

## GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON COUNCIL OPERATIONS AND PRIORITIES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) would like to preface this report with a sentiment that informs each of the recommendations, suggestions, and comments offered below. When faced with a decrease in available resources, groups are generally forced to determine if they wish to attempt to produce the same volume of work recognizing that quality will suffer, or accept a smaller volume of work which does not compromise quality. Given the importance of work that the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) deals with, a compromise in quality could ultimately increase workload to address unintended consequences. Thus, reducing workload appears to be the only viable option to address the budget shortfall addressed under this agenda item.

Items that have been characterized as “non-core” items are often vital to effective management of fisheries and can directly relate to mandates under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), as highlighted by the Ecosystem Workgroup and Habitat Committee in their respective reports. We recognize that, due to current budget conditions, prioritization is nonetheless necessary. The Council should consider how “non-core” items could be more directly integrated into “core” items.

The GMT supports the idea of removing all groundfish items from the April agenda in odd years, assuming this would reduce overall groundfish workload and only minimally shift items to other Council meetings. We also discussed the feasibility of alternatively removing groundfish agenda items from all April meetings, and feel this could be a viable option if additional days were added to the March and June meetings in even years to accommodate workload. The GMT would like to highlight, however, that if removing all April meetings from the groundfish workload was done in conjunction with fixing the March and April meeting locations in perpetuity, an inequitable access issue could result. Specifically, travel burdens would be consistently higher for those groundfish fishery participants who are located in areas farther from the March meeting location.

Regarding a fully remote Council meeting each year, this strategy has been shown to be effective in the past, when necessary and was previously supported by the GMT in [Agenda Item C.3.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, September 2022](#).

The team supports the proposed idea to schedule a day during the meeting for the GMT to travel home, after which the team would proceed listening to Council discussion and supporting their Council members remotely for the remainder of the week. During that travel day, the Council would schedule non-groundfish items. This would ideally be done in conjunction with front-loading an additional day of work for the GMT before the meeting so that reports can be completed on time. Alternatively, the Council could choose to provide the team with additional remote days (e.g., multi-day pre-meeting webinars) while reducing the number of in-person days the team has at a given Council meeting. Should the Council choose to pursue a more hybrid approach to the GMT workload, the team would strongly encourage the Council not to add additional in-person work days during a Council meeting to the existing GMT schedule. GMT members, like all members of the Council and advisory bodies, have work duties that occur outside the Council

process and have limited capacity to balance those duties with additional Council workload. Additionally, a reduction of in-person days also signifies a reduction in time to opportunistically collaborate with the GAP, further isolating the Advisory Bodies (ABs). Listening to Council discussion on critical groundfish agenda items (such as harvest specifications) is directly beneficial to the team's continuity of knowledge on topics which they are directly responsible for, and often, the team's ongoing work benefits from listening to Council discussion on items related to reports we are writing. The team would also like to highlight that, due to distance from the airport for many members of the team, it can take 8 hours or longer for individual members to get to or from the Council meeting. We would recommend that the Council allow the team a night at the hotel before the meeting starts and avoid starting the team on a half day as a cost-saving measure, given the inherent challenges with travel logistics related to attending meetings in person.

Regarding the suggestion to streamline advisory body reports, the GMT supports this in principle and has already begun implementing this proposal. However, we have concerns about explicit page limitations (e.g., 2 pages) that could limit our ability to provide productive advice to the Council on actions that require a more robust rationale. Additionally, reports often serve as documentation of analysis required to meet MSA standards. Shortened reports, if curtailed in extremis, could result in actions not being approved by agencies.

Regarding the following statement, taken from [Agenda Item C.2, Attachment 1](#), "Except for the AS/MT Chair or other necessary members, Advisory Groups would not be expected on the Council floor during Council discussion. Instead, these groups would be expected to continue developing recommendations for the Council on other agenda items, or to depart the Council for home." The team strongly encourages the Council to continue to allow any team member to be present on the Council floor, not just the chair or vice-chair. Advisory Bodies should have the flexibility to select the member(s) most appropriate to the agenda item, especially for complex agenda items. As stated above, multiple members listening to Council discussion in real time is directly beneficial to the team's continuity of knowledge on topics which we are directly responsible for.

Remote locations outside of metro areas are inherently more difficult to access, resulting in increased travel costs and decreased public access. Cost savings related to meeting locations should be explored, but they should not result in creating differential access to our constituents to reduce costs. Additionally, given that many GMT members live in areas distant from major airports, additional funded hotel nights may be necessary to accommodate greater travel time if meetings are held in locations far from a major airport.

### **Agenda Topic Prioritization**

If this proposed prioritization tool in [Agenda Item C.2, Attachment 2](#) moves forward the GMT offers the following questions for consideration:

1. Does the agenda item fall solely within federal waters? If other interested parties are involved in this agenda item, do they have representation at the Council?
2. Does the agenda item have broad applicability to a fishery management plan (FMP) or across multiple FMPs? Given budgetary and personnel constraints, the Council may need to prioritize items that consider multiple issues under a single action in order to address the needs of a fishery.

Additionally, analysis of the prioritization tool found under Attachment 2 suggests that the tool is weighted toward “core” agenda items. If current agenda items such as Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) are run through the rubric, they would score low despite the Council having identified these agenda items as high priority. This suggests that the rubric needs further refinement and alteration. The GMT recommends that this rubric not be prescriptive and instead be modeled after the Council’s utilization of the National Marine Fisheries Service stock assessment prioritization tool.

- Example question: Does the agenda item support non-core Council objectives which have been identified as important such as EEJ, climate change resilience, etc.?

PFMC  
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