

ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP REPORT ON SPECIAL PROJECTS:
PROJECT PLANNING, UPDATES, AND CLARIFICATIONS

The Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) met via webinar on September 15, 2026, and reviewed and discussed the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) staff reports for agenda item C.3. (Attachments 1-5). Importantly, the Situation Summary for Agenda Item C.3 states the Council action is to “refine scope of special projects to align work with available capacity.” The Situation Summary provides further direction for the Council to refine the work associated with Special Project 1 (Adaptive Management and Flexibility), a Council task that is also scheduled for Agenda Item C.5 at this meeting. The EWG reviewed the usefulness of the suggested actions in advancing each project’s objective of making review and implementation of Council actions more timely, efficient, and responsive to a rapidly changing ocean environment and other unexpected events.

Working from the organizing table found on pages 1 and 2 of [Supplemental Attachment 5](#) for Agenda Item C.3, the EWG discussed recommendations for addressing the Council’s three special projects that initially emerged from Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) Initiative Appendix and further developed as projects that were funded under the Inflation Reduction Act below. The EWG recommends the Council:

1. Broadly encourage the already-planned discussions on local knowledge integration to continue and to encourage the fishing public to share information they may have on species shifts and fishing changes associated with the near-term climate variability of the El Niño (SP1).
2. Focus outreach efforts with the Tribes on better understanding whether there is interest in revising existing engagement processes rather than beginning with a general solicitation for collecting Indigenous Knowledge (SP1).
3. Create an umbrella Council Operating Procedure (COP) on Exempted Fishing Permits as long as there remain opportunities within the COP to address any specific needs and requirements of different FMPs and fisheries (SP1).
4. Schedule an opportunity for its appropriate advisory bodies to hear from staff and contractors on Special Project 2 work in winter 2026-2027 (SP2).
5. Seek input from HMS-related advisory bodies to ensure lessons learned from current dynamic ocean management applications inform cross-FMP consideration of dynamic management tools (SP3).
6. Clarify how it will prioritize and fund Special Project activities that are beyond the scope of available IRA funds.
7. Create dedicated webpages that provide updates to Council members and the public on the IRA projects, similar to other regional fishery management councils.

Special Project 1, Adaptive Management and Flexibility:

In Supplemental Attachment 5 for this agenda item, Council staff broke out the tasks under Special Project 1 into six items, which the EWG recommends refining and addressing as follows:

- *Groundfish Spex Flex* – scheduled for Council discussion in November 2026. The EWG has no recommendations on this agenda item.
- *Local Knowledge Integration* – The EWG notes that ongoing work of the California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (CCIEA) team is scoping how to integrate local knowledge from fisheries participants, as reported on by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on page 3 of its [Mini-Ecosystem Status Report](#) (Supplemental Informational Report 7). The Science Centers are particularly interested in hearing information from the fishing public on any changes in the environment or species that they might see as the current El Niño unfurls ([West Coast Fishing Industry Reporting Portal](#)). The EWG also discussed and supports the ongoing work of the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel to bring local knowledge reporting to pre-assessment workshops and STAR panels in 2027 and beyond. Finally, the EWG notes that the Science Centers anticipate multiple near-term public engagement events across the West Coast. **The EWG continues to support a potential future workshop on integrating local knowledge into Council decision-making. However, the impetus for this effort was to better adapt to increasing climate variability, and the El Niño is affecting us now. It may be more cost-effective for the Council to simply encourage the already-planned discussions on local knowledge integration to continue and to broadly encourage the fishing public to share information they may have on species shifts and fishing changes associated with the near-term climate variability of the El Niño.**
- *Indigenous Knowledge Integration* – The EWG does not currently have a representative from the Tribes, which makes commenting on this task difficult. The EWG notes that treaty fishing Tribes already provide significant science, knowledge, and participation in the Council process. **The EWG recommends that Council staff focus its outreach efforts with the Tribes on better understanding whether there is interest in revising existing engagement processes rather than beginning with a general solicitation for collecting Indigenous Knowledge.**
- *If-Then Statements* – As discussed in the EWG supplemental report for Agenda Item C.5, **the EWG considers the Special Project 1 task of Council staff and contractor review of national use of if-then statements in fisheries management to be complete** with staff reports provided in support of Agenda Item C.5.
- *Council Action Meeting Requirements* – In the EWG’s [April 2026 H.1.a Supplemental Report](#) for Special Project 1, the EWG noted that the Council already has language in its FMPs to ensure that the Council discusses action items at as many, or as few, meetings as are needed to complete the decision-making process. **The EWG has no new recommendations on this task.**
- *EFP Process Improvements* – **The EWG supports the creation of an umbrella Council Operating Procedure (COP) on Exempted Fishing Permits as long as there remain opportunities within the COP to address any specific needs and requirements of different FMPs and fisheries.**

Special Project 2, Decision Making for Stronger Fishing Communities:

The EWG recommends that **the Council schedule an opportunity for its appropriate advisory bodies to hear from staff and contractors on Special Project 2 work in winter 2026-2027.** The Council last received an update from staff and contractors on Special Project 2 in June 2026, and is next scheduled to review materials for this project in June 2027. Work on this project should not proceed for a full year without some check-ins with advisory bodies to help evaluate whether the work is meeting the goals of the project. As discussed in the Supplemental EWG report for Agenda Item D.5, Future Council Meeting Agenda and Workload Planning, the EWG also **requests that the Special Project 2 contractors brief the EWG and other advisory bodies in May 2027.**

Special Project 3, New Fishing Opportunities within Bycatch Allowances:

The EWG notes that Special Project 3 has been refined to focus on highly migratory species (HMS) fisheries; however, the supplemental briefing book materials for Agenda Item C.3 were not available to the HMS Advisory Subpanel or the HMS Management Team in time for either of those bodies to discuss their ideas and recommendations for Special Project 3 under this agenda item.

The EWG discussed the Council staff proposal to shift execution of the Dynamic Ocean Management (DOM) workshop from IRA grant funding to Council base funding. The proposal would also remove costs associated with a standalone facilitator, travel, and dedicated meeting-space needs. At this time, the EWG recommends that the Council clarify what processes or funding sources within base funding would be available to support this work, and how prioritization relative to other FMP-specific tasks might affect timelines associated with conducting the workshop.

Prior Council discussions of a DOM workshop originate from a Council priority identified in the FEP Initiative Appendix under Initiative 2.3, “Cross-FMP Dynamic Bycatch Monitoring and Minimization Policy Initiative.” This initiative acknowledged that while bycatch reduction efforts under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) have contributed to reductions in incidental catch across Council-managed fisheries over recent decades, they have also resulted in economic impacts to some fisheries and coastal communities, affecting the MSA goal of optimizing sustained seafood production. This topic remains a national priority, as reflected in the recently prioritized [NMFS actions to restore American seafood competitiveness](#). Under these prioritized agency actions for National Standard 9 (Bycatch Management), NMFS emphasizes development of adaptive, data-driven bycatch management tools – such as real-time avoidance networks and dynamic spatial management – as alternatives to static closure approaches. Such tools can be useful for both regulatory purposes and on-the-water targeting strategies.

Given these national priorities and the Council’s prior direction, **the EWG continues to see value in advancing DOM workshop efforts, as previously stated in the [EWG’s March 2026 E.2.a Supplemental Report](#).** The EWG also notes that several dynamic bycatch avoidance tools have already been developed and successfully implemented within HMS fisheries on the West Coast. As the Council considers the future of this work, **the EWG recommends the Council seek input from HMS-related advisory bodies to ensure lessons learned from current DOM applications inform cross-FMP consideration of dynamic management tools.**

Finally, the EWG notes that several regional fishery management councils have dedicated webpages that provide updates to Council members and the public on their Inflation Reduction

Act projects. Examples of those webpages can be found below. Similar web-based reporting on the Pacific Council's Special Projects might keep Council members, advisory bodies members, and the public up to date on Council staff activities related to these projects.

[Western Pacific Fishery Management Council Inflation Reduction Act Projects](#)

[New England Fishery Management Council Inflation Reduction Act Projects](#)

[Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Inflation Reduction Act Projects](#)

[Caribbean Fishery Management Council Advancing Sustainable Fisheries](#)

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09/17/26