

Aligning Council Priorities with Finances

Introduction

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) has long been the recipient of several different streams of income. These include “base funding” which stems from Congressional appropriations for the Councils. It has also included supplemental funding that comes from National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) through a variety of mechanisms. These are not elaborated upon here since they were covered in other write-ups.

In general, base funding for the Councils should be used to cover “core” priorities. These include the statutory requirements outlined in the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), as well as any other closely aligned priorities that the Council believes are necessary to successfully manage fisheries within its jurisdiction.

In this write up, several scenarios are outlined which assign Council budgets to a given scope of activities. It is not possible to assign organization-wide expenses to individual priorities. Instead, this analysis creates scenarios that are based on a grouping of different priorities, starting first with matters that are considered the statutory responsibility of the Council, and adding priorities with each additional scenario.

The way to consider these scenarios is by viewing them as building blocks. If we were starting to build a Council system today, we would start by building an organization that can handle our core responsibilities. When these have been addressed, we can add additional priorities at additional expense. This is how each of the scenarios in this paper should be viewed.

Use of Council Resources and our Capacity

Currently, the Council is spending well in excess of annual income, and this has been well documented in recent reports to the Budget Committee. What has not been well documented is the state of our current staff and advisory capacity. By almost any account, our advisory bodies and management teams are heavily tasked and frequently work long hours. Unfortunately, we do not have data to show the degree to which these groups are working in excess of a full-time equivalent (FTE).

Recently, Council staff have been refining and implementing tools for tracking and forecasting workload against FTEs. Over the next six months we anticipate Council staff officers averaging approximately 130 percent of an FTE. This equates to 52 hours of work per week. Bounding this average is a high for one staff officer that approaches 160 percent of an FTE (over 60 hours per week) and a low of roughly 100 percent (40 hours per week). A review of staff timesheets over the course of 2023 also indicates that staff officers shoulder work well in excess of an FTE as a general matter.

This information is important context for considering how funding is spent and how it is prioritized. In the sections below, the assumption is that staff and advisors are working full time as opposed to extra time (though it is acknowledged that there will be times when extra work hours are called for, the assumption is that this will be balanced with leave time later on). Since data does

not exist regarding the degree of overload for Council advisory groups, it will be assumed that it is informed by the data on hand for Council staff.

The implication of these assumptions should be made clear. What this means is that, rather than starting from where we are today with our current state of staff and advisory group overload, and adding priorities when available funding appears, instead available funding would be used to support existing priorities and stabilize existing workload demands. When those current priorities are fully supported then additional priorities could be added. This is a core assumption in the next sections of this document.

Overall Summary of Council Expense by Scenario

The table below outlines estimated Council budgets according to prioritization of tasks, assuming 2024 costs. The first column on the left lists Council budget categories. The next column from the left shows a budget breakdown by cost category if the Council were to only work on statutory responsibilities. The next columns assume the Council works on both statutory responsibilities and closely related conservation and management matters concerning protected species (Endangered Species Act, Marine-Mammal Protection Act). This column, plus the first column, constitutes the staff recommendation of “Core Activities.” Of note, the budget necessary to carry out these functions in a fully staffed manner would roughly equate to the level of income the Council received from base funding (in 2024). The next column over brings in several fishery management considerations that include efforts in the international arena, Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs), fishing regulations in Sanctuaries. The next to last column effectively reflects the Status Quo before considering the extra projects we anticipate taking on in 2024. The last column adds in these last two pieces (trawl cost project funding and Inflation Reduction Act [IRA] funding).

The numbers in this table are developed using the same budget development model that Council staff use to develop annual Council budgets. Since this model has been widely used and accepted for many years, it is not explained here. In reality there is often a difference between budget numbers (reflected in the table below) and actual expenses at the end of the year. There are also times when staff, advisory groups, and the Council can squeeze a small number of additional items onto their agenda and workplan even if they have not been budgeted. For these reasons and others, the numbers in the table below should be viewed as informative approximations.

Table 1 Council Budget by Scenario (units in USD)

Cost Category	MSA req.	+Prtct Spp (Staff Core)	+Intnl, EFPs, Sanctuaries, More	Status Quo (Base only)	Adding IRA & trawl cost
Total Personnel	2,157,757	2,273,533	2,400,458	2,505,356	2,630,356
Total Travel Supplies and Services	941,862	1,009,196	1,072,231	1,209,568	1,209,568
AB and Council Member Comp State Liaison	783,439	783,439	783,439	783,439	783,439
Contracts	333,052	317,768	294,844	357,505	357,505
Other Contracts	562,925	590,606	643,387	710,235	710,235
Other Contracts	82,663	197,663	247,663	272,663	442,663
Sum	4,861,699	5,172,205	5,442,021	5,838,766	6,133,766

Summary of Council Activities by Scenario

The table below provides a list of representative agenda items by each budget scenario. This table does not encompass every agenda item the Council takes on. Instead, it is a reflection of the type of agenda topics that align with the budget estimates in the above table. As in the table above, one should read the columns from left to right and consider them as additive (as one moves to the right, each column reflects additional work taken on by the Council).

The first column reflects our statutory responsibilities of managing fisheries within the West Coast Exclusive Economic Zone. The next column reflects the close interaction that occurs between our fishery management responsibilities and the consideration/minimization of mortality to various protected species. This (combined with the first column) reflects the staff’s perspective of what constitutes “core council activity.” The next (third) column is a combination of various activities that include Sanctuary regulation, participation in international activities, EFPs, and activities that the Council works on with the intent of improving the management and condition of the fishery. The next (fourth) column represents activities that the Council undertakes that can be described as comments to other agencies as well as reports from other agencies. The final column reflects activities that the Council received supplemental funding to work on.

Table 2 Representative agenda topics by scenario

MSA req.	+ Prtct Spp	+ Intl, EFPs, Sanctuaries, More	Status Quo Base	All
Spex	Listed salmon	Sanctuary regs	Agency reports	IRA
Season setting	Entanglements	FEP	Legislation	Trawl cost
Inseason management	Seabird avoidance	EFPs	Marine Planning	
EFH		IPHC,WCPFC,IATTC	EEJ & Geographic Plan	
STAR panels		EM		
Methodology reviews		Gear switching		
Program reviews		Habitat comments		

Key Metrics Describing Council Functions and Resources in Support of Scenarios

The table below describes some key informational metrics that were used to develop the budget numbers in Table 1. These three metrics include: 1) number of Council meeting days per meeting, 2) number of staff full time equivalent, 3) relative degree of contractor support, and 4) a qualitative score of staff capacity (e.g., “moderate” would mean backfilling upcoming retirements with more junior level staff). The current plan for 2024 operations is provided as context in the last column to the right. The other columns align with scenarios previously described in earlier sections. What is not described in this table are metrics explaining changes in state liaison contract amounts as outlined in Table 1. State liaison contracts vary commensurate with changes in personnel funds.

Table 3 Key Metrics in Support of Scenarios

Metrics	MSA req.	+Prtct Spp	+Intnl, EFPs, Sanctuaries, More	Status Quo (Base only)	Adding IRA & Trawl Cost	2024 Plan
No. of Council meeting days	4	4.5	5	5.5	5.5	5.5
Number of Staff FTEs	13.2	13.5	14	14.6	15.6	15.6
Contractor Support	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High	High
Relative staff capacity	Moderate	Mod/ High	High	High	High	High

Summary

The figures provided here are intended to be informative and help to shed light on how different sets of Council activities could change the Council’s budget, the level of staff and advisory support, and the nature of Council meetings themselves. Based on some reasonable assumptions, the top-line results indicate that if the Council were to just focus on MSA statutory requirements and interactions with protected species, that this focus would constitute expenditures roughly in line with the Council’s expected income for 2024. Staff suggests that these two sets of activities could be considered “core” activities of the Council. Other activities can be added to these activities based on availability of funds in the delayed spending account, or funds for special projects. It is important to note that the budget estimates provided here are not cast in stone and can be altered based on other considerations, such as the nature of Council operations.

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