

ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP AND ECOSYSTEM ADVISORY SUBPANEL ROLES AND COMPOSITION – STAFF RECOMMENDATION

At the June 2024 Council meeting, the Council tasked staff with exploring the role and composition of the Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel (EAS), considering the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) projects (see [Agenda Item G.4, Attachment 3, April 2024](#)). As noted in the [June 2024 Decision Summary Document](#), these projects are aligned with the Fishery Ecosystem Plan initiatives and – based upon future workload, schedules, and resources – are anticipated to utilize the majority of personnel and resources available to the Council that are allocated for ecosystem-related projects. The Council requested that staff bring forward their recommendations for the EAS at the September 2024 Council meeting. Because the scope and role of the Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) will also be impacted by the IRA projects, the staff recommendation below includes a recommendation for the EWG as well, noting that as an ad hoc workgroup, the EWG’s members are appointed by the Council Chair and therefore are not subject to the regular Council appointment process. Addressing both Ecosystem Advisory Bodies (ABs) in this staff recommendation aligns with the Council action associated with Agenda Item C.3 at the September meeting, which is described as, “Discuss Workplans and Provide Guidance on Next Steps; Consider Role and Composition of the Ecosystem Workgroup and Advisory Subpanel.”

Options Considered

- Status quo: EWG and EAS continue to provide support, advice, and guidance on items or issues with an explicit ecosystem component, especially with respect to implementation of the Council’s Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP).
- IRA focus: EWG and EAS provide support, advice, and guidance on the development and implementation of the Council’s IRA projects, and other Ecosystem items as necessary or requested by the Council.
- New Cross-Fishery Management Plan (FMP) advisory body: Establish a cross-cutting advisory body focused on IRA project design and implementation, to be comprised of representatives with relevant expertise and/or interest from existing ABs (both management teams and advisory subpanels); would only remain in place for the duration of the IRA projects (mid-late 2027).
 - Under this alternative, the EWG and EAS could remain in place but with a more limited focus on ecosystem items not directly related to the implementation of the IRA projects; Ecosystem items would continue to be heard at the March and September Council meetings.

Staff Recommendation

After discussing the above ideas internally, with members of the EWG and EAS, and at the Joint EWG/EAS meeting held on July 31, staff recommends moving forward with the *IRA focus* alternative. This would entail making the following changes to the EAS and EWG, respectively:

EAS:

Staff has no recommended changes to the EAS's role and composition beyond what the EAS proposed in its June 2024 [Supplemental Report 1](#). The EAS's purpose is described in Council Operating Procedure (COP) 2. However, it may be worthwhile to augment this purpose by indicating that the EAS's focus through 2027 will be the IRA projects, perhaps as part of the EAS's Operational Guidelines.

EWG:

As an ad hoc committee, the EWG is governed by COP 8. As stated in COP 8, "Ad hoc committees are created to address specific (or short term) issues and are intended to be in place for a limited duration. Ad Hoc Committees are created and terminated by vote of the Council." The EWG was established in June 2013 to provide technical and policy advice in support of the Council's FEP; it is the understanding of staff that this charge has not been updated since the EWG's creation.

Staff recommends that the EWG remain in place for purposes of IRA project advancement (as well as to continue to help advance and conclude Ecosystem Initiative 4). To make clearer the EWG's role in this regard, staff recommends the Council update the working group's charge to the following: "The EWG will provide technical and policy advice in support of the Council's three Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)-funded projects. IRA projects are focused on increasing the climate resilience of Council-managed resources and are anticipated to be completed in 2027. The EWG may provide technical and policy advice to the Council on other Ecosystem issues and items as needed and/or requested by the Council."

In terms of composition, staff suggests that the expertise that is currently represented on the EWG is well-suited to the IRA projects; however, additional membership that bolsters social and economic expertise may be warranted in order to align with IRA projects (the *Discussion* section below includes a summary of areas of expertise associated with each of the three projects).

Discussion

While the IRA projects were developed in a manner that differs from customary Council process, the projects are shaped by the Council's [FEP Ecosystem Initiatives Appendix](#). Each project connects closely to a Potential Future FEP Initiative:

- IRA Project 1: Innovating the Implementation of Council Actions to Respond to a Dynamic Ocean Environment
 - Connects to: Potential Future FEP Initiative 2.8 – Assess Flexibility in Fisheries Management Process
- IRA Project 2: Considering the Effects of Council Management Actions on Human Well-Being in Vulnerable Fishing Communities Impacted by a Changing Marine Ecosystem
 - Connects to: Potential Future FEP Initiative 2.6 – Supporting Fishery and Fishing Community Resilience Initiative
- IRA Project 3: Developing Climate-Ready Fishing Methods that Mitigate Bycatch of Non-Target, Associated Species in a Changing Ecosystem

- Connects to: Potential Future FEP Initiative 2.3 – Cross-FMP Dynamic Bycatch Monitoring and Minimization Policy Initiative

Each of the IRA projects also links up with one or more of the priorities identified through the Climate and Communities Initiative’s scenario planning exercise. In its [Supplemental Report](#) on the CCI review and prioritization agenda item in March 2024, the EAS provided a table that crosswalks the relationship between the IRA projects, the CCI priorities, and the FEP Initiatives; it is included below for reference.

While the IRA project proposals differ somewhat from Initiatives 2.3, 2.6, and 2.8, they can reasonably be thought of as analogous to FEP initiatives. As such, in terms of the Council’s Ecosystem workload between now and 2027, the Council will undertake three initiatives in just over three years – which is indeed a big lift. As the draft project work plans illustrate (Agenda Item C.3, Attachment 2), it is anticipated that much of the day-to-day project execution will be done by Council staff and contractors, in collaboration with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) West Coast Region and Science Center staff, but the need for technical and policy guidance and project-specific advice will be significant – not to mention vital to the projects’ success. The EWG and EAS are well-positioned to provide that support. Also, by having the EWG and EAS continue to serve as the Council’s Ecosystem advisory bodies, the Council will also help to ensure that the IRA projects are appropriately integrated into the larger Council process.

For the **EAS**, the current composition is organized geographically, not by issue area, sector, or user group. This is appropriate given that it is an advisory subpanel intended to provide stakeholder advice from across the Pacific Coast. By design, the EAS’s composition doesn’t need to change as Ecosystem initiatives change; its membership just needs to reflect the broad range of interests that have a stake in ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM) and ecosystem health and function generally, which it currently does. It is also important to note that the EAS is the primary AB that facilitates public involvement with the Council’s Ecosystem work. Public participation and communication will be critical to the success of the Council’s IRA projects, as they are for any Ecosystem initiative; the EAS can help ensure that this engagement continues to happen in a robust and inclusive manner.

For the **EWG**, the current membership includes a broad range of expertise across the spectrum of ecosystem science and policy. This expertise, along with the EWG’s deep experience with executing Ecosystem initiatives, will ensure that the IRA projects move forward efficiently and with an eye toward their many intersections with other FMP management teams as well as the work of the Science Centers. Further, as noted in the EWG’s Operational Guidelines, “Members of the EWG are appointed by the Council Chair, and the composition of the membership changes based on the topic and expertise needed.” This built-in flexibility allows the Council to seek expertise that appropriately matches the EWG’s current charge. Other than considering the addition of further socio-economic expertise, Council staff does not see a need to change the current composition at this time but notes that the Council Chair may wish to confer further with the state, federal, and Tribal agencies that make their staff available to serve on the EWG to determine if any changes are desired.

In short, staff supports retaining the current EWG and EAS membership, but with due consideration for bolstering social and economic expertise on the EWG. Staff does recommend an updated charge for the EWG to ensure that the Council receives expert and thoughtful guidance and advice in support of its IRA projects. Further, as the Council has noted, the Council's Ecosystem work is broader than just climate resilience. While the IRA projects will be the Council's Ecosystem priority for the next three years, and it is understood that these projects will utilize much of the Council's resources dedicated to Ecosystem issues (including AB and floor time), other Ecosystem issues (both new and ongoing) will continue to benefit from and rely upon engagement from the EWG and EAS. This could include supporting the review and use of Ecosystem Status Reports, continued support for the implementation of Ecosystem Initiative 4, and providing advice as needed for cross-FMP work that links to EBFM (among other issues and items).

Role of EWG:

- Once Council approves individual IRA project work plans, including products and timelines, provide technical and policy support and advice on implementation of project plans.
- Respond to other requests of the Council associated with EBFM.
- Continue to focus on March and September as primary opportunities to bring Ecosystem items forward to the Council; these can be the main Council touchpoints for the IRA projects as well, with Council staff providing additional updates to the Council during other meetings as needed/appropriate.
- As is the case currently, the EWG can meet as needed throughout the year to address the IRA projects and other Ecosystem items and, where desired, provide reports to the Council.

Role of EAS:

- Once Council approves individual IRA project work plans, including products and timelines, provide support and advice on implementation of project plans; serve as primary conduit for public engagement on IRA projects.
- Respond to other requests of the Council associated with EBFM.
- Continue to focus on March and September as primary opportunities to bring Ecosystem items forward to the Council; these can be the main Council touchpoints for the IRA projects as well, with Council staff providing additional updates to the Council during other meetings as needed/appropriate.
- As is the case currently, the EAS can meet as needed throughout the year to address the IRA projects and other Ecosystem items and, where desired, provide reports to the Council.

Areas of expertise and focal topics for IRA projects:

- IRA Project 1: Innovating the Implementation of Council Actions to Respond to a Dynamic Ocean Environment
 - Key areas of expertise: National Environmental Policy Act, Magnuson-Stevens Act, National Standards, NMFS regulatory frameworks and processes, Council processes.

- IRA Project 2: Considering the Effects of Council Management Actions on Human Well-Being in Vulnerable Fishing Communities Impacted by a Changing Marine Ecosystem
 - Key areas of expertise: Community social vulnerability indicators, fishing engagement and reliance indicators, environmental justice indicators, other socioeconomic indicators; community and ecological resilience principles; adaptive capacity in fishing communities.
- IRA Project 3: Developing Climate-Ready Fishing Methods that Mitigate Bycatch of Non-Target, Associated Species in a Changing Ecosystem
 - Key areas of expertise: Dynamic ocean management/modeling, climate-informed ecosystem forecasting, ecological modeling; bycatch mitigation strategies/gear development; EFP processes and development.

Table from EAS’s [March 2024 Supplemental Report](#) on Climate and Communities Initiative (CCI) Recommendations and Prioritization:

Table 1. EAS recommendations for priority CCI tasks with cross-references to the IRA proposals and FEP initiatives.

CCI Priorities (EWG report H.3.a, Appendix A)	IRA Proposal	FEP Initiatives
Council Processes 9) Re-evaluate the Council’s EFP process to simplify and clearly define the process requirements so that they do not exclude participation (especially for smaller vessels).	1) Vulnerable Fishing Communities ¹	2.6: Supporting Fishery and Fishing Community Resilience Initiative
Council Processes 10) Identify mechanisms to align EFP review with funding sources; encourage/support more EFPs that address shifting stocks; identify management challenges where less desirable species may be out-competing a fishery’s target stocks, and opportunities to minimize bycatch of choke species	1) Vulnerable Fishing Communities 2) Innovation in Dynamic Environment ² 3) Bycatch Mitigation ³	2.3: Cross-FMP Dynamic Bycatch Monitoring and Minimization Policy Initiative 2.6: Supporting Fishery and Fishing Community Resilience Initiative 2.8: Assess Flexibility in Fisheries Management Process Initiative
Council Processes 11) Identify ways to expedite both the Council and NMFS implementation of EFPs for use under changing conditions, possibly supporting fishing portfolio diversification.	1) Vulnerable Fishing Communities 2) Innovation in Dynamic Environment	2.6: Supporting Fishery and Fishing Community Resilience Initiative 2.8: Assess Flexibility in Fisheries Management Process Initiative
Council Processes 12) Evaluate whether the Council process itself is adequately flexible by reviewing the recommendations made under the Council Meeting Process and Efficiency agenda item from April 2023.	1) Vulnerable Fishing Communities 2) Innovation in Dynamic Environment	2.6: Supporting Fishery and Fishing Community Resilience Initiative 2.8: Assess Flexibility in Fisheries Management Process Initiative

<p>Communication</p> <p>2) Identify ways in which Federal, state, and tribal agencies can improve communication with their constituents so that stakeholders and the public better understand their interests and the potential impacts and opportunities associated with climate change.</p>	<p>1) Vulnerable Fishing Communities</p>	<p>2.6: Supporting Fishery and Fishing Community Resilience Initiative</p>
<p>Communication</p> <p>3) Explore the development of communication pathways to clarify the stock assessment review, approval, and implementation process to make it more clear for constituents so that they understand when the agencies and the Council are soliciting input.</p>	<p>1) Vulnerable Fishing Communities</p>	<p>2.6: Supporting Fishery and Fishing Community Resilience Initiative</p>
<p>Data Collection</p> <p>3a) Support engagement with industry through “Skipper science” to promote collaborative science and engagement with fishing communities within the Council process. State agency and/or local Sea Grant organized round tables could provide a venue for conversations and information exchange between industry and scientists.</p>	<p>1) Vulnerable Fishing Communities</p> <p>2) Innovation in Dynamic Environment</p> <p>3) Bycatch Mitigation</p>	<p>2.3: Cross-FMP Dynamic Bycatch Monitoring and Minimization Policy Initiative</p> <p>2.6: Supporting Fishery and Fishing Community Resilience Initiative</p> <p>2.8: Assess Flexibility in Fisheries Management Process Initiative</p>

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