

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS REPORT FROM THE FEBRUARY 27-28, 2018 COUNCIL
COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING

The Council Coordination Committee (CCC) met February 27-28, 2018 in Washington, D.C. West Coast attendees included Mr. Anderson, Mr. Crabbe, Mr. Wulff, and Mr. Tracy. The agenda and presentation materials are available on-line at <http://www.fisherycouncils.org/ccc-meetings/february-2018>.

Opening Remarks

Chris Oliver opened the meeting by identifying three administration priorities:

- Sustainable management while maximizing fishing opportunities
- Ensuring protected resources issues are addressed in fishery management decisions
- Organizational excellence, as reflected by regulatory efficiency

He cited several areas of importance including scientific contributions to assessment, Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation efficiency, seafood production from fisheries and aquaculture, and recreational opportunities. He noted that filling leadership positions at the Southwest, Southeast, and Alaska Fisheries Science Centers would be forthcoming. He also mentioned the importance of achieving optimum yield in wild capture fisheries, citing as an example of needed improvements, the West Coast groundfish fisheries.

Aquaculture

Paul Doremus discussed the importance of aquaculture to U.S. seafood production, and the proposed application of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) science-based principles to aquaculture development. He requested advice from the Regional Councils on how to integrate aquaculture products into the seafood industry and supply chain.

Michael Rubino gave a presentation on marine aquaculture. The Councils were requested to offer advice, engagement, expertise on issues, and, as appropriate, to develop regional fishery management plans (FMPs) for aquaculture in marine waters. There were questions about the proposed use of partnerships and grants to advance aquaculture given the President's proposed budget cuts to Sea Grant and Saltonstall-Kennedy grants; the need to incorporate aquaculture programs into the Regional Fishery Management Council's FMPs, including consideration of aquaculture impacts to essential fish habitat (EFH) and habitat areas of particular concern; how the Councils and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) would be involved in state-waters programs; and the availability of siting models to help Councils and applicants with decision making.

Regulatory Reform

Alan Risenhoover gave an update on the regulatory reform process. He noted that the withdrawal of the hard caps rule for our swordfish drift gillnet fishery was considered a deregulatory action. One objective of the process is to reduce review time by 25% for ESA Section 7 and Critical Habitat consultations.

Legislative Update

The CCC received the following legislative updates from Jeff Lewis, Fern Gibbons, and Dave Whaley.

MSA reauthorization is proceeding at a moderate pace with H.R. 200 and S. 1520 as the likely vehicles, although some amendments will be forthcoming.

An aquaculture bill is expected from the Senate soon that would establish an aquaculture division at each National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Regional Office.

Although Sea Grant and Saltonstall-Kennedy funding is zeroed out in the President's FY19 budget, those programs maintain strong congressional support and are likely to be funded.

Offshore Oil and Gas Leases

The CCC drafted a letter on the proposed Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's oil and gas lease proposal, but was unable to come to a consensus on a recommendation. The CCC recommended each Council consider submitting its own comments, then reconsider the issue at the May CCC meeting. It is expected that another comment period will be open later this year after the first round of comments are addressed, and that the list of lease areas are likely to be reduced during that process.

Management and Budget Update

Brian Pawlak provided a budget update, which indicated generally stable funding for the Council's in FY18, ranging from a 2.2% decrease in the President's budget to no change in the Senate mark. At this time, status quo activities for 2018 should be expected, and the Councils should expect a second funding award in March.

Planning for the 2019 budget is ongoing. Items of note in the President's proposal are eliminating funding for the Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund, Sea Grant and Saltonstall-Kennedy programs, and Joint Enforcement Agreements. Overall, NOAA's Fiscal Year 19 budget in the administration's proposal is down over a billion dollars.

Recusal Proposed Rule

Adam Issenberg reported that a proposed rule would be out before the May CCC meeting, and that public comment would be open through the summer. Their goal is to have a final rule by the end of 2018.

Electronic Monitoring

Brett Alger and Cisco Werner provided an update on electronic technology implementation planning. A draft procedural directive on electronic monitoring (EM) cost sharing is expected to be available for Council review this spring, with a target for finalization this fall. Issues being addressed in separate processes include data access, ownership, confidentiality, EM standards, and new guidance for updating the current regional electronic technology implementation plans scheduled for 2019.

Ecosystem and Climate Regional Plans

Sam Rauch reported that the 2016 ecosystem based fishery management (EBFM) policy and roadmap has been released, and NMFS is in the process of developing draft regional implementation plans with council staff participation. The next steps will be a May 2018 CCC progress briefing, an opportunity for Council comments in the June-September timeframe, and a targeted completion time of December 2018. The regional plans are intended to help coordinate regional science and management priorities, develop engagement strategies, and document implementation progress. The plans are aspirational, with no prescriptive measures.

Cisco Werner reported the Climate Science Regional Action Plans are intended to support the EBFM approach with climate vulnerability assessment, target research to improve forecasts, and evaluate alternative management strategies.

Marine Recreational Information Program

Ned Cyr reported that the East Coast and Gulf States are transitioning to a new recreational effort estimation procedure that relies on a mail survey rather than a telephone survey. They have found that effort estimates are more accurate, but also result in substantially higher estimates of effort and therefore catch (three to six times higher for boat and bank estimates). Historical estimates back through 1981 will be adjusted, and in turn, stock assessments, annual catch limits, and allocations will be reviewed using the new catch estimates.

Best Scientific Information Available

Rick Methot presented a draft White Paper on the best scientific information available (BSIA) determination process for stock status determinations and stock assessments. The White Paper focused on how and when BSIA is ultimately decided, what the role of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) is, and how the determination is documented. There were still several issues where clarifications are needed, including differences in how standard and data limited assessments are handled; how to ensure the Council process is not delayed if determinations occur after Council final action; and how NMFS plans on alerting the SSC to potential science and management concerns. NMFS has requested the Councils review the revised draft White Paper and provide comments by the May 2018 CCC meeting or by July 2018 at the latest; they intend to finalize the paper by fall 2018.

National Standard 1 Guidelines

Alan Risenhoover announced a proposed process to update the National Standard 1 Guidelines with additional technical guidance. Three subgroups will be established to address the following: using reference point proxies, status determination criteria (SDC) for species aggregates and multiyear overfishing SDC; harvest control rules using carryover and phase in approaches; and data gaps and alternative approaches for annual catch limits in data limited situations. Council staff participation will be welcome on the workgroups, which will be convened this year, with a target of having products for review by the CCC in 2019.

The Pacific Council provided a brief summary of the CCC's Scientific Coordination Committee meeting hosted by the Pacific Council in January of this year.

CCC Annual Meeting

The next meeting of the CCC will be May 22-24 in Sitka, Alaska. Topics on the agenda at this time are a budget update, legislative update, EM cost allocation update, EBFM regional implementation plans, and research prioritization process.

PFMC
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