



# Pacific Fishery Management Council

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## COUNCIL OPERATING PROCEDURES

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As Amended through September, 2022

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## Introduction

These Council Operating Procedures (COPs) have been developed and adopted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) to guide the process for development of fishery management plans, plan amendments, and regulatory measures for ocean fisheries off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California. COPs are specific to Council operations, rather than fishery regulations or management specifications. They specify how the Council and its advisory entities will run their meetings including how public comments will be entertained. They document the schedules for developing plan amendments and annual management measures, and they cover special processes of importance to the Council.

These procedures provide detailed specificity to the broader policies and procedures found in the Statement of Organization, Practices and Procedures (SOPP), adopted by the Council in amended language September 2004. Whereas revisions to the SOPP document require Secretarial approval, revisions to a COP may occur through Council review (including advisory body and public input) and adoption. This may occur with proper notice before a Council meeting or may occur over the course of two Council meetings, with preliminary action at the first meeting and final action at the second. After final Council action the revised COP would enter into effect. However, changes to existing COPs or the addition of a new COP must be consistent with the broader policies and procedures in the Council SOPP document.

The operating procedures are structured into two categories: Administrative and Process. Administrative COPs (1-8) are those that apply to the structure and function of the Council and advisory committees. Process COPs (9 and above) cover aspects of Council activities, for example management cycles, fishery management plan amendment cycles, and process reviews.

On November 9, 2010 the Council formally designated the following advisory bodies as being established under the authority of Section 302(g)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act:

- Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel
- Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel
- Groundfish Allocation Committee, nonvoting members
- Groundfish Advisory Subpanel
- Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat Committee
- Habitat Committee
- Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel
- Salmon Advisory Subpanel
- Coastal Pelagic STAR Panels
- Groundfish STAR Panels”

# List of Council Operating Procedures (COP)

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**COUNCIL OPERATING PROCEDURE**

**General Council Meeting Operations**

Approved by Council: 04/06/95  
Revised: 03/07/97, 06/25/99, 04/03/00, 12/15/03, 03/11/05, 11/09/07, 09/12/08, 06/13/11,  
06/28/16, 04/11/17, **04/16/19.**

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PURPOSE

To establish general procedures for the Council meetings and administrative matters.

MEETINGS

The Council shall, generally, meet five times per calendar year. At the call of the Council Chair or upon request of a majority of its voting members, emergency meetings may be held. Upon receiving a request for an emergency meeting from any Council member or upon the Council Chair's own instigation, the Council Chair shall instruct the staff to conduct a poll of available voting Council members. If a quorum agrees, the Council Chair shall call such a meeting.

Public Participation

Council meetings are held for the purpose of conducting official Council business. However, the public will be provided an opportunity to address the Council at its meetings and submit information relevant to matters under consideration. To further encourage public participation, the Council, when practicable, shall establish a period at each meeting during which the public shall be granted an opportunity to address the Council on matters of concern to them. These discussions need not necessarily be related to items on the current meeting agenda. The following procedures shall be observed.

Written

The public shall be permitted to file written statements with the Council at any time before or after a meeting. Written statements will be accepted in either hard copy or through an electronic portal. This submission of written statements by the public is a statutory right which cannot be administratively hampered by arbitrary conditions of length, format, numbers of copies, typography, etc. All written information submitted to the Council by an interested person shall include a statement of the source and date of such information and a brief description of the background and interests of the person in the subject of the written statement. To ensure adequate review and timely action, the following procedure will be followed:

1. Written comments regarding matters on the Council agenda received at the Council office no later than a published deadline (approximately four weeks before a Council meeting), will be included in the Council members' briefing materials distributed prior to the meeting. If appropriate, these comments will be summarized by staff at the Council meeting.

2. Written comments submitted after the above deadline and by a published deadline during the week prior to the Council meeting will be made available at the meeting as supplemental briefing material.
3. Written comments received after the deadline specified in number 2, will only be accepted at the Council meeting and must be in support of oral testimony. In order to be available to the Council during an agenda item, written comments must be brought to the Secretariat no later than 5 pm the day before the corresponding agenda item is scheduled on the Council's agenda. Comments received by 5:00 p.m. will be uploaded by staff to the Council's E-Portal shortly thereafter. Any written comments received after that time will be uploaded the following day after 5:00 p.m. The public should be aware that the Council and its advisory bodies may not have time to thoroughly review written comments submitted at the meeting. The Council will not pay for comments transmitted to the meeting hotel. Comments submitted that are not in support of oral testimony will need to be resubmitted during an open comment period for a future Council meeting.
4. When multiple copies of the same or similar written public comment is received, Council staff will provide one copy of the material with a notation indicating the total number of copies received. This procedure will be used for written material received in advance of the Council meeting, per numbers 1 and 2 above.

### Oral

Interested persons will be allowed to present oral statements or to participate in the discussion subject to such reasonable rules or procedures as may be established by the Council. Time limits on oral comments may be prescribed. Every effort should be made to set aside a portion of every meeting for public participation. Any oral statement shall include a brief description of the background and interests of the person in the subject of the oral statement. The following procedures will be followed:

1. The Council will publish in the *Federal Register* and Council meeting notices the public comment opportunities for each agenda item, as appropriate, and provide a time for public comment on items not on the agenda of the Council meeting.
2. Registration cards will be provided at the entrance of the meeting room for individuals wishing to address the Council. The following information shall be included, (1) name, (2) address, (3) affiliation, and (4) agenda item/subject of testimony. After public comment begins on each agenda item, additional cards will not be accepted for that agenda item.
3. For each agenda item, only one opportunity to testify per person will be allowed. Testimony on behalf of another person not in attendance will only be allowed within the period allowed for the person in attendance.
4. At his or her discretion, the Council Chair may establish a sequence for calling on individuals, according to topics to be discussed. Generally, oral testimony is limited to five minutes for individuals and ten minutes for groups or individuals representing organizations.

5. Depending upon time and Council wishes, the Council Chair may ask for comments from the public on subjects of interest to the Council after all comments have been made by individuals from the comment registration cards.
6. When there are numerous public comments, the Council Chair may decide to use an alternative approach to expedite the comment process. The following procedure may be used when there are two opposing factions:
  - The Council Chair requests, in advance of the public comment period, that each side choose a panel to present the arguments.
  - Each panel makes its presentation.
7. If new information from a state or Federal agency or from a Council advisory entity is accepted by the Council, the Council Chair shall insure that the Council gives comparable consideration to new information offered at that time by interested members of the public. Interested parties shall have a reasonable opportunity to respond to new data or information before the Council takes final action on conservation or management measures (pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act).
8. Council members shall be allowed to ask questions of individuals addressing the Council.

### Public Notification of Meetings

#### News Releases

Timely public notice of each regular meeting and each emergency meeting, including the time, place, and agenda topics for the meeting, shall be widely distributed via facsimile machine, electronically (e-mail and Council website), and/or U.S. Postal Service to individuals on mailing lists maintained by the Council and to local media in the major fishing ports of Washington, Oregon, and California (and in other regional areas having a direct interest in the affected fishery, e.g., Idaho). The notice also may be announced by such other means as will result in wide publicity. For purposes of this notice, the term "timely" will be defined as two weeks prior to the actual meeting. However, the Council recognizes that due to the expediency of some Council actions and/or other reasons deemed valid, such two-week advance notice may not always be possible.

#### Federal Register Notices

Timely notice of each regular meeting, emergency meeting, and hearing also shall be published in the *Federal Register*. Council staff shall prepare this notice in coordination with the appropriate National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regional office. In this context, the term "timely" shall denote submission of the notice to NMFS (at least 23 calendar days prior to the meeting) for publication in the *Federal Register*.

The published agenda of the meeting may not be modified to include additional matters for Council action without public notice or within 14 days prior to the meeting date, unless such modification

is to address an emergency action under section 305(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, in which case public notice shall be given immediately.

### Voting Procedures

Robert's Rules of Order will be strictly enforced. Makers of motions must first be recognized by the Council Chair, and if an action is to be reconsidered, the motion for reconsideration must be made by an individual who originally cast a vote for the prevailing side.

### Motions

The maker of a motion must clearly and concisely state and explain the motion. After discussion and a call for the question, the motion must be restated clearly and concisely by the Council Chair before the vote is taken. Motions must be recorded in written form visible to each Council member present and the public if the action 1) requires approval or amendment of a fishery management plan (including any proposed regulations), 2) requests an amendment to regulations implementing a plan, or 3) is a recommendation for responding to an emergency. The written motion, as voted on, must be preserved as part of the record or minutes of the meeting, and include the exact vote of the Council members.

In the case of a telephonic vote, the Council Chair or the maker of the motion must clearly read the motion aloud immediately prior to the vote, such that everyone on the call understands the wording of the motion up for vote. The motion would then become part of the written record of the call/vote, which would also include the exact vote of the Council members.

### Votes

At the request of any voting member of the Council, the Council shall hold a roll call vote on any matter before the Council. The official minutes and other appropriate record of any Council meeting shall identify all roll call votes held, the name of each voting member present during each roll call vote, and how each member voted on each roll call vote. All other votes shall be by verbal indication. Council members/designees who are not in attendance may not vote by telephone.

A voting member of the Council may not vote on any Council matter that would have a significant and predictable effect on a financial interest of that Council member. A designated official (NOAA General Counsel) will determine whether a Council decision would have a significant and predictable effect on a financial interest of a member. An affected individual who may not vote may participate in Council deliberations relating to the decision after notifying the Council of the voting recusal and identifying the financial interest that would be affected.

For a vote on a Council finding that an emergency exists in a fishery, the exact number of votes (for, against, and abstaining) must be preserved as part of the record of the meeting.

## Measures to Improve Meetings

### Report Presentation

- Council staff, advisory body representatives, invitational speakers, and Council members should shorten all oral reports to the extent possible. For lengthy written reports, provide brief executive summaries highlighting major points.
- Provide written reports on items that are only informational and do not require Council action.
- Advisory subpanel reports should describe areas of consensus and differences. Individual subpanel members shall not provide public testimony as part of the subpanel presentation.
- In general, lengthy detailed presentations will be provided during joint advisory body meetings (e.g., Scientific and Statistical Committee, Groundfish Management Team, Groundfish Advisory Subpanel joint meetings to review stock assessment information) rather than during the Council session. Council members should endeavor to attend these advisory body meetings.

### SSC Reviews for Scientific Merit

- The SSC requires good documentation and ample review time in order to provide the best possible advice to the Council. Agencies and review document authors should be responsible for ensuring materials submitted to the SSC are technically sound, comprehensive, clearly documented, and identified by author. If there is any uncertainty on the part of authors regarding SSC expectations, authors should clarify assignments and expectations of deliverables with the SSC Chair. In order that there be adequate time for careful review, documents and materials destined for review by the SSC or any of its subcommittees must be received at the Council office at least two weeks prior to the meeting at which they will be discussed and reviewed, unless otherwise approved by the Executive Director. The Council will then provide copies to appropriate SSC members at least five working days prior to the meeting. If this deadline cannot be met, it is the responsibility of the author to contact the SSC Chair prior to the two-week deadline, so appropriate arrangements, rescheduling, and cancellations can be made in a timely and cost-effective manner. This deadline applies to all official SSC activities and meetings.

### Public Comments

- The Council Chair will limit the length of oral testimony to five minutes per individual and ten minutes per group or individual representing a group. At the discretion of the Council Chair, less time may be allotted. If less time is to be provided, the Council Chair shall announce this prior to the start of public testimony on an agenda item.
- The Council Chair will urge members of the public to not repeat comments provided by a previous public commenter.
- Council member debate and record development should be avoided during the public testimony period. Questions should be for clarification only.



## Structure of Agenda

- As appropriate, the Council Chair will advise Council members of time limits for each agenda item. Time limits will not be rigidly enforced, but they may serve as a guide or reminder to focus discussion and be concise.
- Avoid placing too many weighty issues near the end of the meeting. Intersperse major items throughout the agenda to the extent possible.
- Review workload and next meeting agenda at or near the end of each meeting. Establish priorities for activities. Priorities should be publicized.
- Provide time for advisory subpanels to complete their work.

## Council Discussion and Debate

- Debate should be complete and not be arbitrarily limited, but it should be focused on the motion. (Robert's Rules limit members to two speeches per topic and ten minutes per speech.)

## Decorum

Participants in the Council process are expected to participate in a manner that is professional and respectful of Council members, staff, advisors, committee members, and the public. Harassment will not be tolerated. Preventing harassment is everyone's responsibility and individuals who experience or observe harassment are strongly encouraged to come forward to ensure a safe working environment for everyone involved in the Council process. Council process participants who observe, experience, or receive a report of harassment, including but not limited to sexual harassment or assault, should report the matter as soon as possible to an appropriate official as described in the Harassment Procedures Policy<sup>1</sup> [insert link when posted].

## MEETING RECORD

A detailed meeting record of each Council meeting, including summary minutes, except for any closed session, shall be kept and shall contain a record of the persons present, a complete and accurate description of matters discussed and conclusions reached, and copies of all statements filed. At a subsequent meeting, the Council will review and adopt the meeting record. A copy of the official meeting record shall be submitted to NMFS. The Council Chair shall certify the accuracy of the record of each such meeting and submit a copy thereof to the Secretary. The meeting record shall be made available to any court of competent jurisdiction.

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this policy covers a harassment includes unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, older age (beginning at age 40), disability, or genetic information (including family medical history). This policy does not cover allegations of incivility not based on a protected characteristic. However, this policy is not intended to limit in any way the Council's ability to address incivility, inappropriate behavior, or other issues in an appropriate manner for the context.

## STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to drafting meeting record, the staff will prepare brief, pre-Council meeting issue summaries, identifying issues and options for each agenda action item. These summaries are provided in the briefing books.

## NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION

New Council members will be provided with a one-day to two-day briefing session with appropriate Council members, staff, and advisory Chairs (Scientific and Statistical Committee, advisory subpanels, and plan development/management Teams) prior to their first Council meeting. During this session, both mechanics of operation and management issues and techniques will be addressed. In addition, new members will attend at least one Council Chair's briefing during their first year of service on the Council in coordination with the Executive Director.

## COUNCIL CHAIR'S BRIEFING

The Council Chair's briefing is for the purpose of briefing the Council Chair and not a forum for debate or discussion of the issues.

## QUICK RESPONSE PROCEDURE

This procedure addresses Council comments to other entities on actions proposed by those entities. It does not include fishery management action items that are the responsibility of the Council and must be approved by the Council at a regular or emergency meeting.

For new policy matters that will be implemented or have a comment deadline prior to the next Council meeting, the Council Chair is authorized to send a letter on behalf of the Council using the following procedure:

Staff will distribute a summary of the issue and a proposed response to all Council members. If the Council Chair receives a response from at least one voting member from each state, staff may send an official Council comment letter taking into account the responses received from members. Consensus is not required.

## OFFICERS

The Council Chair and up to two Vice Chairs of the Council shall be elected by majority vote of Council members present and voting. Generally, elections are held during the June Council meeting. Officers shall serve one-year terms, which commence August 11 and end August 10 of the following year. Appointments may be renewed for additional one-year terms by majority Council vote at the next June meeting. The Council Chair normally serves two consecutive one-year terms.

## STANDING COMMITTEES

Standing committees can consist of Council members or a combination of Council and non-Council members. Members are appointed by the Council Chair and serve indefinite terms.

### Budget Committee

The Budget Committee shall be composed of Council members or Council-member designees and have no more than seven voting members, among whom include:

- The Council Chair;
- One voting member from each state, which could be an agency director/designee, an obligatory or at-large appointee. The Council Chair could serve as one of these members;
- One at-large member
- A representative of the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and;
- A representative of the National Marine Fisheries Service West Coast Region.

The Budget Committee shall elect its chair and vice-chair from among its members. Appointments and election of officers shall generally occur at the June or September Council meetings.

### Legislative Committee

The Legislative Committee shall be composed of no more than seven voting Council members or Council member designees appointed by the Council Chair and membership should represent a variety of geographic areas. Legislative Committee membership and elected officers will be reviewed after June Council meetings to account for possible turnover in Council membership.

## FISHERY REGULATION DEEMING PROCESS [Procedure for Implementing MSA Section 303(c)]

In taking final action on Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) recommendations to adopt a fishery management plan (FMP) or FMP amendment, or to revise regulations implementing an FMP, the Council is deeming that regulations implementing the recommendations are necessary or appropriate in accordance with Section 303(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). In so doing, the Council implicitly requests the appropriate National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Region complete regulatory language to implement the Council's final action. Unless otherwise explicitly directed by the Council, after NMFS has prepared the regulatory language, the Council authorizes the Executive Director to review the regulations to verify that they are consistent with the Council action before submitting them, along with his determination, to the Secretary on behalf of the Council.

The Executive Director is authorized to withhold submission of the Council action and/or proposed regulations and take the action back to the Council if, in his determination, the proposed regulations are not consistent with the Council action.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In cases where the consistency is in question, the Executive Director is expected to work with NMFS to resolve the issues. Returning the regulations to the Council would be a last resort when questions cannot be resolved without involving the whole Council.