

ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP REPORT ON COUNCIL MEETING AND PROCESS EFFICIENCIES

The Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) thanks Dr. Kit Dahl for presenting the staff whitepaper on Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) efficiencies and effectiveness (Agenda Item C.3, Attachment 1) to the EWG on August 29, 2022. The EWG was impressed with the thought that went into the paper and agrees with the general tone and suggestions of the paper. Our experience with EWG meetings has been that remote meetings have been beneficial for increasing public attendance and engagement from the Council's advisory bodies and for supporting work-life balance for EWG members, but in-person meetings can allow for faster and more effective team-building for EWG members.

If the Council continues discussing ecosystem agenda items at its March and September meetings, we recommend an EWG schedule of:

- Advance briefing sessions on ecosystem agenda items for all advisory body members and the public prior to the March and September Council meetings;
- One in-person EWG meeting per year prior to or in conjunction with the March Council meeting;
- One multi-day remote meeting prior to or in conjunction with the September Council meeting;
- Opportunities for half-day remote meetings between major Council meetings for the EWG to organize its work and share progress with the public, as needed.

The EWG supports the suggestions found in the report's "Takeaways" on page 6, particularly the need for a more thorough strategic-planning exercise around efficiencies and effectiveness of Council decision-making. We also support the suggestion that a strategic-planning exercise carefully consider whether five in-person Council meetings are needed per year, and whether we need to stick to roughly the same traditional meeting dates into the future. We defer to the suggestions of fishery-specific advisory bodies on the best timing for this exercise, since it will need to be carefully scheduled to accommodate fishing season and fishery-related annual and biennial decision-making. As mentioned above, the EWG is most familiar with the timing of the March and September Council meetings, and we note that the September meeting timing creates a variety of scheduling conflicts with Labor Day, the start of the school year, and major religious holidays.

We also recommend that a strategic-planning exercise consider whether there could be changes to the Council process that would improve the flexibility and nimbleness of Council and NMFS decision-making in support of adaptation to climate change. The EWG discussed examples from other fishery management councils of more efficient decision-making associated with harvest-setting and exempted fishing permit development. The EWG reminds the Council that they recently completed a scenario planning exercise around adapting fish stocks and fisheries to climate change, and refers the Council to the results of the workshops associated with the Climate and Communities Initiative, which included many suggestions for improving Council decision-making flexibility and nimbleness. Many of these recommendations were summarized in the EWG's April 2022 report to the Council on unfinished tasks from the CCI ([Agenda Item H.3.a](#),

[Supplemental EWG Report 1](#)), which we plan to update for the workload planning agenda item at this meeting (Agenda Item C.8.a, Supplemental EWG Report).

The EWG discussed a variety of ideas that could be considered during a strategic-planning exercise on making Council and advisory body in-person meeting time more efficient and effective:

- Support the suggestion at the bottom of page 5 that agenda planning be conducted in online sessions following each Council meeting. The future workload and agenda planning discussions usually happen after Council members and participants are already tired and before agencies and the public have had a chance to think out future calendars for their agenda items of interest.
- In-person meetings could be more efficient if the Council were to hold advance online briefing sessions for those issues that must be considered by multiple advisory bodies, or for highly-detailed briefings.
- Setting advance briefing book submission deadlines at the beginning of each calendar year would improve advisory body planning and coordination.
- Consider time limits for staff and advisory body presentations.
- Council could receive comments on non-agenda items (e.g. Agenda Item B.1, September 2022) during advance online sessions.
- As much as possible, more detailed briefing documents should be submitted to the advance briefing book. It is the EWG's experience that in-person briefing presentations are valuable in supplementing briefing documents but they cannot fully replace the benefits of providing information to decision-makers and the public in advance.
- Council staff should analyze the use of the quick-response letter process during the pandemic and non-pandemic periods. Has it been used more or less frequently in recent years? What are the risks and benefits of relying on that process?
- Council should ask itself if more decisions could be frameworked for automatic implementation. For example, could the Council develop more if/then triggers for common decision types, so that agency actions could be based on those triggers?

Finally, the EWG recognizes that balancing Council meeting efficiency and effectiveness against meeting openness, public access, and transparency is challenging. We discussed the balance between needing deep engagement between participants versus the ability to include participants who might not be able to engage in in-person meetings. And, we weighed the hectic in-person Council meetings filled with multiple meeting conflicts against the online meetings that seem to last for weeks at a time. Ultimately, the Council will need to consider:

- Whether the Council needs to use in-person floor time to review the range of informational items submitted to the Council;
- Whether the Council is taking on decisions that it does not need to make (for example, decisions that may be outside of Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements);
- Whether the Council is making its decisions at the appropriate level of frequency and detail (for example, inseason management decisions that could instead be guided by longer time-scale advance policy directives from the Council to implementing agencies).