

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON CLIMATE AND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE WORKSHOP REPORT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed the materials in the briefing book for this agenda item, received a summary presentation about the stakeholder workshops, and GAP members attended one or more of the workshops. As in previous statements, the GAP highlights the importance of this topic to fishery participants and fishing dependent communities because they will be directly impacted by the changes envisaged in the future scenarios for the California Current Ecosystem. Moreover, the importance of this topic is highlighted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has revealed inherent qualities within the groundfish fisheries and the science and management processes that support them. These fundamental aspects have been tested during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing that fishery participants are, by their nature, resilient and adaptable to change while science and management systems have proven less adaptable. This experience demonstrates that significant work needs to be done to ensure the science and management processes that are the foundation of successful, sustainable, and resilient fisheries are capable of timely and effective adaptation such that they can continue to support harvesters, processors, recreational fishermen, and the communities that support and rely upon them.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is tasked with providing guidance on the scenario planning exercise and completion of the initiative. Related to this, the Council and fishery participants have also been asked by National Marine Fisheries Service to [“Give us Your Input on Making Fisheries and Protected Resources More Resilient to Climate Change”](#) (Supplemental Informational Report 8, March 2021). There are several fundamental questions: – How can the Council and fishery management agencies become nimbler and more responsive in their research and administration of fisheries such that science is stronger and less uncertain, and management systems are adaptable to and capable of effectively responding to changing climatic conditions and the concomitant effects on fisheries and fishery participants? To that end, how can the information developed under this initiative be made useful to the Council, management agencies, and fishery participants? Which of the nine themes (i.e., “Priority Action Areas”) are directly relevant to the Council process? For example, only two of the nine themes (“Management Flexibility” and “Council Efficiency”) are directly within the purview of the Council. While the Council can have a role in the other Action Areas, they are outside of the direct control of the Council and methods for engaging in them would need to be forged.

It is important to recognize that, while this initiative is aimed at bolstering the capacity and adaptability of the Council process, flexibility is also needed in the federal management process. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that many aspects of the Council process are already able to accommodate rapid and dire changes (e.g., while agenda topics were lessened, Council meetings occurred and Council work got done). In contrast, the pandemic has revealed that the science and management processes that support the Council and its fisheries are much less capable of effective and timely responses to changing conditions (e.g., scientific surveys were cancelled with downstream effects on stock assessments and harvest specifications, and there is inherent inertia in the agency rulemaking process).

The information garnered through the Climate and Communities Initiative (CCI) should be informative to the Council in developing and implementing the necessary systemic changes and in working with its agency partners as they evolve their science and management processes to foster and support resilience in the fisheries managed by the Council. Therefore, the GAP recommends that the next step in the process is for the Ad Hoc Climate and Communities Core Team (CCCT) and Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) to begin building the necessary bridges between the information developed through the initiative and its usefulness to the Council and Council family. For example, the information is currently wide ranging and not all of it is necessarily relevant to the Council. The information needs to be synthesized such that those aspects that are of the greatest relevancy to the Council are identified and prioritized for use in the near term and plans developed for adaptability over the long term. This synthesis should be the first task of the CCCT and EWG and aligns with one of the recommendations of the EWG ([Agenda Item I.2.b, Supplemental EWG Report 1, March 2021](#)) that notes “the potential actions resulting from this initiative... include short-term actions to update fisheries regulations or Council Operating Procedures, as well as longer-term actions that may require shifts in data-collection and analysis processes, fishery management plan amendments, or additional ecosystem initiatives.”

Moving forward on this initiative is critical. As noted above, harvesters, processors, and recreational fishermen are by their nature adaptable and resilient. However, maintaining successful and sustainable fisheries into the future, under any number of changing climate scenarios, requires evolution in the science and management processes that support Council managed fisheries. The CCI has produced a wealth of insights and information about potential changes and the necessary adaptations to prepare for and respond to those changes. This information needs to be tailored to fit the needs of the Council and Council family. In essence, fisheries are demonstrably innovative, whereas regulatory, management, and science processes are less so; this is not a criticism of the latter, it is simply that the incentives are different. The ultimate goal should be to streamline the management and science processes, to make them agile and flexible, without sacrificing the integrity that embodies and supports sustainable fisheries management.

PFMC
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