

Discussion Paper: Community Engagement at the NPFMC

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1 Introduction

In April 2018, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) requested that staff prepare a preliminary assessment of ideas for improving engagement by rural and Alaska Native communities in the Council process. The Council has heard requests to either reconstitute the Rural Outreach Committee or develop a new ad-hoc committee to consider community engagement strategies. The Council is also considering ideas to foster community engagement. Council staff have identified several questions that will improve the recommendations that staff can provide to the Council. This paper will present those questions and considerations for both a Community Engagement Committee (CEC) and a Request for Proposals (RFP) for community engagement strategies. It should be noted that the Council has not authorized any new committee or made any formal request for proposals at this time; this paper is intended to help the Council scope out what direction to take.

2 Existing opportunities for Outreach and Engagement in the Council process

In April 2018 the Council reviewed a discussion paper providing an overview of the Council’s rural community outreach activities. The paper was requested by the Council in response to requests from the public to reconsider ways that the Council conducts outreach to rural and Alaska Native communities. The paper provided background and history of the Council’s Rural Outreach Committee (ROC) and the ROC’s recommendations for a three-tiered approach to outreach that includes statewide, regional, and project specific tools. The ROC recommendations have been successfully applied to many Council projects; the April 2018 discussion paper summarized the application to chum salmon bycatch reduction and Chinook salmon bycatch reduction projects in the Bering Sea. The April 2018 paper also noted that the Council is considering more general, programmatic initiatives such as the Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan and abundance-based halibut management for which the ROC’s recommended three-tier approach may not be as effective in fostering community engagement.

After discussion of the April 2018 paper during Staff Tasking, the Council directed staff to prepare a discussion paper to consider opportunities and challenges for a Community Engagement Committee and a request for proposals for suggestions for how the Council might improve its community engagement activities. One consideration for setting up a committee is to think how its scope will fit within the Council’s existing advisory structure. The Council is advised by a number of advisory bodies, committees, and teams established by the Council, which by design present opportunities for public comment and engagement throughout the Council decision-making process.

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- The Advisory Panel (AP) is appointed by the Council, and composed of members that represent major segments of the fishing industry, subsistence users, consumers, environmental organizations, and recreational fishers. The Council relies on the AP for comprehensive advice on how various fishery management alternatives will affect the industry and local economies, on potential conflicts between user groups of a given fishery resource or area, and on the extent to which the United States will utilize resources managed by the Council's Fishery Management Plans. The AP reviews and provides recommendations on nearly all items that come before the Council. The AP also provides opportunity for public comment on all items on its agenda.
- The Council also establishes issue-specific committees to assist in the collection, evaluation, and dissemination of important information relevant to the Council's actions. Council committees are appointed by the Council chairman, and composed of public representatives from multiple stakeholders and communities throughout Alaska, Washington, and Oregon and are selected to provide varied expertise and perspectives from stakeholders. All Council committees provide opportunity for written comments and many provide opportunities for public testimony, at the chairman's discretion. Public committees advising the Council include the Charter Halibut Management Committee, Ecosystem Committee, Electronic Monitoring Workgroup, IFQ Committee, Observer Advisory Committee, Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee, and Recreational Quota Entity Committee.
- Fishery Management Plan Teams are appointed by the Council from agencies and organizations that have a role in the research or management of Alaska fisheries. Plan teams are designed to work effectively and provide expertise covering all important aspects of a particular fishery. The Plan Teams provide the Council with review and recommendations of fishery stock assessments and information on ecosystem and economic issues as they relate to groundfish, crab, and scallop fisheries of the BSAI and GOA. Plan teams meet one to three times annually in public meetings to compile Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) reports that provide the Council with a summary of the most recent biological condition of the fishery stocks and the social and economic conditions of the fishing and processing industries.
- The Social Science Planning Team (SSPT) was established by the Council to facilitate and enhance the use of social science data in the management process. The SSPT supports collection and aggregation of social science data in a manner that cuts across Fishery Management Plans and specific management programs within the North Pacific region. The SSPT is an opportunity for members of rural and Alaska Native communities to engage in discussions about the social science priorities in the Council process. At its first meeting the SSPT was presented information about subsistence harvests in Alaska, estimated harvests by region and census area, regional patterns of fish and wildlife harvests in contemporary Alaska, and updates and overviews of subsistence data. The SSPT also held a discussion of subsistence data availability, quality, and needs and how to incorporate LTK and stakeholder engagement in the Council process and held a facilitated discussion of the role of LTK/TEK and citizen science information into science and management. The SSPT also provides scheduled opportunities for oral and written public testimony at its meetings.
- The Council initiated development of a Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan (BSFEP) in 2017. Fishery Ecosystem Plans are a tool that can serve as a framework for continued incorporation of ecosystem goals and actions in regional management. The draft BSFEP is being prepared by the BSFEP Plan Team and will be reviewed by the Council in October 2018. Working drafts of the BSFEP have been reviewed several times by the NPFMC Ecosystem Committee at public meetings and included opportunity for public input. The BSFEP will include sections on ways that LTK and knowledge co-produced by Alaska Native and academic partnerships can be

incorporated into the Council process. Communication and engagement strategies are planned to be part of the recommendations from the BSFEP. Information and recommendations from the BSFEP are likely to be applicable to other regions of Alaska.

The following sections identify some key questions as well as general considerations for a CEC and RFP.

3 Questions for the Council

During discussions amongst Council staff, it became clear that there are a number of questions that should be addressed by the Council before recommendations can be made about a CEC or a specific request for proposals. The following lists some substantive questions that would help the Council consider next steps.

1. What is the objective for this action?

As noted above, there are existing opportunities for the public to engage in the Council process. Council committees and other advisory bodies meet regularly and are composed of representatives from many different stakeholders from many different communities. Council staff and Council members also undertake project-specific outreach on many projects.

One question that was discussed by staff is which communities in particular are intended for engagement. Is this primarily targeted to improve engagement with geographical communities, for example remote Alaska communities? With Alaska native communities or groups? Or is the focus specific to users who are under-represented in the Council process? And if Alaska communities, is there a particular geographic focus, or would it be appropriate to consider a phased-in approach since much of the testimony that the Council has heard on this issue has been from stakeholders in the Bering Sea?

2. Is the intention to better communicate decisions and actions of the Council, or to solicit information that the Council does not now have that it needs to manage fisheries?

Different strategies for engagement would be considered if the Council wishes to better communicate its decisions and actions affecting commercial fishery management with stakeholders, for example in rural or Alaska Native communities in Alaska, so that interested persons can use appropriate mechanisms to engage with the Council. Alternatively, the Council may feel that there is a need to solicit information from stakeholders in rural or Alaska Native communities in Alaska which is lacking from the process currently; this would entail a different approach. For example, some regional Councils employ public information officers to disseminate information to stakeholders, and others have multiple advisory panels in different regions to address region specific management actions.

3. Does the Council intend a potential committee to take over the project-specific communications that now occur, or is its purpose more process-related?

There are many actions that Council staff and members have taken for communications regarding specific actions (e.g., salmon bycatch actions) in multiple communities and regions of Alaska. It is likely that many of the activities (community visits, conference calls, etc.) would be common to project-specific and programmatic communication strategies. It will be important to consider whether the role of a committee, like the previous Rural Outreach Committee, is to advise on ways of engagement for the Council, or whether the committee would specifically be conducting engagement activities, both at programmatic and project-specific levels.

4 Considerations for a potential Community Engagement Committee

The Council's Rural Outreach Committee was established in 2009 to advise the Council on ways to provide opportunities for better understanding and participation from Alaska Native and rural communities in the Council process, and recommendations on which proposed Council actions could benefit from a specific outreach plan. The recommendations from the ROC have been successfully applied on many Council actions. However, the Council has heard from representatives from some rural communities about convening an ad-hoc committee or redirecting the ROC to consider ways to enhance two-way engagement between the Council and rural and Alaska Native communities. A CEC tasked with identifying and recommending ways for the Council to engage rural and Alaska Native communities could allow better engagement and two-way communication with Alaska fishery stakeholders that have heretofore had limited participation.

If the Council wishes to establish a CEC at this point, a draft charter is suggested:

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council's Community Engagement Committee is established to identify and recommend strategies for the Council and Council staff to enact processes that provide effective community engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities. Community engagement involves two-way communication between the Council and communities at all stages of a project and allows for community concerns and priorities to be shared clearly with the Council, whether part of an active Council action or not.

The Council is currently developing terms of reference (TORs) for its existing committees. It is assumed that a CEC would apply any standard TORs and additional terms, as appropriate.

Membership in a CEC is suggested to include members with the appropriate expertise to develop recommendations for engaging with rural and Alaska Native communities, including representatives from various regions in Alaska (may include all or some from Bering Straits, Western Alaska, Aleutian and Pribilof Islands, Southcentral, Southeast), anthropologists, subsistence specialists, community planners, etc. Expertise in fishery management is not necessarily a requirement for membership on a CEC.

A CEC may meet regularly to review and recommend changes to community engagement strategies or may meet as required or requested by the Council to address specific issues. It is anticipated that a sitting Council member would be the chairman of the CEC. The CEC would be staffed by the Council staff member with the most appropriate expertise.

5 Request for proposals for community engagement strategies

Once a CEC has been established, its first order of business could be to call for proposals from the public. These proposals would be meant to enhance the Council's community engagement strategies. The CEC would review proposals from the public and develop recommendations based on input from those proposals. The CEC would identify its priorities and identify the types of information that it would request in the RFP. This allows a more focused and efficient process than making a call for proposals without establishing clear objectives and priorities. It is the recommendation from Council staff that the CEC be established before calling for proposals from the public to allow the CEC to establish its objectives and priorities.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The Council has been requested by some members of the public to consider ways to increase the Council's engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities. While the project-specific outreach that Council staff have conducted for several years is largely seen as effective and appropriate, the programmatic initiatives now considered by the Council may require different strategies to facilitate two-way communication between the Council and rural and Alaska Native stakeholders.

There are a number of questions that the Council should address before specific actions are identified to foster communication with rural and Alaska Native communities. To address these and other questions, **the Council may consider holding a moderated workshop specifically reviewing the Councils outreach and community engagement strategies, and identifying objectives for a committee and/or request for proposals.** A moderated review may more efficiently identify gaps in the Council's strategies and suggest alternatives that the Council and staff have not considered. Staff suggests that the workshop include an invited panel to provide perspectives from the agency, Council, tribal governance, and rural community governance, and other representation that the Council identifies. The workshop should be open to the public to allow a broad discussion of panel perspectives. If the Council chooses to go down this path, a small workgroup would identify potential panelists, moderators, and other logistics.

Staff recommends a moderated workshop as the first step to develop community engagement strategies. This approach would allow the Council time to identify the appropriate objectives, scope, and priorities of this engagement effort, and that will specifically inform the composition of a committee if the Council chooses to move in that direction.

A Community Engagement Committee may provide the Council with recommendations on ways to maximize community engagement at all points in Council actions and provide opportunities for communities to share their priorities and concerns with the Council outside of the normal Council action process.

If a CEC is formed and populated by the Council, one of its responsibilities could be to call for proposals from the public to identify community engagement strategies for consideration by the committee. Allowing the committee to manage a proposals process is likely to result in a more focused and efficient process.