



Pacific Fishery Management Council

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Pete Hassemer, Chair | Merrick J. Burden, Executive Director

August 31, 2026

RE: A.5 Executive Director's Report

Dear Council -

The Executive Director's Report to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council, PFMC) provides updates on select administrative matters, Council activities, staffing, and other developments not otherwise captured in briefing book materials. I have also taken the liberty of highlighting matters that may be of unique interest to you as part of this report.

Changes to Council Roster

In June the Department of Commerce re-appointed Mr. Butch Smith (Washington) to an Obligatory seat and newly appointed Mr. Jeff Lackey (Oregon) to an At-Large seat. These appointments are through August 10, 2029.

Mr. Brad Pettinger (Oregon At-Large) completed his final term with the Council this past August. I'd like to thank Mr. Pettinger for his many contributions to the Council process during his three terms with the Council.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) West Coast Region (WCR) has temporarily added Ms. Karen Palmigiano as a WCR designee for the September Council meeting. It is anticipated that Ms. Keeley Kent will return as a designee in November.

The United States Coast Guard (USCG) has recently informed the Council of revisions to Council representation. Rear Admiral Michael Campbell is the Agency Principal, replacing Rear Admiral Arex Avanni. The USCG designee list remains unchanged.

Alternates at this Meeting

There are several alternate appointments at this meeting, as indicated in the table below:

Advisory Group	Seat	Member	Alternate
GMT	NMFS NWFSC	Kate Richerson	Kayleigh Somers
HC	WDFW	Michael Garrity	Laura Brown
GAP	Mid-water trawl	Vacant	Heather Mann
CPSAS	Processor	Vacant	Lori Steele
EWG	NMFS SWFSC	Elliot Hazen	Andy Liesing
SSC	NMFS SWFSC	John Field	EJ Dick
SSC	At Large	Aaron Berger	Selina Heppell
CPSMT	ODFW	Vacant	Christian Heath

Artificial Intelligence Policy

An artificial intelligence (AI) policy for the Council remains under development. Staff have consulted with other Regional Fishery Management Councils and with the PFMC grants officer as we have considered how best to approach the use of AI within the Council.

Our work has confirmed that the Council's AI policy should be done in a thoughtful manner. In particular, questions have arisen concerning the treatment of confidential information, the use and disclosure of AI-generated materials, and how AI-related records may relate to public records and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Given the sensitive nature of these issues, we believe additional consultation is warranted before offering a Council-wide policy.

In the coming weeks we plan to consult with state agencies, tribal agencies, and NOAA General Counsel as we continue developing the policy. These discussions will help us better understand the appropriate use of AI and the treatment of information within AI systems, as well as other legal and policy considerations associated with AI use in the Council environment.

In the meantime, I have instructed staff to refrain from uploading confidential or sensitive information into AI systems, and to be transparent about the use of AI in developing PFMC products. When AI is used in a substantive manner to develop Council products, that use should be disclosed.

Council Office

After several months of discussions and negotiations with a potential new landlord, we ultimately reached an impasse regarding a possible move of the Council office. During that process, our current building owner approached us again with plans to make improvements to the building and to address several of the maintenance and security issues that had prompted us to explore alternative office space.

Those discussions have progressed well, and we are now nearing completion of a new lease at our current location. The terms are favorable to the Council and include plans to address the concerns

that had originally led us to consider a move. Assuming the remaining lease details are resolved, we expect to remain in our current location.

June 2027 Council Meeting Dates

We have modified the dates for the June 2027 Council meeting to avoid a conflict with Juneteenth. The June 2027 meeting will now be held from June 9 through June 14, 2027. This change was also made possible by a shift in the North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting schedule.

Because many of our stakeholders participate in both Council processes, coordinating the two Councils' meeting schedules is beneficial. The revised dates should reduce conflicts while maintaining generally desired timing for meetings and workload.

Implementation of Prior Council Motions and Guidance

For your awareness, I would like to flag a couple of instances where implementing prior Council motions and guidance has proven more difficult than anticipated.

The first example concerns the Council's direction last year for staff to engage the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in a discussion concerning the possibilities of implementing multi-year catch limits. The SSC's workload last fall, combined with the federal government shutdown, prevented that discussion from occurring in time for the issue to be incorporated into the groundfish specifications flexibility agenda item as originally envisioned.

Rather than lose the opportunity for this discussion, we plan to incorporate this issue into the risk management agenda item. The next time that agenda item is scheduled to come before the Council is in November. At that time, it would be useful for the Council to consider the nature of this dialogue in the broader context of risk management and the ongoing work of the Council, including how discussions of multi-year catch limits can help achieve the Council's objectives. If the Council desires to pick this matter up under a different schedule or agenda item, I recommend discussing that proposal with me and our Deputy Director under our future meeting planning agenda item (Agenda Item D.5) on day last.

A second example concerns implementation of Council motions and guidance associated with the Council's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) projects. The current workload associated with these projects exceeds both human resource capacity and available fiscal resources. At this meeting, the Council will therefore be asked to pare down the scope of work products currently falling under the IRA project umbrella so that staff can see the remaining work through to completion as part of the planned no-cost extension of the IRA grant. This will occur under Agenda Item C.3.

It is important to emphasize that narrowing the scope of work under the IRA grant does not mean that the Council is precluded from continuing work on these topics in the future. If the Council wishes to continue working on any of the activities identified to date under the IRA grant, it may continue do so after the grant concludes. The immediate need is to establish a manageable scope

of work and achieve an appropriate level of completion that can be documented when the IRA grant ends. After that time, additional work could continue.

Sacramento River Fall Chinook Peer Review

Finally, I want to note the Council's new peer review process concerning the Sacramento River Fall Chinook stock. This is a new type of process for the Council to independently review scientific aspects of salmon management, and the first meeting of the peer review panel was held August 19 and 20 in Sacramento. According to accounts I've been given, the meeting was successful, with panelists appropriately digging into the work of the Sacramento River Fall Chinook Workgroup and providing the independent scientific scrutiny that was envisioned when this process was developed. A subsequent panel meeting is scheduled for September 11.

I want to thank the members of the peer review panel, as well as the SSC, Salmon Technical Team, Salmon Advisory Subpanel, Sacramento River Fall Chinook Workgroup, Council staff, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission staff, and the state, federal, and tribal partner agencies and individuals who contributed their time and expertise to support this effort. Establishing a new process of this nature requires a significant amount of coordination and cooperation, and the success of the initial meeting reflects those contributions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Merrick Burden', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Merrick Burden
Executive Director