

## HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON COUNCIL MEETING AND PROCESS EFFICIENCIES

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) held a webinar on March 27, 2023, to discuss the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council's) Staff White Paper (White Paper) on Formats for Council Advisory Body (AB) Meetings ([Agenda Item F.2, Attachment 1](#)) and the Agenda Item F.7, Future Council Meeting Agenda and Workload Planning, [Supplemental Attachment 3](#): Council Staff Proposal: Advisory Body Meeting Formats.

One challenge in considering trade-offs between the various formats is that the costs to support virtual meeting time as opposed to travel and per diem for in-person meetings are relatively easy to compare in monetary terms, whereas the relative benefits such as quality of communications or support for representative participation are not easy to quantify. The Council may wish to consider quantitative metrics for meeting effectiveness, such as levels of participation among different constituent groups and rates at which Council agenda items can be covered in the different formats as proxies for the relative value of the different formats.

After discussion of the pros and cons of the various meeting formats covered in the White Paper, the HMSMT recommends the Council continue to use a mix of concurrent virtual and in-person meeting formats in the future. In addition to the concurrent virtual and in-person meeting format currently being utilized, the HMSMT proposes a consideration of a split-meeting format where ABs meet virtually prior to as well as in person at the Council meeting when appropriate. Agenda items that are more administrative in nature or require less interaction with Council constituents outside the ABs could be scheduled for virtual meeting time, reserving in-person meeting time for topics requiring in-person discussion, collaboration, and/or consultation.

The split-meeting approach could allow for greater scheduling flexibility by planning sequential virtual meetings for the Management Teams (MTs) and Advisory Subpanels (ASs) in advance of the Council meeting, and concurrent in-person meetings for both ABs. This could minimize in-person meeting time (and therefore costs) and better optimize Council staff's time by enabling more engagement with each AB, as well as increase the opportunity for discussion between MTs and ASs by allowing each AB to hear the other's discussion. A potential shortcoming might be the creation of expectations for increased overall meeting time. The HMSMT also urges acknowledgement that it is common for ABs to have overlapping membership and recommends this be taken into account when scheduling AB meeting times and selecting meeting formats.

The HMSMT appreciates Council staff Supplemental Attachment 3 under the April workload planning agenda item, and strongly desires that AB meeting formats should be planned as far in advance as possible. The HMSMT supports meeting in person for September and November as scheduled in the report, and proposes that the Council's Workload Planning process specifically query the ABs to provide recommendations on meeting format for each meeting based on proposed agenda items.

The hybrid AB meeting format as outlined in the staff White Paper is not without its own challenges, but it does allow for new opportunities to improve flexibility and efficiency. A hybrid

AB meeting format could accommodate AB members who cannot attend in person due to extenuating circumstances. However, the option of attending remotely could potentially reduce in-person meeting participation and may also create a perception of inequity between AB members attending in person and those attending remotely. Cost savings are also limited under the hybrid AB meeting format, since meeting space still needs to be allocated for members attending in person. Criteria and an approval process should be developed to authorize remote attendance of AB members in hybrid meetings, similar to that of designation of an alternate.

The HMSMT considers the split-meeting format of virtual and in-person meetings, if thoughtfully planned, to be a better balance of equitable stakeholder engagement and meeting costs and efficiencies than the hybrid meeting format, but does recognize the value and necessity of the hybrid meeting option for special cases, such as engaging with experts or key AB members that are not able to attend a meeting in person. The HMSMT supports investment in the necessary technology and personnel capacity needed for limited hybrid meetings (e.g., “hot swapped” hybrid meeting rooms) to accommodate these special circumstances, but not as a replacement for in-person meetings.

There are equity implications of the different meeting formats for various Council constituents. For instance, the virtual and hybrid meeting formats make participation less costly for members of the public who cannot afford to attend in person. However, the virtual format may also disadvantage key constituents in the Council process who are less comfortable with virtual platforms, and may discourage participation. The HMSMT has found that our own ability to meet effectively in the virtual format is commonly compromised by distractions and technical glitches that are generally not present when meeting in person. Additionally, public participation in virtual meetings appears to be reduced in comparison to in-person HMSMT meetings.

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