetings are the heart of the Federal fisheries management process. They are where ideas develop into management decisions, and where recommendations are forwarded to National Marine Fisheries Service. However, Council meetings can be confusing to people who are new to the process or who only attend Council meetings occasionally.

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 fishery 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 process was created in 1976 through the Act now known as the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (or MSA). See our MSA fact sheet for more information.



New Council members Bob Dooley, Louis Zimm and Christa Svensson in 2018.

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

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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.

ALL COUNCIL MEETINGS AND ADVISORY BODY MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, EXCEPT FOR A CLOSED SESSION TO DEAL WITH PERSONNEL MATTERS.

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, habitat, ecosystem-based management, economics and social science, and communication. There are typically 15 or 16 members of the Council staff.

Advisory bodies include advisory subpanels, management teams, work groups, technical teams, the Scientific and Statistical Committee, the Enforcement Consultants, and the Habitat Committee. There are also ad hoc committees which focus on particular, timely topics, then disband. These bodies usually meet while the Council meets (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 our “Council Advisory Bodies” fact sheet.

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 decisionmaking, the Councils are required to use the best scientific information available and to meet the national standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. They must also comply with the other Federal laws like the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The Council currently has FMPs for salmon, groundfish, coastal pelagic species, and highly migratory species, as well as an overarching Fishery Ecosystem Plan.

COUNCIL MEETINGS

The Council meets five times a year, usually in March, April, June, September, and November. Most Council meetings take six 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. 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. Advisory bodies also meet at various times between Council meetings.

BRIEFING BOOKS

Council staff prepares a Briefing Book before each Council meeting. The Briefing Book contains summaries, reports, and other materials for each agenda item, as well as written public comment. Briefing Book materials are available on the Council website (www.pcouncil.org), usually as PDF files, one week before Council meetings.

There are two public comment deadlines. The first (and main) deadline is roughly two and a half weeks before the Council meeting. Public comments and reports that are supplied before this deadline are included in the Briefing Book. The second deadline, known as the “supplemental” deadline, is about four business days before 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. The exact dates for each meeting can be found on our website. Comments can be submitted through our e-Portal (<https://pfmc.psmfc.org/>), mailed, or faxed to the Council.

HANDOUTS

All materials included in the Briefing Book, the supplemental material provided to Council members, and all reports 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 label in the upper right-hand corner of the handouts explains where they fit in the agenda and what subject they pertain to.

AGENDAS AND AGENDA ITEMS

The Council works off an agenda that is drafted at the

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previous Council meeting and posted on the Council's website.

Agenda items are set by the Council, working with Council staff. To have something placed on the agenda, talk to the Executive Director, Chair, or an individual Council member, or suggest the agenda item during an advisory body meeting or during the public comment period when the agenda is finalized. Draft agendas for the next Council meeting are usually discussed on the last day 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 state and/or tribal reports, advisory body comments or reports, and by public comment. Finally, the Council discusses the topic and may vote on it.

ALL AGENDA ITEMS HAVE A PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD.

ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

The Council meeting process follows "Robert's Rules of Order," rules for parliamentary procedure which were developed in 1876. This ensures that discussions run smoothly, and that the process of making motions is fair and clear. 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 copiers 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.

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 backgrounders titled "Council Testimony" and "Getting Involved" (www.pcouncil.org).

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