

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON COUNCIL OPERATIONS AND PRIORITIES

The Habitat Committee (HC) discussed various options for reducing costs of Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) meetings. The HC has several recommendations: 1) better define “core” agenda items, 2) prioritize cost savings by reducing large-cost items, and 3) improve the format for advisory body comments.

“Core” habitat issues. Attachment 2 of this agenda item discusses the amount of Council floor time taken up with non-core agenda items presented in Table 2 and the need to prioritize these items to reduce floor time. Current Habitat Issues (i.e., the Habitat Committee report) are listed as a recurring (4x per year) non-core agenda item. As noted in our [April 2024 HC Report](#) on Council Operations and Priorities, the HC briefs the Council (and drafts letters) on Federal actions and other activities that may impact essential fish habitat (EFH) for species managed under a fishery management plan. Notably, the Council is *required* by Magnuson-Stevens Act to comment on government actions/activities that are likely to substantially affect the habitat, including EFH, of an anadromous fishery resource under its authority. By definition, this is a ‘core’ responsibility of the Council but is not listed as such in any of the present or past documents for this agenda item. As Council and staff continue to work to prioritize Council agenda items, the HC recommends differentiating between core and non-core habitat issues that are currently represented in Attachment 2 as a single item. The HC is likewise considering the distinction of core and noncore habitat issues for streamlining HC reports.

Related to addressing core habitat issues, Federal actions that substantially affect EFH are not necessarily predictable and do not always coincide with Council meetings. Therefore, the HC recommends continued meetings in conjunction with every Council meeting, such as the current schedule with two in-person and three virtual meetings annually.

Options for reducing costs. The HC recommends that the Council first explore the “big” ticket items for reducing costs, such as holding one virtual Council meeting, as this has an immediately measurable effect on the overall budget. It was difficult to parse how other potential cost-saving measures would pan out in terms of reducing costs, and a better delineation of these would help put what might seem like smaller cost savings (e.g., reducing individual public comment duration) into context. Furthermore, the HC recommends that the Council consider an adaptive management process by which some of these alternatives are implemented and cost-savings are quantified.

Reducing floor time for advisory body reports. The HC supports the recommendations to make advisory body reports more efficient, particularly by identifying sections that don’t need to be read. The HC is already considering this alternative for its own reporting format.