

COUNCIL EFFICIENCIES UPDATE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper is intended to address progress made toward implementing the Council’s recommendations regarding efficient and effective Council process from June 2024. Many items from that decision have been relatively straightforward to implement and have been ongoing since that time. However, some matters are becoming more complex to implement and will take further discussion throughout 2025 to implement by 2026 (the target date for many items in the Council’s June 2024 guidance). The items in this paper summarize several of these more complicated matters, in addition to a matter that may be considered “new”. This new item is within the spirit of implementing effective and efficient Council process and has come to light as the Executive and Deputy Directors have worked to implement the Council’s June 2024 guidance. This new item relates to briefing book production timelines and is intended to 1) ensure adequate time for the development of materials for Council consideration, and 2) maintain adequate time for consideration of these materials prior to Council meetings. The development of quality materials as well as adequate time for review are both necessary for effective decision-making.

This document covers several key updates and recommendations that include:

- That the Council consider altering the briefing book production time from 21 days prior to a Council meeting, to 14 days prior to a Council meeting
- Efforts to shorten Council meeting length are complicated by the need for 5 Council meeting days in March and April due to the North of Falcon process. This means that other meetings will need to be shortened more than originally expected (this relates to the next two bullets)
- One way in which meetings were envisioned to be shortened was through enhanced focus of Council advisory groups. How to focus the efforts of these groups will take efforts that will continue through the spring and summer, with recommendations planned for November 2025
- One of the Council’s pieces of guidance was in regard to the treatment of informational reports. Specifically, the Council recommended that informational reports be included in briefing materials, but without accompanying Council floor presentations or speeches. Several Council agenda items can be thought of as “informational” and the question is posed whether the Council would like to strike these items from future agendas in favor of including them as purely informational reports in future briefing books.

1. Briefing Book Production Timelines

Council Operating Procedures (COPs) call for a 21-day period between the publication of the advanced briefing book and a Council meeting. When briefing book production schedules are considered in addition to this 21-day period, this means that staff and other contributors to Council briefing books are working on Council briefing book materials over 4 weeks or more in advance of a Council meeting. When added to time spent at Council meetings and doing immediate follow-up, each Council meeting takes roughly 6 weeks of staff time from briefing book production through meeting follow up.

Council meetings are arguably the most important function of the Council, and therefore significant time spent on these meetings by Council staff and others should be expected. However, effective meetings require adequate preparation, and this includes time spent developing materials that support good decision-making.

A review of schedules throughout 2024 and 2025 indicates that that balance between time spent working on materials between Council meetings often pales in comparison to the amount of time spent publishing, organizing, and coordinating meeting materials. For example, no work time exists between the March and April meetings, only two weeks of work time exist between September and November, and only three weeks of work time exist between April and June.

The figure below illustrates these metrics and attempts to show the balance between time spent prepping and attending meetings versus the time spent developing materials that support decision-making.

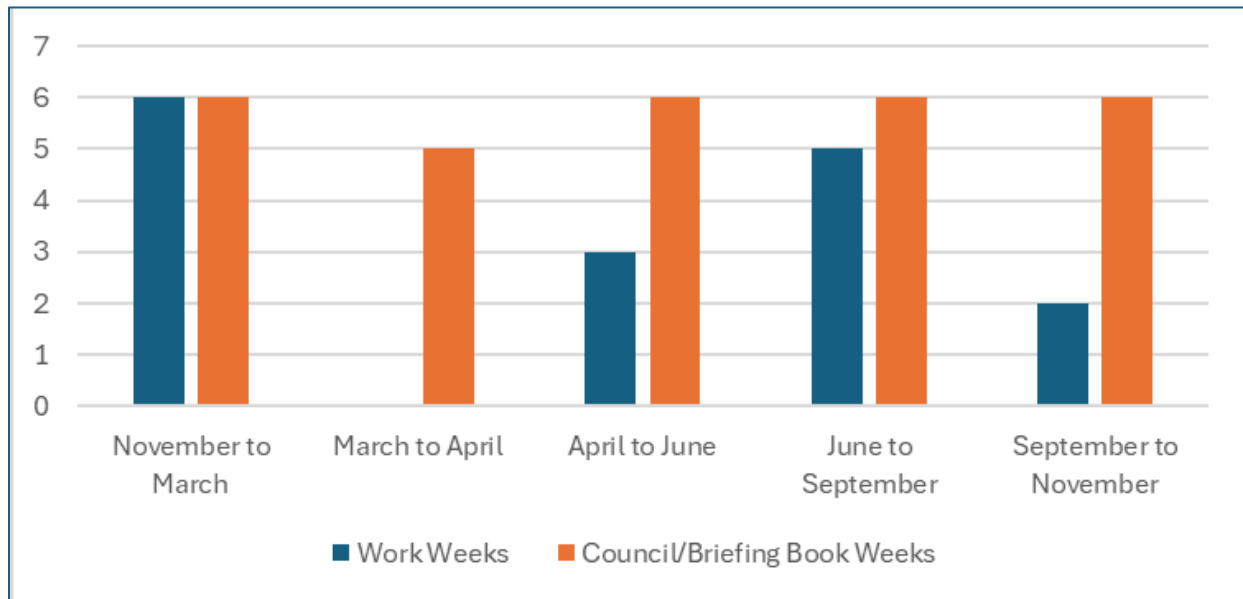


Figure 1 Number of work weeks versus meeting planning and attendance weeks. Blue bars indicate the number of working weeks available when staff and others are not engaged in meeting planning, coordination, preparation, and attendance. Orange bars represent the amount of time spent planning, coordinating, preparing, and attending Council meetings.

The figure above is a simplified comparison of time spent in meeting planning and attendance versus time spent developing materials to support Council decision-making. This shows that in most time periods there is less time spent producing materials in support of the Council versus time spent planning and attending meetings (often significantly so). In reality there is a fair degree of overlap between the two concepts (e.g. materials are produced at Council meetings that support the Council and Council decision-making, while meeting coordination and preparation is ongoing during all times of the year to some degree). However, the stark difference shown in the figure between time spent outside of Council meeting attendance and preparation versus time spent in such activities is informative.

A brief review of briefing book production timing at other fishery management councils indicates that publication times at other councils range from roughly two weeks prior to a council meeting, to merely the Friday before a meeting begins. Relatively short publication times are made possible due to electronic format of briefing books. A review of PFMC history regarding briefing book production timelines indicates that the 3-week publication period has its roots in the distribution of paper briefing book materials. This would involve the printing, collating, and mailing of materials in advance of a Council meeting with the intent that materials arrive with adequate time for review. Recent changes to Council operations that involve the use of more technology, and the distribution of briefing books via electronic formats, makes this relatively long briefing book production time period fairly obsolete.

In order to better manage workload pressures, and to ensure that the Council has high quality work products from which to base decisions, the Executive Director is making arrangements to reduce the briefing book publication period from 21 days prior to a Council meeting, to 14 days prior to a Council meeting. With this revised schedule several additional impacts are expected:

- Supplemental materials would be published 7 days in advance
- Items requiring Scientific and Statistical Committee review would continue to be distributed 14 days in advance
- Public comment periods may be adjusted in response to changing briefing book publication periods

2. Focusing Work of Advisory Groups

In June 2024 the Council stated its intent to focus the work of Council advisory groups (e.g. committees, advisory subpanels, management/technical teams) in order to make the work of these groups more efficient. The logic behind this approach is that enhanced focus of these groups would: 1) enable these groups to reduce the amount of time spent in meetings, 2) would reduce Council floor time spent on various agenda items, 3) would reduce the amount of time that Council staff spend supporting and facilitating such groups, 4) would enable these groups to focus on their core tasks and ensure adequate time spent on those tasks, and 5) would be done in such a way where the Council would continue to receive advice and insights from those advisory groups that are instrumental to specific agenda items.

While considering what it means in greater detail to enhance the focus of Council advisory groups, several considerations have come to light. These include:

- Refining and clarifying the charge of Council advisory groups: many groups have a tendency to expand their focus over time. This is almost always well-intended and can be due to many factors, including an interest by advisory group members in matters tangential to their core work, a cultural pattern in the Council of commenting on most Council meeting agenda topics, an historical desire by the Council to hear from many advisors, and more.
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities: The implementation of the revised Regional Operating Agreement (December 2021), which envisions Council staff as the lead analyst on most items, combined with the need for certain internal review and coordination processes with National Marine Fisheries Service and General Counsel, have altered roles and responsibilities between Council staff, advisory groups, and NOAA staff when it comes to fishery management actions, compared to years prior. In practice this has often meant a greater separation of tasks between Council staff and management/technical teams. Council scheduling has not fully responded to these changing roles and responsibilities.

The Council's Executive and Deputy Director will continue working on these matters through the summer and fall and will aim to have a proposed course of action at the November 2025 meeting.

3. Informational Reports and Related Agenda Topics

In June 2024 the Council stated its intent to reduce the amount of floor time spent on informational items. In effect this means the movement of such items to the Informational Reports section of the briefing book, or placing reports under specific agenda items and treating them as informational in nature (as opposed to speaking to them). Questions have arisen regarding whether certain agenda items that are regularly scheduled on the Council's agenda should be treated as informational, or whether the Council would like

to continue treating these matters as agenda items with Council discussion and potential action. These items include:

- Annual Coast Guard report
- Annual International Pacific Halibut Commission report
- Annual Tri-State Enforcement report

4. Update on length of meeting and implications

Shortening the length of Council meetings is one strategy for reducing Council expenses. As we've reduced the length of such meetings, it's become clear that reducing the length of March and April meetings is challenging due to the iteration needed with various salmon activities, such as the iterations between the Council and Salmon Technical Team regarding the modeling of different scenarios, and negotiations in the North of Falcon process.

Because of these March and April challenges, other meetings may need to be shortened more than originally anticipated. One meeting that may be a good candidate for shortening more than originally expected is the Council's September meeting. The June meeting is also another candidate. November may be more challenging due to the relatively large number of agenda topics that are typically scheduled for that meeting.

The Executive and Deputy Director will continue working on meeting length and will report back to the Council as plans unfold.

PFMC
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