

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE REPORT ON LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

The Council’s Legislative Committee (LC) met on March 5 in Vancouver, WA. While there was little to discuss regarding current, specific legislation (Congressional bills of interest), the LC started by noting our November 2024 discussion of items that might gain traction in the new Congress. The LC also noted the following: passage (in December 2024) of FISHER Act, which holds the Secretary, including the OMB review role, to specific timelines on processing fisheries disaster declarations; Senator Sullivan (AK) to chair Senate subcommittee on Coast Guard, Maritime, and Fisheries; the recent House subcommittee hearing on ESA/MMPA implementation and associated issues for potential, future congressional action; introduction of S688 (Sullivan) and referred to committee (combat IUU fishing globally); introduction of S182 by Newhouse (NW energy security Act), to stop removal of four lower Snake River Dams. We will continue to track these, and any additional legislation, for future consideration by the LC and Council.

The LC meeting agenda also included discussion of numerous recent actions from the Administration (Executive branch) which could have significant implications for Council operations, regulatory processes, and fiscal viability. These included Executive Orders or other Administration actions which relate to personnel cutbacks, associated regulatory workforce capacity, grant processes (and potential freezes on accessing Council grant funds), and overall budget climate (potential reduced funding overall).

Because the LC discussion leaked over into operational/staffing/fiscal concerns, many of which may require a swift and nimble reaction by the Council, outside of scheduled Council meetings, the LC is recommending that the Council consider establishing a separate, small Executive Committee to guide the Executive Director as necessary moving forward. Such a Committee could potentially be combined with the Budget Committee (noting that some of the actions will have direct implications for budgets and operations), or be formed as a separate Committee (also recognizing that some of the discussion topics for such a Committee would be Executive (closed) Session topics, requiring immediate operational decisions). The LC also noted that the Council has previously given direction to the Executive Director regarding workload prioritization and more efficient ways to conduct Council operations (i.e. “Council Efficiencies”). This guidance – and the plan for making the Council more efficient and streamlined – may need to be implemented more swiftly. The LC indicates that these actions should not need consideration by an Executive Committee if one should be formed.

There was also discussion, but no resolution, of the question of whether and how this Council, and perhaps the broader Council Coordination Committee, might weigh in to the Administration regarding impacts of recent and possible future Administration actions on Council/NMFS management actions and fisheries resource management generally.