

ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP REPORT ON ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND FLEXIBILITY - SCOPING

The Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) reviewed the Council Staff Report on Special Project 1: Adaptive Management and Flexibility ([Agenda Item H.1, Attachment 1](#)) and provides suggestions for Council consideration when addressing Tasks 1 and 2 of the Council’s action for this agenda item. We await further Council discussion before commenting on next steps or sequencing work.

1. Draft Problem Statement

The EWG proposes that the Council consider the following problem statement for this project: *The California Current Ecosystem (CCE) is highly variable, creating conditions that can lead to rapid and unexpected change and can increase scientific and management uncertainty. Traditional Council processes and timelines can be too inflexible to keep pace with shifting conditions. Time lags in Council processes slow Council decision making, and can hamper fisheries scientists, managers, and stakeholders in adapting to emerging threats and opportunities. In other cases, the data and analysis to detect and respond to change in a timely and deliberative manner may be insufficient.*

The EWG offers this Problem Statement as a starting point for further development. Due to limited time for discussion, some key questions remain unresolved. For example, there was debate about the appropriate focus of the project. One possible approach is to concentrate on areas the Council directly controls and can implement independently, such as Council processes. However, the timing and impact of Council recommendations also depend on broader factors, including administrative review by the Executive Branch, procedural requirements under the Administrative Procedure Act, and other federal laws enacted by Congress. In addition, effective decision-making and implementation rely heavily on the availability of data, staff capacity for analysis and coordination, and sufficient funding to support those efforts. Striking the right balance between focusing on what the Council can directly influence and accounting for the larger system in which it operates will be an ongoing consideration as the project moves forward.

2. Guidance on a Range of Alternatives

In September 2024, Council staff shared [its proposal for this project](#), which describes the objective as “identifying innovations to make review and implementation of management actions more timely, efficient, and responsive to a changing ocean environment.” The Council again considered this project in April 2025 and its motion from that meeting sought an “action plan for exploring and implementing the general tools for increasing flexibility and adaptive management (identified in [Agenda Item C.4.a, Supplemental Attachment 1](#)), as well as other tools, in all of the Council’s FMPs.”

Since September 2024, the Council has prioritized management flexibility and efficiency under a variety of different agenda items, some associated with particular fishery management plans (FMPs), others scheduled for consideration under the Council’s Administrative or Cross-FMP

actions. Given these changes in the past year, the Council could consider a somewhat unconventional approach to developing a Range of Alternatives (ROA) for this particular agenda item:

- Alternative 1: Develop a review framework for evaluating the responsiveness and flexibility of the alternatives under discussion in the following Council projects that are already underway: The Ad Hoc Fisheries Innovation Workgroup (FIW) Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) Process, Groundfish Specifications Flexibility actions, and the Council Operations and Efficiencies review. Under this alternative, Council staff would explicitly include a responsiveness and flexibility analysis for each alternative considered for each of those underway projects, and the Council itself would purposefully set aside time to discuss whether the alternatives for those projects provided more or less operational flexibility for fisheries participants.
- Alternative 2: Develop a review framework for evaluating the responsiveness and flexibility of the alternatives under discussion for *all* future Council actions that are intended to have a duration of greater than one year. Under this alternative, Council staff would explicitly include a responsiveness and flexibility analysis for each alternative considered for all future Council projects and decisions that are intended to be in place for more than one full year. The Council itself would purposefully set aside time during its deliberations of these future projects to discuss whether the alternatives for those projects provided more or less operational flexibility for fisheries participants.
- Alternative 3: Select a project outside of those mentioned under Alternative 1 that the Council is developing or plans to develop in the near future (e.g., see current [Year-at-a-Glance](#)) that the Council will implement under this Special Project 1 so that the alternatives for that fisheries management project provide greater management responsiveness and operational flexibility for that fisheries' participants. A pilot project should be:
 - Timely and feasible within the funding and timeline for Special Project 1; and,
 - Not duplicative of existing efforts already in progress (e.g., the projects under Alternative 1, above).
- Alternative 4: Select a cross-FMP project that the Council is developing or plans to develop in the near future (e.g., see current [Year-at-a-Glance](#)) that the Council will implement under this Special Project 1 so that the alternatives for that project provide greater management responsiveness and operational flexibility for fisheries' participants in two or more FMPs. A pilot project should be:
 - Timely and feasible within the funding and timeline for Special Project 1;
 - Not duplicative of existing efforts already in progress (e.g., the projects under Alternative 1, above); and,
 - Broadly applicable across all FMPs to maximize impact.