

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES FROM THE MAY 2024 MEETING OF THE COUNCIL COORDINATION COMMITTEE

The Council Coordination Committee (CCC) met from Tuesday May 21st to Thursday May 23rd in San Juan Puerto Rico. The meeting agenda and materials are available on [the CCC website](#). The Caribbean Fishery Management Council is the host Council for 2024. An official report of the meeting is forthcoming but is not available in time for the June briefing book. This report serves as a summary of key outcomes and discussions from the CCC meeting.

NOAA Fisheries Update and Priorities

NOAA fisheries provided an update, including several priorities. The priorities discussed by the CCC included: a proposed rule regarding confidentiality; new regulations from the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regarding implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); the National Seafood Strategy; America the Beautiful; and Sanctuary regulations regarding fishing activity. The CCC plans to convene a subgroup to work on new NEPA regulations and their integration with NEPA, but this is on hold until further information is gathered from the CEQ. The America the Beautiful initiative (also known as 30 by 30) involved discussion around how conservation areas are defined and what counts toward the Administration's goal of protecting 30 percent of US lands and waters. It was generally understood by CCC members that most protections implemented by fishery management councils would be defined as "other effective conservation measures" (OECMs). A motion was passed by the CCC to request that Councils be involved in the development of definitional issues regarding OECMs and the possible counting of these measures toward the 30 by 30 goals. Brief discussions occurred regarding the National Seafood Strategy and Sanctuary regulations. At a to-be-determined future time, Council Executive Directors will be meeting with Sanctuary leadership to discuss new processes regarding the development of fishing regulations in Sanctuary waters. This new process is scheduled to be completed by May 2025 for consideration by the CCC at that time.

Climate Change and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Funding

Climate change came up on the CCC agenda in several places, including the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) science update and a discussion regarding IRA funding. NMFS has assembled a new initiative titled Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) which is largely driven by IRA funding. This initiative will involve the development of data products, decision support tools, and climate-informed advice for each region of the US.

A discussion of Council IRA projects and the distribution of IRA funds to the Councils was discussed. NMFS summarized the Council projects that they plan to fund, and indicated that the first round of funding should be made available to the Councils by June, with a second round of funding being made available later in the summer. Several Councils expressed concern regarding

the delay in funding and the associated challenges of completing work on time. NMFS leadership attributed the delay to the implementation of their new financial systems.

Policy Development and Updates

A final version of the Endangered Species Act (ESA)/Magnuson-Stevens Act integration policy was provided at the meeting. This new policy is the culmination of multiple years of effort between fishery management council staff and NMFS and outlines procedures for the involvement of councils in the development of measures necessary to protect species listed under the ESA. Throughout the development of this new policy, several Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) experiences were cited as models for how any new process should work.

Also discussed was a new procedural directive under development by NMFS that would involve the identification of lead councils when stocks shift from one fishery management council region to another. This procedural directive has been the subject of discussion at multiple CCC meetings but does not appear to affect the PFMC.

National Standards 4, 8, and 9 is a topic that was a keen interest of all Councils, however no new information was made available in time for the CCC meeting and thus only a limited discussion of the Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and the decision to pursue a Proposed Rule occurred.

Budget

A relatively lengthy discussion occurred regarding the next fiscal period for the fishery management councils and the long-term fiscal outlook for both the councils and for NMFS. Since 2019 council funding has declined in inflation adjusted dollars. NMFS indicated that fiscal requests are made as part of the development of the President's budget request, and that additional funding for councils is a part of that discussion. All councils expressed concern regarding their fiscal status. The discussion also involved consideration of how NMFS and the Councils could streamline budgets and better align on priorities to help deal with a deteriorating budget situation. It was decided that the Council Executive Directors and NMFS leadership would convene to share approaches, tools, and discuss priorities in an effort to help support one another with tightening fiscal conditions.

Anti-Harassment Policies and Unprofessional Behavior

Following the implementation of Council policies for addressing harassment, all councils have indicated that questions still exist regarding implementation of these policies. Most of these questions exist because of the unique structure of the council process. In addition, implementation of these policies has led to broader conversations regarding professionalism and conduct by council participants. CCC members discussed these matters and agreed that the Executive Directors would work with NMFS leadership to further develop practices and procedures regarding both harassment and professionalism at fishery management councils.

CCC Related Meetings – SCS and CMOD

Plans are under way for both the 2024 scientific coordination subcommittee (SCS) meeting and the 2025 Council Member Ongoing Development (CMOD) meeting. Both meetings will cover topics related to climate change and will include participation from each Council. To foster CMOD planning, the organizing Council will be looking for names of participants by the fall of this year. The next CMOD will occur from April 30th to May 1st in Vancouver.

Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ)

The National Academies recently produced the first of two reports on equity within US fishery management. This report was requested by NMFS and is expected to provide some basis for advancing equity within US fisheries. NMFS outlined how regional strategic plans are expected to be released in June of this year. It is anticipated that these plans can help to inform council consideration of EEJ issues.