

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON MEMBERSHIP APPOINTMENTS AND COUNCIL OPERATING PROCEDURES

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed and discussed the report “Recommendations for a Respectful and Harassment-free Workplace” (Agenda Item C.7, Attachment 6). The SSC is supportive of efforts to address the issue of appropriate conduct and formalize these policies. The SSC has the following recommendations:

1. The SSC strongly recommends that the Council consult experts (in workplace law, human resources, and sociology, for example) and review the literature on best practices in prevention of, and response to, harassment. Other organizations, including those involved in Council activities, have existing guidelines and policies in place, as well as experienced staff to implement these. Expert input throughout the process is the best way to ensure that Council policies are comprehensive and consistent with currently accepted norms. For example, academic institutions have experience distinguishing between academic free speech and inappropriate behavior. NOAA Fisheries has a National Program Office for Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity that can offer support or resources¹. Further, several organizations have publicly available guidelines for review².

Consulting outside experts on the development and application of codes of conduct is important because participants in the Council process may not be knowledgeable enough to develop effective policies. There is a risk of causing more harm than benefit if best practices are not followed. Also, personnel who are part of existing organizational management structures may not be the best suited to understand how to better include communities and individuals that are currently underrepresented.

2. Effective training is essential to harassment prevention. This training should ensure that Council participants are aware of and comprehend the Council policies and, at minimum, include unconscious bias, bystander intervention, and effective reporting of inappropriate behavior. Training for Council participants that would investigate reports of inappropriate behavior is also necessary.

Unconscious bias training helps to promote a more inclusive meeting for all involved in the Council process. Bystander intervention training would equip meeting participants, especially meeting chairs, with the tools to identify and effectively deal with inappropriate behavior as it happens. Training on reporting procedures would encourage individuals who experience or observe harassment to come forward by reducing uncertainty on how to report. Training on

¹ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/about/eoo-diversity>

² Federal government Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) task force:
<https://www.eeoc.gov/select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace-report-co-chairs-chai-r-feldblum-victoria-lipnic>

University of Washington School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences: https://fish.uw.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2022/11/SAFSCCodeOfConduct_Sept2022.pdf

American Fisheries Society: <https://fisheries.org/about/governance/standards-of-professional-conduct/>
<https://fisheries.org/about/governance/afs-meetings-code-of-conduct/>

reporting procedures would also make it more likely that participants effectively document behavior and provide the response team with the information it needs. Training on how to investigate reports of inappropriate behavior would help ensure that investigations are fair and effective.

3. The specifics of the reporting process and outcomes of investigations should be better defined and documented. Neither the [PFMC Harassment Procedures Policy](#), nor Agenda Item C.7, Attachment 6 include specifics of what information will be communicated to the parties involved (such as whether the reporter's claim was substantiated by the response team, what information will be made public, who will see non-public information, or expected time frames for resolution). Further, while the PFMC Harassment Procedures Policy clearly states that the Council will not tolerate retaliation against those who report harassment, neither the consequences for retaliation nor how reporters will be protected are specified.

4. The SSC recommends that there be a common set of ground rules for conduct rather than separate ground rules for each advisory body or meeting. This will allow for a consistent set of expectations for conduct and appropriate interactions among those participating in Council activities. Language at the top of page 2 in Agenda Item C.7 Attachment 6 should be changed from: "on funded council travel" to "Council-related travel or other Council-related activities" to ensure that codes of conduct apply to all Council participants in online or in-person settings.

5. The SSC recognizes the need for a process for anonymous reporting for accusers who do not feel comfortable talking to the points of contact at the Council. Anonymous reporting would help the Council track patterns of inappropriate or unwelcome behavior and enable policy or procedural modifications without formal investigation.

PFMC
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