

Update Regarding an External Review of the Council's Stock Assessment to Management Process

In June of 2024 the Council considered a recommendation from the Executive Director to pursue an external review of the Council's groundfish stock assessment process. This recommendation was motivated by conversations with several Council members who had expressed concern in one way or the other about tensions that exist within the Council, advisory groups, and partner agencies following the most recent groundfish stock assessment cycle.

Since the June Council meeting, the Executive Director has consulted with the directors of the Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers to develop a project definition and scope, with the eventual aim of circulating a Request for Proposals (RFP) to qualified contractors. The Science Center directors have in turn consulted with National Marine Fisheries Service science leadership and with their stock assessment teams. Close collaboration on this project between the Council and the Science Centers is desired due to many factors, including relevance to MSA requirements, possible implications for the Council's best scientific information available framework, and workload capacity considerations within the Council and Science Centers.

As of the date of drafting this report, several iterations to an RFP have occurred and a final document is nearing completion. Before finalizing any RFP, some additional steps need to be taken in order to ensure the close collaboration that is desired of this project occurs: additional consultations with National Marine Fisheries Service science leadership is desired and oversight/approval of the Council is desired.

Nearly four months exist between the November Council meeting and the first meeting of 2025, which is problematic for a timely launch of this review effort. Rather than waiting for a formal Council review and approval of an RFP until that time, the Executive Director is requesting that a small number of Council members (2 to 3) work with the Executive Director and Science Center Directors to finalize the RFP, with the goal of ensuring that such an RFP reflects the interests of the Council in pursuing this project.

Question for Council Consideration:

- Should a subset of Council members be identified to work with the Executive Director and Science Center Directors to finalize the RFP over the coming weeks?

Select Excerpts from Draft RFP

1. Overview

The Pacific Fishery Management Council seeks qualified contractors to conduct a review of the Council's stock assessment-to-management process, with a primary focus on groundfish. This review is sought in the interest of continued evaluation and improvement of Council process. Well-

designed process plays an instrumental role in leading to well-informed decision-making by the Council and buy-in to the process.

The Council, in consultation with leadership at the Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers, have crafted a shared vision and set of values regarding the science-based process of the Council. This shared vision should serve as a beacon for evaluating the Council's existing stock assessment-to-management process and whether (and where) there are areas for possible improvement. This vision is:

It is the shared vision of Council and Science Center leadership that available scientific resources, personnel, science-development, and science-to-management decision-making processes are applied and followed in a manner that is most effective for Council-managed fisheries as determined by the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the Council's Fishery Management Plans.

Achieving this vision in a resource and capacity-limited environment will require high levels of shared understanding among participants in the Council process. To this end, we desire a science and management process that is collaborative, mutually supportive, transparent, timely, and thorough.

To achieve this vision, we will:

- *Support and defend scientific processes and the expert scientists that carry them out, while collaborating to consider enhancements of the science*
- *Ensure professionalism and productive working relationships*
- *Incorporate and/or appreciate the diverse views of Council participants (stakeholders, Council members, professional staff)*
- *Strive for high levels of transparency in decision-making and scientific development processes*
- *Periodically review and reflect upon our processes and how they can be improved*
- *Exercise leadership in ways that support the rigor of Council processes, make and resolve difficult decisions, and strive for continued learning*

2. Project Overview

The existing Council process for review and adoption of stock assessments for management has served the Council well for many years. However, new pressures, changing financial and personnel resources, and continued evolution in public process best practices warrants a review of how the PFMC's stock assessment-to-management process is structured. Therefore, the PFMC proposes to conduct an evaluation of the PFMC's current stock assessment-to-management process, guided by the vision, goals, and objectives outlined above. Such an evaluation is based on the notion that a periodic review of and reflection upon our processes is necessary for continued improvement of work products that underpin Council decision-making.

We envision an evaluation of current stock assessment review, adoption, and uptake processes to be conducted by a contractor experienced with public process and development of scientific

products that underpin marine resource management. This review would be used to inform further consideration of the Council's existing process and whether the Council, in collaboration with the science centers and other partner agencies, desires a change to the process associated with reviewing and adopting stock assessments for use in west coast fisheries management. In other words, we envision a third-party review as providing information that is supportive of any further consideration of the Council's stock assessment-to-management process.

This project should result in a report that includes:

- a description of methods used by the contractor,
- a summary of the results that are derived from those methods,
- the identification of any areas for potential improvement in the Council's process,
- and any recommendations that the contractor may deem appropriate for addressing those conflicts or areas of improvement.

The focus of the work is bound by the public process arena (public input, peer review, adoption), and should not include a review of the technical merits of assessments, data, or modeling platforms.

PFMC

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