

## **DRAFT SUMMARY OF THE MAY 2026 COUNCIL COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING**

This is a draft report of the May 2026 meeting of the Council Coordination Committee (CCC). It is provided by the Executive Director for the benefit of Council awareness and consideration. A formal report of the meeting will be available at the CCC webpage in the coming weeks.

The CCC met May 19–21, 2026, in Homer, Alaska, and was hosted by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). The meeting brought together Council chairs, vice chairs, executive directors, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries leadership, support staff, and stakeholders to discuss priorities, agency and Council initiatives, legislative developments, science and management issues, budgeting, and coordination among the Regional Fishery Management Councils.

An overarching theme of the meeting was the tension between expanding national expectations for fisheries management and the workload and capacity constraints facing Councils, NOAA Fisheries, and partner agencies. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining the regional fishery management structure established under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) as we approach the 50th anniversary of the Act.

### **Council Priorities and Capacity Challenges**

The Councils provided updates on regional priorities, emphasizing concerns about staffing limitations, budget uncertainty, inflationary pressures, and increasing procedural and analytical requirements. Several Councils noted growing workloads associated with climate and ecosystem initiatives, endangered species consultations, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, offshore energy development, and Executive Order implementation. Members also highlighted concerns regarding NOAA staffing reductions and the implications for stock assessments, rulemaking timelines, science support, and implementation capacity.

Many Councils emphasized the need to focus available resources on core fishery management responsibilities while continuing to respond to emerging national priorities. Discussions reflected interest in improving prioritization among both Councils and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), clarifying expectations between NMFS and the Councils, and ensuring that any new initiatives are accompanied by sufficient staffing and funding support.

### **NOAA Fisheries Priorities and Executive Order 14276**

NOAA Fisheries leadership provided updates on FY 2026 and FY 2027 priorities, including implementation of Executive Order 14276, “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.” Discussions focused on opportunities to increase domestic seafood production, streamline

regulatory processes, reduce unnecessary burdens, and improve permitting while maintaining conservation standards.

Council members discussed the importance of preserving regional flexibility under the MSA and ensuring that any streamlining efforts recognize differences among fisheries and management systems. Participants also highlighted the need for clear implementation guidance and realistic timelines given existing staffing and workload constraints.

NOAA Fisheries also discussed the Deep Seabed Hard Minerals Resource Act (DSHMRA), international fisheries matters, and ongoing agency efforts related to science modernization, climate and ecosystem science, and fishery data systems.

### **Budget, Funding, and Legislative Issues**

NOAA staff provided updates on agency budgets and Council funding. Discussion focused on uncertainty surrounding future appropriations, inflationary impacts on operating costs, and the challenges of maintaining core scientific and management functions under constrained budgets.

The legislative outlook presentation reviewed congressional activity related to fisheries management, appropriations, seafood competitiveness, and broader NOAA issues. Participants discussed the continued importance of communicating the value of the regional fishery management system and the economic and conservation successes achieved under the MSA.

Several members stressed that the Councils are increasingly expected to address new national priorities—including climate resilience, ecosystem management, aquaculture, offshore energy coordination, and supply chain resilience—without corresponding increases in staffing or analytical support.

### **Science, Risk, and Management Process Issues**

NOAA Fisheries presented updates on agency science priorities, including stock assessment modernization, ecosystem and climate science, survey challenges, and improving scientific information available for management decisions. Of note was the presentation on the development of the new Fisheries Integrated Modeling System stock assessment platform, and also the agency's interest in improving and maintaining fishery independent survey information in the face of reduced capacity and inflationary pressures. Support material for these discussions is available on the CCC's May 2026 meeting page.

A portion of this discussion focused on NOAA Fisheries' proposed Risk-Value Matrix framework, which has been paused. Members discussed concerns regarding the potential for the framework to increase procedural complexity and analytical workload without clearly improving decision-making outcomes. Discussions emphasized the importance of regional flexibility and avoiding duplicative or overly prescriptive requirements.

NEPA implementation was another major topic. NOAA Fisheries staff reviewed procedural revisions and efforts to improve integration between MSA and NEPA processes. The CCC NEPA Work Group reported on ongoing efforts to identify opportunities for streamlining, improve consistency, reduce duplication, and clarify procedural expectations.

Council representatives expressed continued concern regarding the cumulative workload associated with documentation, procedural compliance, consultation requirements, and increasingly complex analytical expectations.

### **Coordination, Education, and Outreach**

The Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) provided an update on its work supporting stakeholder participation and fisheries management literacy. Participants emphasized the value of MREP in helping improve public understanding of Council processes and increasing effective engagement in fisheries management.

The interstate marine fisheries commissions also provided updates on coordination activities and shared priorities across state and federal fisheries management programs.

CCC workgroups and committees reported on ongoing activities, including habitat issues, scientific coordination, and Council Member Ongoing Development (CMOD). The CMOD Steering Committee summarized recent training and professional development efforts intended to support effective Council governance and decision-making. Planning for the next CMOD is underway, with the next meeting in 2028.

### **Key Themes and Outcomes**

Several overarching themes emerged during the meeting:

- Continued concern regarding workload capacity and staffing limitations across Councils and NOAA Fisheries.
- Strong support for maintaining regional flexibility and the Council-based management system established under the MSA.
- Interest in streamlining analytical and procedural requirements where possible while maintaining sound conservation and scientific standards.
- Concern that new initiatives and policy directives are being layered onto existing management responsibilities without corresponding increases in resources.
- Recognition of the need for improved coordination, prioritization, and clearer delineation of responsibilities between NOAA Fisheries and the Councils.
- Continued emphasis on strengthening stakeholder engagement, Council member training, and communication regarding the successes of U.S. fisheries management.

Supporting materials for the meeting, including presentations and briefing documents, are available through the Council Coordination Committee meeting webpage.