



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

THE DIRECTOR

APR 06 2016

Mr. Chris Oliver
Executive Director
North Pacific Fisheries Management Council
605 W. 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501-2252

Dear Mr. Oliver:

Thank you for your letter regarding NOAA Fisheries' stock assessment prioritization plan. We developed this plan in response to a 2010 request from the Office of Management and Budget, as well as extensive Congressional interest, as to how the agency prioritizes stock assessments. The focus of the prioritization process is to ensure efficient, consistent, and transparent decision-making related to stock assessment planning within each region. We did not develop the Prioritization Plan in order to reallocate budget resources across regions; in fact, because the process allows for regional planners to adjust the weight of each prioritization factor in accordance with regional priorities, results will not be directly comparable across regions.

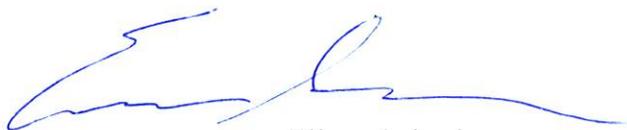
We fully recognize and appreciate that fisheries management in the North Pacific is highly effective, efficient, and operates within a collaborative and trusting environment. These are the hallmarks of successful and sustainable fisheries management and we do not wish to compromise this success in any way. Implementation of the prioritization process should provide yet another forum for constructive engagement on regional decisions and priorities. Because managers and regional experts have roles to play in the prioritization process, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) and its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will be consulted on a regular basis as part of the process.

The prioritization results are intended to provide material to be considered when setting assessment schedules rather than to be prescriptive. Regional planners may deviate from the recommendations, given transparent and reasoned justification. Also, we recognize that there are risks associated with changes in the existing process for assessment prioritization and agree that the effects of potential changes (such as reduced assessment frequency in the Alaska region) should be analyzed before implementation (e.g., using management strategy evaluation). The Alaska Fisheries Science Center has developed a timeline and a work plan that will incorporate Regional and Council feedback and an evaluation of the potential implications of altering the current assessment frequency by the end of this year. By examining the scale and frequency of assessments for NPFMC-managed stocks, assessment analysts will best be able to achieve a balance between assessment updates and assessments incorporating more expansive efforts such as climate vulnerability and linkages to ecosystem processes. We agree to share the results from these analyses with the NPFMC and its SSC prior to finalizing any decisions regarding changes to the way in which stock assessments are prioritized.



I appreciate your interest in the stock assessment prioritization process and look forward to working with you to help your Council best meet your management needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eileen Sobeck', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Eileen Sobeck
Assistant Administrator
For Fisheries

