

## ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT ON COUNCIL OPERATIONS AND PRIORITIES

The Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) met via webinar on April 5, 2024, to discuss Agenda Item G.2, Council Operations and Priorities, and other supporting documents from the January 18-19, 2024 Committee-of-the-Whole (COTW) meeting.

The EWG offers the following suggestions for consideration when the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) or its Executive Director develop recommendations on restructuring and reorganizing the Council process to address concerns related to finances, workload, and effective decision making:

- 1) Create a comprehensive list of Council agenda items with the associated classifications of Statutory Core (Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) Required), Advisory, and Commenting.
- 2) When considering how to find cost savings, the Council should start by addressing changes to operational procedures such as meeting location and/or a virtual meeting format for at least one meeting per year to address budgetary constraints before eliminating agenda topics or Advisory Body (AB) membership.
- 3) Include in the prioritization tool being developed, a framework and process to prioritize the Council time for both current and new agenda topics that considers not only the costs but also the benefits of the Council addressing agenda items.
- 4) Do not support the suggestions under “*Structuring the Ecosystem Groups as Strategic Planning Advisors Staff*” ([Agenda Item D, Staff Briefing Paper, January 2024](#) page 11), and instead continue to rely on the EWG and Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel (EAS) to provide needed support for developing and implementing the Council’s planned Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funded work.

During review of the briefing documents for this agenda item, the EWG found the lists of agenda items and their associated classifications to be incomplete. In order for ABs to provide feedback on the Council’s statutory core (MSA required) activities at the June Council meeting, the EWG recommends Council staff provide a complete list of the agenda items classified under these criteria. As noted in the Habitat Committee report ([Supplemental HC Report 1](#)), the interpretations of what actions fall under the statutory core duties may be broader than what is expressed in the staff reports, and therefore the EWG would recommend that classifications take into account all the facets of the Council agenda topics which fall directly and indirectly under MSA.

By evaluating the financial costs of meeting logistics like format and location first, cost savings may be identified which potentially address financial concerns and would be a reasonable starting point for this evaluation process. For example, shifting one Council meeting per year to a virtual meeting format would seemingly be the simplest way to save money without having to make major decisions around reducing or eliminating agenda items or ABs. The EWG understands that moving to a remote framework even for a single meeting will require evaluation of agenda topics for each

of the fishery management plans (FMPs) as contentious and complex items necessitate an in-person meeting structure.

Modifications to Council operations (i.e., meeting location or format) can potentially reduce budgetary constraints, but this does not meet the other objectives of the COTW discussions regarding workload. The EWG suggests that the Council request that the Executive Director and the Council staff include in their prioritization tool development a framework to consider not only costs but benefits for prioritizing issues when evaluating workload size and budget. Given the propensity for the Council and AB workload to continue to inflate, the development of guidelines for which topics meet the Council criteria for prioritization is needed regardless of budgetary condition to avoid burnout.

The EWG does not support the proposed changes to the structure of the Ecosystem Groups suggested under the section “*Structuring the Ecosystem Groups as Strategic Planning Advisors*” ([Agenda Item D, Staff Briefing Paper, January 2024](#), page 11). Specifically, the recommendation to only use the EWG and EAS to provide program level reviews for the Council every 2 to 5 years rather than twice per year, and tasking “staff officers and management team members... to bring recommended ecosystem topics into management” is ineffective. The Council’s application for IRA funds focused on ideas and information from the ecosystem initiatives described in its Fishery Ecosystem Plan appendix (see Agenda Item H.3.a, [EWG Report 1](#), March 2024). Since FMP-specific ABs already carry large workloads, it seems counterproductive to substantially reduce the roles of relatively inexpensive advisory bodies in advising the Council on IRA projects relating to climate change and shifting that responsibility to Council staff and more expensive and overburdened ABs. The EWG offers a unique opportunity at low cost to the Council for developing proactive, climate-ready, ecosystem-informed fisheries management approaches and to assist other ABs in this work, which would be severely hampered if the EWG’s role were reduced.

PFMC  
04/09/24