

ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP REPORT ON THE FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN UPDATE

During the Ecosystem Workgroup's (EWG's) February 22-23, 2021 meeting, we discussed a draft outline for the final Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) chapter on ecosystem science in the Council process. On February 23, John DeVore briefed the EWG and the Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel on the development of the Council's Research and Data Needs Database, which helped the EWG think about the types of projects and ideas that could be included in that database, versus the bigger picture discussion of science needs that could be provided in the final chapter of the FEP. We also discussed the various ecosystem and climate science documents and strategic planning processes within the agencies and commissions that participate in and support the Council process.

Below, we provide a draft outline of the final FEP chapter for review by the Council, its advisory bodies, and the public. The EWG's intent is to bring the Council a draft of the final chapter to the Council's September 2021 meeting, where the Council is tentatively scheduled to adopt the revised FEP. We are concerned that if the Council were to adopt the revised FEP in September 2021, Council advisory bodies and the public would not have an adequate opportunity to review the full draft revised FEP. Therefore, we recommend the Council consider an FEP adoption process similar to that used for the 2013 FEP:

- September 2021: EWG provides a complete draft FEP for review by Council, advisory bodies, and the public. Council receives comments and makes recommendations for immediate revisions to be made by the EWG in September-October 2021.
- October-December 2021: Council staff issues Public Review Draft FEP, with comments due by the end of December 2021.
- January-February 2022: EWG drafts final revisions to FEP for March 2022 briefing book.
- March 2022: Final Council adoption of FEP.

Chapter 5 Ecosystem Science in the Council Process

In the 2013 FEP, this chapter briefly addressed bringing ecosystem science into stock assessments and the annual ecosystem status report. The Council moved all of its recommendations on specific ecosystem science projects into the Research and Data Needs Document, which is now becoming a database (tentatively scheduled for discussion at the April 2021 Council meeting). The Introductory section of the new Chapter 5 would discuss our progress to date on bringing ecosystem science into the Council process and would discuss new or different opportunities for bringing ecosystem science into the Council process. This section would also discuss how the Council process can understand, interpret, and use near real-time information to make more rapid decisions based on changing environmental, biological, and social conditions. Additionally, this section would discuss when and how quickly we might react to new ecosystem information -- not all new ecosystem information needs immediate reactions, nor would the ecosystem or fishing communities necessarily benefit from reactive decision-making.

5.1 Ecosystem information as supporting context for stock assessment process

Bringing ecosystem information into the stock assessment process is addressed in the 2013 FEP and as part of the [NMFS Next Generation Stock Assessment Enterprise](#). This section would discuss:

- how that recommendation has been implemented;
- new kinds of models and data to inform Council harvest decisions, and new tools like thresholds, risk analysis, and decision tables; and
- guidance from more recent scientific literature and other natural resource science and management processes.

5.2 Climate-ready fisheries and fishing communities

This section would discuss:

- science products that can help us better understand fish stock and protected species distribution and abundance in the context of a changing ocean;
- how to assess and think about the cumulative effects of climate change and fisheries regulations on community well-being and equity; and
- the meaning of the term “climate-ready fisheries” (e.g., climate-ready for whom?), and its implications for data collection efforts and gaps.

Additionally, this section would look into some of the ideas emerging from the Climate and Communities Initiative to consider what scientific information and collaborative efforts would be needed to better prepare Council-managed fisheries for the future conditions discussed under that initiative.

5.3 Synthesis of biophysical and social conditions across FMPs

This section would discuss how we are building our understanding of biophysical and social conditions across our managed species, not just what goes into the ecosystem status report, but where we can fill in our bigger picture understanding of the ecosystem. In particular, this section will look at:

- how we think about habitat, bycatch, and fishery participation across the fishery management plans,
- the potential effects of non-fishing activities on our ecosystem, and
- how can new scientific information help the Council understand how those effects interact with fisheries management.

PFMC
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