

ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT ON SPECIAL PROJECT 1: ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND FLEXIBILITY

The Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) reviewed and discussed the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) staff reports for Agenda Item H.1, Attachments 1-5. Those staff reports separate Special Project 1 into four priority areas, with each priority area having multiple potential actions for Council consideration. The EWG reviewed these actions by evaluating their usefulness in advancing the project's objective of making review and implementation of Council actions more timely, efficient, and responsive to a changing ocean environment and other unexpected events.

The EWG details its recommendations for addressing each of the actions under all four of the priority areas in this report and suggests that the Council adopt EWG recommendations in order to move Special Project 1 forward as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Priority Area: If-Then Statements and Inseason Management Actions

The staff report for this priority area ([Agenda Item H.1, Attachment 2](#)) identifies three potential actions for the Council. **For this priority area, the EWG recommends the Council address those potential actions sequentially as follows: Action 2, Action 3, and if necessary, Action 1 (See Table 1).**

Whether an if-then statement approach to inseason management or other management measures will meet the Council's goals under Special Project 1 will depend on the particular if-then statement in question and the fishery to which it applies. A pre-developed framework for if-then statements, especially one that applies to all management actions across all FMPs, may be too rigid of an approach. If this framework is written into regulation, it could lead to less flexible and adaptive processes than the status quo.

Table 1, Priority Area: If-Then Statements and Inseason Management Actions	
Action Item	Recommendation
1. Specify a framework and process to support the development of new if-then statements	This action item may not be needed at all if the review of if-then statements (Action Item 2) by Management Teams and Advisory Subpanels do not identify any need for additional if-then statements beyond those already in use. Tackling this action first could be confusing and inefficient for Council and advisory bodies. Furthermore, it could potentially reduce management flexibility.
2. Conduct a review of the use of if-then	This action item should be completed first chronologically, if at all. Council should ask its staff to provide this review as a

statements in both NMFS regulations and the Council process	briefing book document for its next consideration of this issue. This step could help to identify existing practices that are similar to if-then statements that are currently in use; it could also socialize and prioritize the future use of if-then statements in Council processes. It could also be beneficial to review inseason management practices in other regions of the U.S. to glean any insight to applications currently outside of those being used on the West Coast.
3. Request that Management Teams, in collaboration with their respective Advisory Subpanels, review and consider opportunities to develop if-then statements and/or new inseason management actions	This action item should be completed as a second step, following the review of the use of if-then statements (Action Item 2), and based on the outcome of this action item, decide whether Action Item 1 (above) is needed.

Priority Area: Exempted Fishing Permit Process Improvements

The staff report for this priority area ([Agenda Item H.1, Attachment 3](#)) identifies 12 potential actions for the Council. The EWG notes that the Council's Ad Hoc Fishery Innovation Workgroup (FIW) is discussing and assessing many of the actions considered for this priority, and provided a useful report to the Council in March 2026 ([Agenda Item G.4.a, Supplemental FIW Report 2](#)). The Council may wish to allow the FIW process to finish its deliberations on Council Operating Procedure (COP) 20 before deciding whether to rehash the same questions for its other COPs on Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) processes.

As detailed in Table 2, below, the EWG recommends that the Council:

- **Support Actions 3, 4, and 6, noting that the FIW has already supported Action 6;**
- **Table consideration of Actions 5 and 7 until the FIW's work is complete;**
- **NOT proceed with Actions 2 and 8, and NOT develop the forms and templates discussed under Action 10, as those could trigger Paperwork Reduction Act requirements;**
- **NOT adopt Actions 11 and 12 as universal across all fishery management plans (FMPs) and EFP-related COPs;**
- **Suggest that future staff reports provide more detail on how Action 9 might be implemented; and,**
- **Note that Action 1 can be undertaken by Council staff at any time.**

Table 2, Priority Area: Exempted Fishing Permit Process Improvements

Action Item	Recommendation
1. Create clear Council EFP materials for applicants	Council staff can and do update the Council's website without receiving advance instructions from the Council.
2. Create ways for Council to prioritize applicants likely to actively use EFP	Do not proceed. Council does not need to set up an advance prioritization process. Instead, all EFP-related COPs should be amended to follow the FIW's recommendation to add an item requesting that EFP applicants provide "a description of the applicant's relevant experience and their ability to successfully conduct activities under the EFP, including existing gear and vessels that can conduct EFP activities."
3. Identify Council research priorities critical for increasing adaptive capacity and well-suited for EFPs	Support the recommendation that Council staff review the Research and Data Needs document "for priorities that would increase the Council's adaptive capacity through the use of EFPs."
4. Promote flexibility and efficiency in Council EFP process	Support expanding the FIW's recommended revisions to COP 20 so that they apply across EFP COPs, including the move to a one-meeting process.
5. Standardize the protocol for initial review of EFP applications	Table this action for more thorough consideration after the FIW's work is complete.
6. Allow for a one-meeting process for certain EFPs and identify other review flexibilities	Support this action as it is already part of the FIW's recommendations for COP 20. For EFPs with potential effects that lie within the effects of actions already considered, a process longer than one meeting is unnecessary.
7. Make technical edits and updates to the COPs	Support the action to make technical edits to all EFP COPs. It is still unclear what an umbrella COP might look like and should not be considered until the FIW has completed its work.
8. Develop criteria for considering EFPs outside of designated windows	Do not proceed with this Action as it is unnecessary. Encouraging review of applications outside of designated windows makes analyses more difficult because requested fishing activity may not be well synched with regular harvest management schedules.
9. Frontload environmental analyses and build in flexibilities	Support this action as many of the flexibilities considered under other actions within this priority area would not be possible if Action 9 is not taken.

	MSA and ESA analyses would need to be frontloaded. NEPA analyses for EFPs should theoretically be covered by categorical exclusions, but that depends on the potential effects of the activity contemplated under the EFP.
10. Create more efficiency, consistency, and accessibility for EFP reporting and data	Federal regulations on EFPs at 50 CFR 660.745 have Paperwork Reduction Act coverage but explicitly state that no forms or templates are required. Creating forms or templates would require PRA compliance work. Additionally, if the action is expected to result in new reporting requirements, those should be established through rulemaking, not just changes to COPs.
11. Establish a “checkpoint” schedule for considering EFP-informed management changes	Do not proceed with a universal checkpoint schedule across FMPs. Support consideration of checkpoint schedules on an FMP-by-FMP or case-by-case basis.
12. Create templates for assessing risk and scientific uncertainty to use when considering an EFP-informed regulatory change	Do not proceed with a universal template across FMPs. Support consideration of templates on an FMP-by-FMP or case-by-case basis.

Priority Area: Improved Processes for Data Streams and Integration of Local and Indigenous Knowledge

The staff report for this priority area ([Agenda Item H.1, Attachment 4](#)) identifies five potential actions for the Council. In discussing this priority area, the EWG followed the guidance of the staff report and discussed only the potential collection and use of Local Knowledge. The EWG’s Tribal seat is recently vacant and filling that seat would be essential for any future discussions of potential collection and use of Indigenous Knowledge. **The EWG:**

- **Recommends supporting Action 3, Fishery Performance Reports, in combination with Action 2, Fishermen’s Roundtables.**
- **Notes that the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) version of [Fishery Performance Reports](#) provide insightful, big-picture discussions of the ecosystem and economic factors faced by fishery participants, providing the MAFMC with thoughtful assessments of near- and long-term fishery management challenges that may be coming to the council floor. If the Council moves forward with Action 3, the EWG recommends that the scope and potential application(s) of the reports be clearly defined.**
- **Notes that reports combining the work of Actions 2 and 3 could serve as source documents for a variety of Council analysis documents, including some of the**

required contents of FMPs found in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Table 3, Priority Area: Improved Process for Data Streams and Integration of Local and Indigenous Knowledge	
Action Item	Recommendation
1a. Email Portal for Sharing On-the-Water Observations for Inclusion in California Current Ecosystem Status Report (ESR)	The Council could work with Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission to develop a portal for information sharing; however, Action 1a and 1b are not actions the Council can take but are requests that the Council can make of NMFS.
1b. New ESR Section or Appendix for On-the-Water Observations	Using fishery observations to corroborate and enrich the scientific information in the ESR is a strength. However, there has been an ongoing interest in seeing on-the-water knowledge play a role in shaping and evaluating specific management measures. Historically, the ESR has provided a wide range of scientific context for the Council's broad management planning, rather than being used to develop specific management measures.
2. Fishermen's Roundtables	The EWG supports a combination of Actions 2 and 3, so that the structured conversations of the Fishery Performance Reports, as described in MAFMC reports, could occur during roundtable sessions or at other fora. It should be noted that the cadence of convening roundtables should reflect clear predetermined goals and objectives.
3. Fishery Performance Reports	In combination with other sources of information (e.g., gathered at fishermen's roundtables), information from these reports could potentially be incorporated into a new column of a risk table, if the new column were used to inform a choice of P*.
4. On-the-Water Observations Feedback Tool	The EWG recognizes there would be benefit to having on-the-water knowledge and suggests that this kind of tool might be useful for sharing information between fishermen about near-term high bycatch locations. However, the EWG also notes that information-sharing would not flow through Council actions, which is the goal of this Special Project. Any pilot project would need to be bounded in scope in terms of the goal of this Special Project and identify the audience being targeted to engage and provide feedback.
5. Workshop to Identify LK Priorities and Pathways	If the Council is unable to narrow the scope of actions at this April meeting, a workshop might help with expanding or prioritizing potential actions.

Priority Area: Council Action Meeting Requirements

The staff report for this priority area ([Agenda Item, H.1, Attachment 5](#)) asks whether Council staff should develop “draft criteria and a proposed approach to applying that criteria when determining if an action could be completed in fewer meetings than under status quo.”

The EWG recommends that the Council not proceed with this action. The EWG notes that the Council already has language in its FMPs to address this issue. As suggested in the report for this priority area, the phrase “normally require” is adequate to ensure that the Council discusses action items at as many, or as few, meetings as are needed to complete the decision-making process.

PFMC

04/09/26