

COUNCIL AND NMFS WORKLOAD – CAPACITY ALIGNMENT

At the May 2025 meeting of the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) members discussed the diminished capacity of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), stemming from the downsizing of staff levels across various divisions of the agency. This added to ongoing conversations among the Councils about how best to achieve statutory obligations and maintain expected levels of service in an era of high inflation and relatively flat budgets. At that meeting, NMFS headquarters (HQ) staff presented a concept intended to stimulate conversation regarding the prioritization of stocks managed under the U.S. Federal fisheries management system. The implication of that discussion was that fewer stocks can be managed in the Federal fisheries management system in a reduced capacity environment, and NMFS HQ was developing a framework for prioritizing management. Following this discussion, the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Pacific Council) Executive Director and the West Coast Regional Administrator referenced the work that the Pacific Council has already done through the committee-of-the-whole process, cost efficiency planning, and groundfish stock definitions and offered to use the Pacific coast experience as an example from which other regions of the U.S. may be able to learn from. It was envisioned that developing a Pacific coast example to help assist a broader National conversation (while also working to resolve west coast challenges) would require additional coordination between the Pacific Council and NMFS, building upon the earlier efforts of the Pacific Council.

Since that time Pacific Council leadership and NMFS West Coast leadership have met to discuss greater alignment between capacity and fishery management efforts. These conversations have covered a range of fishery management topics that are in addition to the stock management prioritization exercise proposed by NMFS HQ. These conversations have been driven by seeking an understanding of capacity at the science level, management level, and implementation level with the intention being that a greater level of understanding regarding capacity concerns should be used to drive any potential approach to remedy those concerns.

An update from the Pacific Council and NMFS leadership is anticipated for this meeting. This update will be intended to provide the Pacific Council with information regarding the nature of capacity constraints across the broader fishery management system, how those constraints affect the functional capacity of Pacific coast fisheries management, and some considerations for how the Pacific Council may be able to take certain actions to align fishery management needs with existing capacities.

At the time of drafting this situation summary, the Federal government is closed. The extent of any update provided at the November Council meeting will depend wholly or in part on Pacific Council and NMFS leadership being able to meet prior to the Pacific Council meeting. Should the shutdown continue and prevent the ability of Pacific Council and NMFS leadership to meet in advance of the Pacific Council meeting, it is possible that a brief update can be provided but a more detailed update and discussion will almost certainly need to take place in early 2026.

Council Tasks:

Consider the update and any relevant recommendations from Council and NMFS leadership.

Reference Materials:

None

Agenda Order:

- D.2 Council and NMFS Workload – Capacity Alignment Merrick Burden
- a. Report of Council and
NMFS Leadership Merrick Burden/Jennifer Quan/Kristen Koch/Jeremy Rusin
 - b. Council Discussion and Comment, as Appropriate

PFMC
10/22/25