

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON COUNCIL MEETING AND PROCESS EFFICIENCIES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) appreciates the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) staff expending the time and effort to contemplate potential improvements to efficiencies and effectiveness in the Council process. The GMT supports a more formal, comprehensive strategic planning exercise that could address the scope of topics the Council considers, how to prioritize and schedule decisions/topics, and evaluation of the format and timing of Council meetings. The GMT has been informed that other regional Councils have gone through similar processes, where an outside consultant was hired to evaluate Council operations and make recommendations, and we believe this approach would be valuable. Any exercise that is undertaken should take a bottom up approach and involve representatives from each Advisory Body (AB)/Management Team (MT), Council members, and Council staff.

The GMT agrees with the assessment that the scope and volume of what the Council takes up has substantially increased since the Council's creation. The GMT foresees an increasing workload in the Council's future as the fishing industry, coastal communities, and fisheries adjust to climate change, socio-economic changes, and a growing population. In addition to improving Council operational efficiency, the Council also faces a substantial workload and may find a solution by minimizing the number of agenda items, particularly groundfish, that the Council takes up concurrently and/or adding resources like additional staff and subject matter experts. Membership of the ABs could be expanded to help with workload, preferably with differing expertise (e.g., social scientist, statistician, modeler, database manager, equality and equity justice representative). The Council should also explore adding capacity by partnering with colleges and fellowship programs, hiring paid interns, Americorps workers, additional outside contractors, or additional staff officers to help create work products relevant to the Council. This can help with stress and burnout of AB members, Council Members, and Council staff which can lead to errors as identified in [Agenda Item C.3, Attachment 1, September 2022](#).

The GMT recommends the Council facilitate hybrid meetings for all ABs and Council meetings moving forward.

Again, the GMT appreciates the Council looking into the overall process and where efficiencies can be gained. Team members are willing to participate in the process moving forward. Attachment 1 to this report contains a summary of GMT discussions which may be useful to Council efforts in the future.

Attachment 1: Summary of GMT Discussions

The information below is a summary of the GMT discussions over two days on this topic. We are providing details here for reference with the aim that these ideas may inform future discussions.

Council Meetings and Advisory Body Meetings

The GMT recommends the Council facilitate hybrid meetings for all ABs and Council meetings moving forward. While the GMT recognizes the logistical, workload, and financial strain hybrid meetings create for Council staff, the utility to the public, cost savings, and reduction in carbon footprint from virtual attendance makes the hybrid option appealing. The utility and equity proven over the last two years of Council meetings provides a solid justification for building a permanent capacity (i.e., staffing, equipment, funding, etc.) to facilitate hybrid Council and AB meetings in the future. These efforts will help meet the outreach and community engagement equitability goals as specified in National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [Fisheries Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy](#). Hybrid meeting options are especially useful for constituents in remote areas, those who cannot afford travel expenses, or cannot miss one or more days of work to attend a Council meeting in person. The GMT believes that hybrid meetings should not be used by team members if the team is meeting in person, but it does provide the flexibility for team members to participate if unavoidable events prevent them from being in person. The GMT agreed amongst ourselves that, barring unavoidable events, every team member would try to attend in person even with a hybrid ability.

The GMT sees merit in an option where ABs with significant workload relevant to their AB (e.g., groundfish or salmon) are in person/hybrid while other ABs for which Council workload at that meeting is not as significant could meet exclusively remotely. For example, the March and/or April Council meetings, which are typically salmon heavy, could be good candidates for fully remote GMT/Groundfish Advisory Subpanel meetings. However, if that were chosen, the Council would likely need to further limit the amount of groundfish items taken up by the Council at those meetings.

Regarding the planning of agenda items for meetings, the GMT supports scheduling the future Council meeting agenda and workload planning agenda item a few days or a week after the Council completes action on all other items, because the Council may be able to have more in-depth, engaged discussion to strategically plan the future after a brief rest. Often the GMT and other ABs are traveling back home on the day that the Council takes up future agenda planning, and staggering it after the Council meeting would allow for more team members to listen and be available to respond to questions if needed.

Similarly, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) meets just prior to and/or overlapping with the travel day and/or first day of AB meetings. If the SSC met earlier (i.e., either days or up to a week) their statements could be available in advance of ABs meeting which could facilitate more robust consideration of their input and/or recommendations when developing statements. A hybrid option may help facilitate this.

Information Flow and Council Operations

The GMT suggests that the Council give further direction to Council staff and AB leadership to formally familiarize new members with existing resources, such as [Stock SMART](#), model methodology, Council archives, etc. In January 2021, the GMT gave presentations as part of our week-long work session with the aim of educating new members during a time of high turnover. New members expressed that the sessions were extremely helpful in learning about GMT model methodologies, Council processes, and stock assessments. Similarly, Council staff held a webinar on Council operations when many new AB members were appointed. ABs or the Council could formalize this process to help quickly on-board new members.

The GMT thinks the Council could benefit from increased focus on project management to prioritize and manage items. If work products are not meeting standards, a project's scope has increased significantly, or deadlines are not being met, a project manager can adjust the scope of the assignment (e.g., create less work), provide additional time for the project, provide additional staff, or provide other resources such as technology to help meet the deadlines and project standards. Some consideration may be given to setting a maximum number of years/meetings, as determined by the Council, for the Council to take action on items that are currently going through the Council process. While thorough Council consideration is valuable for any issue the Council takes up, there are trade-offs between exhaustiveness and efficiency that must be balanced in order to make timely decisions that allow the Council to equitably consider the many requests brought forward.

If the Council chooses to continue using a hybrid approach for both Council sessions and AB meetings, the GMT sees the need for additional information/technology staff and equipment to facilitate the technology and troubleshooting required to run smoothly. Additionally, Council, or other federal funding, could be utilized to provide additional state or federal employees that are not AB team members themselves but that support GMT (or other MT) members and the Council process outside of Council meetings. Such employees could also conduct Council related work behind the scenes while Council meetings are ongoing. Ideally, additional staff would be allocated to the fisheries which consume the bulk of the Council's time, such as groundfish which takes up 40 percent of the Council's floor time as identified in [Agenda Item C.3, Attachment 1, September 2022](#). A non-exhaustive list of management tasks additional state staff would perform includes running models, writing reports, creating presentations to concisely convey information from complex or lengthy reports, quality control of data, public outreach, communicating and coordinating with other ABs, and tracking fishery performance and landings. These tasks currently constitute a significant workload for GMT members.

The GMT supports taking a comprehensive approach when considering activities that apply to all Council FMPs. For example, when looking at revising Council Operating Procedures (COPs) for Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs), the GMT believes that efficiencies could be gained by examining all EFP COPs across all the FMPs. Lessons could be learned from the various FMPs on successes and failures and incorporated into the other FMPs. This could help the EFP approval and review process when considering EFPs and could help eliminate confusion for constituents, ABs, and Council members. The Council might also consider revising COP-3 to allow long-standing vacancies on ABs to be filled by an at-large individual rather than holding to the specific affiliation.

The GMT recognizes the loss of institutional knowledge occurs with retirements and member turnover. In order to increase efficiency, the Council could look for strategies to institutionalize knowledge and resources. One avenue that has been pursued by other institutions is asking retiring staff or departing AB members to create a “continuity book” that allows the departing individual to capture their institutional knowledge such as contacts, unique aspects of their fishery and geographic location or other relevant information. Council reports are another great source of knowledge but due to the structure of the Councils briefing books, which are aggregated by meeting, finding older relevant information can be difficult if you don’t know where to look. Consolidation of information and previous examples from rarely encountered circumstances such as information on overfished stocks (rebuilding plans, what a ramp down strategy is, relevant sections of the TOR, etc.) could be housed in one location or a report to formalize institutional knowledge on pertinent subject matter. This information could be housed in a cloud-based file all ABs have access to or possibly on the Councils webpage. The GMT acknowledges the work Council staff is undertaking to develop a groundfish resources page and recommends expanding it to include pertinent subject matter from rarely occurring events like overfishing or previous reports which provide historical context on current Council topics (e.g., history of Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Areas, Cowcod Conservation Area, etc.) if that is not already occurring.

Other Consideration: Outreach

In order to increase representation and diversity of participation throughout the Council process, the GMT recommends additional Council outreach. GMT members are routinely surprised by the number of recreational anglers, commercial fisheries participants, and adjacent fisheries businesses (tackle shops, marinas, buyers, port officials, etc.) who are unaware of the Council process and their representatives on the Council and ABs. The Council could consider sponsored meet and greet or town hall style venues, especially in areas outside the typical Council meeting locations. Virtual events could also be considered, though the GMT sees this as more of a networking opportunity focused on informing and engaging communities and it would be especially helpful before critical times, like when season setting begins, to facilitate stakeholder engagement and build trust amongst stakeholders. This may be especially useful for ABs that have had significant turn over. The Council could also consider leveraging social media to maximize outreach across age, technology levels, social status, and languages, and host a booth at fishing shows to connect with stakeholders unfamiliar with or unable to access online resources. An example of leveraging social media could be a Facebook or Instagram live where a Council staff member walks participants through the upcoming agenda, provides a brief overview of topics, and provides instructions on how to make a public comment could occur.

PFMC
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