

North Pacific Fishery Management Council
Status of Ecosystem Based Fishery Management (EBFM)
development process and actions, May 2014

Summary of EBFM actions

The North Pacific Council has utilized an ecosystem approach to fisheries for many years. The Council views EBFM as a process, and is constantly improving the fishery management program as new information or tools become available. EBFM is not something that is tied to a single management measure or analytical document.

- Management policy
 - Ecosystem approach and vision statement adopted as Council policy in Feb 2014 (for all Council actions in all fisheries) – *see attachment*
 - Comprehensive ecosystem-based goals and objectives for groundfish FMPs (from 2004)
 - Council has strict policy of science-based decision-making, and adherence to SSC advice
- Management measures:
 - Conservative ACLs
 - OY cap on total groundfish yield; Arctic FMP reduces OY to 0 (based on the results of an ecosystem assessment)
 - Individual TACs for all species or species groups (based on lowest common denominator species)
 - Groundfish control rule with automatic rebuilding
 - Ecosystem considerations included qualitatively in each stock assessment
 - No directed fishing for forage fish
 - Habitat, marine mammal/seabird, bycatch protections
 - Broad time/area closures, bottom trawl restrictions
 - Gear modifications (biodegradable panels, salmon/halibut excluder devices, seabird deterrents, elevated trawl sweeps)
 - Bycatch limits on non-FMP species (salmon, halibut, herring, crab, forage fish)
 - Coastal community protections included in limited entry programs
- Ecosystem reports and FEPs
 - Annual ecosystem considerations report prepared as part of annual harvest specifications, including assessments by ecosystem region
 - Aleutian Islands Fishery Ecosystem Plan adopted in 2007, which identifies key ecosystem interactions and includes a preliminary risk assessment
 - Scoping currently underway for a Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan
- Public input and advice
 - Council Ecosystem Committee
 - established in mid-1990s, reconstituted in 2005, new chair in 2013
 - provides recommendations on EBFM, habitat, conservation issues
 - Stakeholder inclusive process
 - Fishing industry is actively involved in efforts to ensure the sustainability of fish stocks and mitigation of environmental impacts, through Council measures and also independent certification programs
 - Council is also responsive when new information suggests need for conservation (most recently, evaluations of the Bering Sea canyons)

- Adoption of outreach policy in 2008 increased Council's efforts to engage affected stakeholders that are not traditionally involved in the Council process

Process

1. What were the EBFM goals and objectives that the Council/Agency chose?
 - Council adopted an overarching ecosystem policy statement recently (see attached), with the following vision statement:
 - *The Council envisions sustainable fisheries that provide benefits for harvesters, processors, recreational and subsistence users, and fishing communities, which (1) are maintained by healthy, productive, biodiverse, resilient marine ecosystems that support a range of services; (2) support robust populations of marine species at all trophic levels, including marine mammals and seabirds; and (3) are managed using a precautionary, transparent, and inclusive process that allows for analyses of tradeoffs, accounts for changing conditions, and mitigates threats.*
 - More specific objectives are articulated in the groundfish management policy statement (adopted in 2004), which includes goal statements and objectives addressing overfishing; sustainable fisheries and communities; the food web; incidental catch, bycatch, and waste; seabirds and marine mammals; habitat; equitable and efficient use of fishery resources; Alaska Native consultation; and data quality, monitoring and enforcement.
 - The AI FEP had specific objectives: create a user-friendly synthesis of available ecosystem information from multiple sources in one place; highlight important ecosystem considerations for an area that is often dwarfed in importance by its larger, more productive neighbor (the Bering Sea); develop ecosystem indicators and new research tools and models; identify research needs and data gaps. The FEP was consciously designed as a guidance document for the Council, rather than a document with legal standing such as an FMP¹. The intent was that all management actions would continue to be analyzed and implemented through the regular Council process, but would be informed by the FEP at every stage in the process.
2. What mechanism or document made them effective? Was the FEP or guidance document formally approved by NMFS?
 - The Council adopted the vision statement as a Council guidance document, it has not been formally approved by NMFS (nor has that approval been requested).
 - The Council's groundfish management policy was formally recommended as an amendment to the groundfish FMPs, and went through the NMFS review process (and was supported by a Programmatic SEIS analysis).
 - The Council also developed an FEP for the Aleutian Islands (AI), one of the 4 major ecoregions in Alaska. This also is a Council guidance document, and while NMFS scientists were primary authors of the document, it was not formally approved by NMFS as it does not have implementing regulations.

¹ In part this was because the primary fisheries in the area occur under the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish FMP, and during the scoping process, it was determined that the advantage of independent Aleutian Islands management did not outweigh the complexity of revising the FMP to separate the areas.

3. What process was followed to develop and define EBFM goals and objectives, procedures, and policies? How was public input about the FEP or guidance document sought and considered during EBFM development? Did you develop a scoping document and conduct public hearings?
 - The ecosystem vision statement/policy was developed by the Council's Ecosystem Committee. The Committee has nine members, six of whom represent different stakeholder constituencies (three are agency representatives). The committee chair accepts public testimony during committee meetings, and many members of the public attended and provided comments on the Committee's development work. The Council also chose to put the vision statement out specifically for public review, and also heard further public input during its deliberations.
 - For development of the AI FEP, a scientific writing team was constituted with interagency representatives. All meetings were public, and the writing team reported to the Ecosystem Committee and the Council over the course of several meetings, where public input was also received. To initiate the project, the Council requested several discussion (scoping) papers, first on options for spatial management in the Aleutian Islands, and then once an FEP had been selected, on how an FEP should look and what it should accomplish. Public input on the discussion papers was through the regular Council process. Members of the team undertook two outreach meetings to communities in the area during the development of the FEP (the AI is a sparsely populated area).
 - The Council is currently considering whether to initiate an FEP for the Bering Sea. A discussion paper has been prepared setting out possible objectives for the FEP, which are likely to be different from the objectives of the AI FEP. Public hearings in three cities have been scheduled for public input, and the Council is scheduled to make a decision on next steps in October 2014. The scoping flyer is attached.
4. How were the EBFM/FEP plans or guidelines received by management agencies and the public? Was there a formal agency review and/or approval?
 - The AI FEP was well received by the agency and the public, and met its objectives. A 'glossy' companion to the FEP summarized its key scientific information in ~20 pages, and this overview has been widely shared among stakeholders and further afield. The FEP formed the basis of the process for selecting key indicators for the annual AI ecosystem assessment, and was successful in highlighting research gaps. Information about the AI ecosystem has been used as appropriate in Council analyses.
 - As described in question 2 above, there was no formal agency approval, as the AI FEP made no regulatory change.
5. Were the EBFM/FEP plans or guidelines integrated across functional and/or geographical jurisdictions? If so, how were the other regulatory bodies brought into the process?
 - The AI FEP focused on fisheries occurring in the AI ecosystem area, and understanding ecosystem dynamics relative to informing fishery management. There are three Council FMPs that occur in the AI area, as well as the halibut fishery over which the Council has jurisdiction over allocation. There are also some State managed groundfish fisheries in State waters. The interagency writing team included members from other agencies, in order to bring in information from a variety of sources.
 - The Council's EBFM discussions during the development of the groundfish management policy (2004) and the AI FEP also highlighted the influence of non-fishing activities on the ecosystem, and in response the Council developed the Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum (AMEF) as a venue to communicate with other agencies about issues affecting the marine ecosystem. The AMEF comprises the Council, 10 Federal agencies, and 4 State

agencies, all with jurisdiction over the marine ecosystem off Alaska, in order to promote dialogue and information exchange.

6. Looking back, what should have been done differently to develop EBFM/FEP plans or guidelines? What future actions and initiatives do you anticipate?
 - The AI FEP did not include action items for the Council, in terms of detailing specifically how the FEP should be used in the Council process. The ways in which it has been used to date have been largely ad hoc. The discussion paper for the proposed Bering Sea FEP recommends that if the FEP could be used to direct specific management action of some kind, this would provide added value to justify the time and resources that would need to be devoted to such a project.

Ecosystem Approach for the North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Value Statement

The Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea, and Aleutian Islands are some of the most biologically productive and unique marine ecosystems in the world, supporting globally significant populations of marine mammals, seabirds, fish, and shellfish. This region produces over half the nation's seafood and supports robust fishing communities, recreational fisheries, and a subsistence way of life. The Arctic ecosystem is a dynamic environment that is experiencing an unprecedented rate of loss of sea ice and other effects of climate change, resulting in elevated levels of risk and uncertainty. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council has an important stewardship responsibility for these resources, their productivity, and their sustainability for future generations.

Vision Statement

The Council envisions sustainable fisheries that provide benefits for harvesters, processors, recreational and subsistence users, and fishing communities, which (1) are maintained by healthy, productive, biodiverse, resilient marine ecosystems that support a range of services; (2) support robust populations of marine species at all trophic levels, including marine mammals and seabirds; and (3) are managed using a precautionary, transparent, and inclusive process that allows for analyses of tradeoffs, accounts for changing conditions, and mitigates threats.

Implementation Strategy

The Council intends that fishery management explicitly take into account environmental variability and uncertainty, changes and trends in climate and oceanographic conditions, fluctuations in productivity for managed species and associated ecosystem components, such as habitats and non-managed species, and relationships between marine species. Implementation will be responsive to changes in the ecosystem and our understanding of those dynamics, incorporate the best available science (including local and traditional knowledge), and engage scientists, managers, and the public.

The vision statement shall be given effect through all of the Council's work, including long-term planning initiatives, fishery management actions, and science planning to support ecosystem-based fishery management.



The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is Considering Objectives for a Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is considering whether to prioritize time and resources to develop a Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan (BS FEP). Fishery Ecosystem Plans provide a synthesis of ecosystem information relevant to fisheries and help managers consider the ecosystem perspective in fishery decisionmaking. In 2007, the Council developed an FEP for the Aleutian Islands, which describes ecosystem processes, and physical, biological, socioeconomic, and management interactions in the area, and includes a qualitative ecosystem risk assessment and description of how risk associated with these interactions is currently addressed by managers.

Since there have been many recent studies investigating the Bering Sea ecosystem, the Council will decide whether there is value in developing a guidance document that assesses available information about the Bering Sea with respect to the fisheries that the Council manages. The BS FEP would not be a regulatory document, and changes to the management of Bering Sea fisheries would continue to be made through fishery management plan amendments. The FEP could provide an opportunity for the Council to express its management values for Bering Sea fisheries, and develop strategies to respond to emerging ecosystem science.

The Council is seeking the following input from stakeholders:

- What should be the objectives of the Bering Sea FEP? What questions should the FEP answer?
- What kind of actions should be considered in the FEP? Should the FEP provide specific or general guidance for fishery management? (for example, strategies to respond to climate change, preserve subsistence fishing and hunting resources, maintain healthy populations of top level predators, etc.)
- Would the FEP provide added value over existing Council documents, and if so, how? (for example, annual SAFE reports, essential fish habitat descriptions, etc.)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INPUT

The Council is interested in hearing from local residents and communities, as well as agencies, organizations and the general public, about the objectives and structure of the FEP, prior to decision-making. Interested stakeholders are encouraged to contact the Council with their concerns and suggestions as the Council proceeds with this effort.

Proposed Outreach Meetings:

- Nome, AK - Sunday, June 8th, 1pm - Mini Convention Center, 409 River St. Receiving public input on this issue is an agenda item at the Council's June meeting.
- Anchorage, AK - Thursday, August 21st, 3:30 - 6 pm (tentative - location TBD)
- Seattle, WA - Monday, September 15th, 3:30 - 6 pm (tentative) - Alaska Fisheries Science Center

Further information on this project, including a discussion paper prepared in January 2014, is available at www.npfmc.org.