

FOURSTATE REPORT ON MARINE PLANNING WORKLOAD
CDFW, ODFW, WDFW and IDFG

As discussed under the Marine Planning agenda item at the March 2021 meeting ([C3 Marine Planning](#)), offshore development processes are already mid-stream in California and Oregon. The Council has a longstanding tradition of providing an inclusive forum for governments, scientific and industry experts, and interested and affected communities to effectively and efficiently bring information and advice together to inform the Council's decisions and recommendations to NOAA Fisheries and other entities. As such, fisheries representatives and other marine experts that participate in the Council process are uniquely positioned to provide valuable and regionally-informed input on fisheries activities across the West Coast and EEZ. Consequently, the four states expect that deeper Council engagement in marine offshore development and planning processes will lead to more robust and informed decision-making. In particular we currently are focused on planning processes led by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration/National Ocean Service (NOAA/NOS) for Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOAs) and by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) for offshore wind (OSW) lease areas.

With this in mind, the four states recommend scheduling further Council discussion on how to engage with marine planning processes at its June 2021 Council, specifically considering planning and siting of renewable energy and aquaculture projects in ocean waters ("offshore development"). The state fisheries management agencies offer this report to provide some indication of our current thinking on options. We acknowledge that offshore development involves authorities and policy processes over which the Council lacks direct control. However, the Council could provide persuasive and constructive input. The four states are interested in learning from the Council's Executive Director about potential options for facilitating PFMC advisory body engagement with offshore development and in scheduling additional Council discussion on this topic in June 2021. Specific suggestions are described in the proposal, below.

The current need for engagement appears to be highest for areas off California and Oregon and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) place high priority on Council engagement. Notably, under Agenda Item H.3, Legislative Matters, Council staff has identified state legislative proposals in both Oregon and California related to offshore wind development processes. However, at the Federal level, there have been recent communications from the White House and federal agencies about national planning goals and commitments for developing offshore wind in particular (White House announcement on March 29, 2021, includes the target of [30 Gigawatts by 2030](#)). ***The four agencies believe there is pressing need for and would be coastwide benefits from increasing the Council's ability to track and engage in offshore development planning processes, particularly for advisory body members to have facilitated opportunities to engage in the related mapping processes, and fisheries and habitats impact analyses.***

Models for PFMC Engagement in Marine Planning

By agreement and arrangement of BOEM, NOAA, and PFMC, the Council's March 2021 Marine Planning update focused on efforts to map fishery grounds by NOAA/NOS for AOAs and by BOEM for OSW. This Council discussion was preceded by the preparatory and highly attended Habitat Committee (HC) webinar on February 24, 2021, during which NOAA and BOEM also presented information on their processes.

The four states thank NOAA/NOS and BOEM for their presentations to the HC and Council, and appreciate Council staff and the HC for their work to date and the information they have developed to inform the Council's understanding of these issues, as well as BOEM's email correspondence with PFMC earlier this month (Agenda item A3, supplemental Attachment 1). The experience from those presentations, the March discussions and public comment received, and BOEM's correspondence are taken into account in the conclusions and recommendations we offer below.

Clearly, offshore development (including both AOAs and OSW) has the potential to cause negative impacts on Council-managed species and habitats, researchers' ability to survey and assess those resources, and on access to fishing grounds by the fishing communities that rely on these resources. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Council routinely provides comment on essential fish habitat issues and would do so for any offshore development project that related to impacts on PFMC-established essential fish habitat; this is the role of the Habitat Committee. Also, and as discussed throughout the Council's Climate and Communities Initiative proceedings, we anticipate ecosystem and population shifts due to climate and ocean change, which will be important to document in ecosystem assessment surveys (including stock assessments) for fisheries management and for adaptive management of offshore development; comments on this is the role of the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment group and the Fishery Science Centers generally and we encourage NMFS to work closely with federal partners on marine planning to protect NMFS' ability to continue research and assessment surveys in the future. Beyond this and as described above, the regional fisheries expertise within PFMC advisory bodies is an important resource for Federal agencies for mapping and planning processes; however, we do not have a single advisory body or established path for facilitating the discussion needed between advisory bodies and Federal agency planning teams to transfer that knowledge. Facilitating this transfer of knowledge is a primary goal of the authors of this report.

Related to PFMC engagement generally, the Council's advisory bodies provided thoughtful and lengthy comments on the AOA and OSW public processes under the Marine Planning agenda item in March, including many recommendations for additional engagement with the diverse fishery perspectives that are part of the Council process. In summary, the advisory bodies recommend further engagement of PFMC in the planning processes to extend to interactive discussion on representing fisheries data and activities, as well as impacts. The Council heard suggestions for four different models for assigning this work to Council advisory bodies, which could then engage directly with NOAA/NOS and BOEM on AOA and OSW including:

- a. Task the Habitat Committee and expand their typical role beyond EFH, to include tracking the marine planning issue and developing Council comments letters on AOA and OSW mapping (status quo)

- b. Augment the Habitat Committee with additional expertise
- c. Create a new ad hoc advisory body (members could be representatives from existing advisory bodies or could be new to the PFMC family, if additional expertise is desired)
- d. Task all advisory bodies simultaneously (e.g. similar to Feb 24 webinar)

Comments from Council advisory bodies in March offered either no opinion on how to assign this work or recommended model c. ***All of the above alternatives (including status quo) place new demands on Council staff, and we recommend that there would be benefit from augmentation of Council staff capacity in order to address these demands.*** Although we did not hear specific recommendations on how to augment expertise (models b. and c.), there was a recognition that the existing Council advisory bodies are comprised of members who have the right expertise to represent the PFMC fisheries in marine planning, but are not necessarily prepared to meet the specific expertise of planning for offshore development.

Proposal

The four states therefore request that the Council ask the Executive Director to analyze for Council consideration, discussion and decision in June 2021:

1. ***Advisory body models*** – including consideration of the 4 advisory body structures, described above.
2. Plans to proceed with the ***working webinars*** suggested in recent correspondence from BOEM, focusing on facilitating meaningful input by PFMC advisory bodies (or representatives) on the mapping and planning process underway for offshore wind. The plan description would include timeline, participation strategy (with the suggested alternatives for advisory body models in mind), and Council agenda time to discuss as needed.
3. Options for how ***Council staff capacity*** will be used and/or augmented to meet the new workload demands from these working webinars and other related workload demands (including hosting the webinars, summary reports to the Council, drafting comments letters to agencies such as BOEM, as directed by the Council). In describing opportunities to augment staff capacity, include consideration of examples such as the contracting done to support the Climate and Communities Initiative scenario planning process.
4. Options for scheduling ***Council agenda time*** to maintain Council awareness and provide opportunity for Council guidance on these issues. This would include analysis of how to act in a timely manner on the pre-Council coordination calls with BOEM (which includes Council staff, the Council’s marine planning lead, and BOEM staff). This could include, for example, a standing agenda item which could be cancelled if not needed, or a regular update and discussion as part of the Director’s Report.