

Staff suggestions for Tribal organization representation on the SSPT

November 29, 2018¹

During staff tasking in October 2018, the Council requested that staff bring back suggestions for a process for the Council to select an SSPT member to broadly represent Tribal organizations. Staff has provided the following feedback.

Staff suggests the Council clarify affiliations eligible to be considered on the SSPT.

Language in the SSPT draft terms of reference (TOR) and from the June 2018 call for nominations states, “membership shall generally be limited to affiliates of public organizations and academic institutions,” and the draft TOR continues on to list examples of representing agencies. This language created some confusion about who the Council intended to target with this call for nominations in June 2018, and whether affiliation did/should matter in this and other calls for nomination. This language is broad enough to incorporate an array of affiliations (e.g. affiliates of state/ federal/ local/Tribal government, even perhaps publicly funded (non-profit) sector organizations). Other plan teams also have very broad language on membership in their TOR,² but in practice, the Council has constrained plan team appointments to scientists and management staff from state and federal agencies, NPFMC, IPHC, and university-affiliated scientists.³ In contrast, the Council typically looks to the Advisory Panel or Committees to solicit diverse stakeholder advice, including from non-profits or fishing organizations that may employ scientists and experts. Because of the ambiguity between the written language in the SSPT charter, and the Council’s application of Plan Team affiliation requirements in practice, providing clarification on which affiliations are eligible to be considered for membership on the SSPT would be a step towards fostering transparency and a shared understanding on this issue.

If the Council agrees that it would be helpful to clarify this issue, there are a few different ways to proceed.

- It may be the Council is ready to articulate this interpretation relative to the SSPT at this meeting, which could be included in the TOR.
- It may be that the Council wishes to evaluate its long-term intention for the balance of membership on the SSPT (see further discussion below), which again could be articulated in the TOR at a later date.
- Or, the Council may choose to consider the question of membership and affiliation more broadly for all of its plan teams. Council staff is in the process of developing a guidance document or Handbook for the plan teams, with the intent this guidance would be available in Spring 2019. This handbook is meant to be an operational guide for the plan teams, not necessarily a Council policy document. However, this may present the chance to think more holistically about membership for the groups and develop Council policy if warranted. This policy could be

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² For instance, the groundfish plan teams TOR states, “Plan Team members will be appointed from government agencies and academic institutions having expertise relating to the groundfish fisheries of the BS/AI and GOA.” Even more broadly, the crab and scallop plan team TOR states, “Plan Team members will be appointed from government agencies, academic institutions, and organizations having expertise relating to the (crab fisheries of the BS/AI) (scallop fisheries)”.

³ Membership and affiliations for plan team members are listed on their webpages:

For groundfish: <https://www.npfmc.org/fishery-management-plan-team/goa-bsai-groundfish-plan-team/>

For crab: <https://www.npfmc.org/fishery-management-plan-team/bsai-crab-plan-team/>

For scallop: <https://www.npfmc.org/fishery-management-plan-team/scallop-plan-team/>

clarified in a policy document similar to the Council Committee guidance that the Council reviewed earlier this year.

In addition to clarifying who is eligible to be considered for the SSPT through its TOR, the Council may also choose to indicate how it would like to weigh merit and affiliation during each call for nominations. For instance, the Council may be sending a different message and could expect to receive different candidates if it asked for nominations specially from ADF&G Subsistence Division versus if it asked for an individual with expertise in subsistence halibut harvest. It is possible that both affiliation and professional qualification may be a factor of consideration in either case; however, these factors would likely be weighed differently depending on what language the Council provides during its call for nominations.

Staff suggests the Council clarify the role it is looking to fill on the SSPT (i.e. public representation or scientific knowledge?).

Before determining a process for identification of an individual to broadly represent Tribal organizations, staff would benefit from clarification on the role the Council is seeking to fill on the SSPT. Is the objective more about getting a certain type of scientific knowledge that may not be available in State/ Federal government agencies or among academics, or more about getting specific representation on the team? Depending on what the Council is looking to augment, different approaches may be suggested.

If the Council is seeking specific expertise/ scientific information (e.g. more members that have expertise in local and traditional knowledge), the current call for nominations process may suffice. However, it may be important to pair this nomination process with a clarification of the affiliations that are eligible and/or if there are certain affiliations the Council is seeking in particular. This will provide guidance to the public who may apply, and guidance to the SSC in how to weight merit and affiliation. For instance, perhaps the Council wishes to clarify that any affiliate of a public organization may be eligible, and the SSC should exclusively focus on professional qualification metrics. Or perhaps the Council is specifically looking for a social scientist that is Tribally-affiliated (possibly defined as having been nominated by a Tribe or Tribal organization) and requests the SSC consider this in addition to other professional qualification metrics when suggesting a candidate. This clarification will add transparency to the process.

If the Council's objective is to designate a specific seat on the SSPT for one individual to represent Tribes/ Tribal organizations broadly, it may be that a special process is warranted. Under the current call for nominations process if there were multiple nominees, it may be difficult to identify a single candidate to speak on behalf of (or from the perspective of) all Tribes and/or Tribal organizations. As previously mentioned, it is not unusual for affiliation to be a factor in seating a plan team member; however, as there are 229 Tribes in Alaska, it may create equity issues if one (or some) Tribe's perspectives were represented on the team and others were not. If the Council wishes to proceed down this route, we can consider other, creative ways to identify a candidate, likely starting with outreach to Tribes and Tribal organizations. Initial discussions by staff have not yet identified an obvious solution to this request.

To provide some additional context, local knowledge (LK) and traditional knowledge (TK) are information gaps highlighted in the SSPT's draft Gap Analysis. The SSPT recently discussed its role in relation to the task of incorporation of LK and TK into the Council process (see SSPT minutes⁴). There was discussion from some members that perhaps this task was best addressed through the Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan (BS FEP), LK/TK Action Module team. With the possibility that this group will soon be assembled with the specific purpose of addressing this knowledge gap in the Council process, there may be redundancy in having the SSPT spearhead this effort as well. This Action Module team may

⁴ <https://meetings.npfmc.org/CommentReview/DownloadFile?p=62af9099-7575-4082-874f-e31c3bf6e83c.pdf&fileName=D8%20SSPT%20Minutes.pdf>

be intentionally geared to broader representation and affiliations. Diverse stakeholder perspective could be critical in understanding what successful incorporation of this information into the Council process would look like. In addition, while the SSPT is intended to improve data accessibility and usability, the SSPT is not constructed as a “working group”; i.e. it may not have the time or resources to devote to advancing this particularly nuanced information gap, even with one member who could broadly represent Tribal organizations. Moreover, this type of knowledge sometimes extends outside the realms of social science and may be regarded differently than other social science data or qualitative information. As there is overlap for the SSPT charged with improving quality and application of social science data that informs management, it will be advantageous to foster communication with a working group focused on incorporated this information into the Council process.