

Ecosystem Committee Minutes

January 28, 2010 2-4pm
NMML Conference Room, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Seattle, WA

Committee: Stephanie Madsen (chair), Jon Kurland, Dave Benton, Bill Karp, Caleb Pungawi, Diana Evans (staff), Chris Oliver (staff)

AI Ecosystem Team: Diana Evans, Sandra Lowe, Forrest Bowers, John Olson, Paul Spencer, Jennifer Sepez, Steve Barbeaux, Kerim Aydin, Sarah Gaichas, Francis Wiese, Carol Ladd

Others attending included: Stephanie Zador, Chang Seung, Jon Warrenchuk, Dave Fraser, Ivonne Ortiz, Jason Anderson, Debra Fischman

The Committee met jointly with the AI Ecosystem Team.

Aleutian Islands Fishery Ecosystem Plan

The Committee heard a report from the Team about their workshop, at which the Team reviewed new information about the AI, and discussed future directions for the FEP and the Team. The Team suggested that now that the FEP has been developed and approved by the Council, the next step is increase awareness in the management process about the information that is available in the FEP, and how it can better be utilized. The Team and the Committee discussed specific examples and suggestions for improving utilization of the AI ecosystem information at all levels of the Council process (among analysts and assessment authors, at Plan Teams, and in the SSC, AP, and Council arenas). **The Committee concurs that Terms of Reference should be developed for the AI Ecosystem Team**, to articulate the purpose of the Team, the purpose of the FEP, and how the Team and the FEP should interact with existing Plan Teams and the Council process generally. The Committee suggests that the Terms of Reference be developed among Team and Committee members, and presented to the Council in April for approval.

The Committee also concurs with the Team's plan and schedule for updating the FEP. The Team intends to work on incorporating new information available on the Aleutian Islands, and the review of interactions and indicators that was accomplished at the last Team meeting, over the next six months. Noting that the AI trawl survey, which informs many of the AI indicators, is scheduled to occur this summer and that the fall time period is especially busy for stock assessment authors and the Council due to harvest specifications, the Team suggested targeting February 2011 for a comprehensive presentation to the Council. The presentation would include updates to the FEP, a comprehensive review of the state of AI indicators and ecosystem state, and plans for further analysis. In the interim, the Team will also plan to make presentations to the Crab and BSAI Groundfish Plan Teams.

The Committee discussed the Team's recommendation for appointing an economist to the Team, and agreed that this should follow on from the development of the Terms of Reference. With respect to prioritizing longer-term projects for further work on the AI FEP, this will be addressed at future Committee meetings in preparation for the Council discussion in February 2011.

Comments on the national Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning Framework

Mr Oliver explained that a national framework for coastal and marine spatial planning was released for public comment on December 9, 2009, and the comment period is open through February 12, 2010. The eight Regional Fishery Management Councils (RFMCs) have submitted a joint letter addressing some of the major issues that they see with the proposed framework, including a lack of clarity about the relationship between the framework and existing authorities and the proposed composition of regional

planning bodies, and that RFMCs are not mentioned at all in the framework. **The Committee recommends that the Council submit a letter concurring with the RFMC letter, but adding specific comments relevant to Alaska, along the following lines:**

- Many of the ideas encompassed by marine spatial planning are positive, and the Council is already engaged in pursuing many such initiatives. The Council has established an extensive system of protected areas for habitats of particular concern, endangered species, and ecologically sensitive areas. Additionally, the Council has developed a Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the Aleutian Islands, which identifies spatial relationships in the Aleutian Islands ecosystem, and considers not only the effects of the various fisheries which operate in the ecosystem area, but also interactions of other marine activities such as marine shipping, energy development, and military activities. The Council was also instrumental in setting up the Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum, which brings together all Federal and State agencies in Alaska with jurisdiction over marine activities, to improve coordination and collaboration among these agencies.
- The framework identifies Alaska as a single region. As the Council has previously iterated in many different contexts, the Alaska ecosystem areas are so diverse, physically, biologically, and socially, that considering them as a single system does not allow for meaningful management. However, the Council does agree that having a single regional planning body for Alaska would be advisable, which would provide a centralized point for management agreements and decision making among agencies. At the same time, the ability to further subdivide within Alaska to specify planning teams for each ecosystem area would be critical in order to assemble the appropriate expertise for each area, engage appropriate stakeholders, and appropriately identify regional objectives and information.
- The decision making framework identified in the report presupposes that management agreements will be reached among the Federal, State, and tribal partners that are to be constituents of the regional planning bodies. The management agreements are integral to the implementation of any measures put forward in the CMS plan. The framework does not address what would happen if any of the non-Federal partners are not willing to participate at all in the outlined process, however.
- The framework highlights throughout the importance of a regional approach to implementing marine spatial planning. Should disagreements occur among agencies, however, dispute resolution would be handled by the National Ocean Council in Washington, DC. This effectively removes the seat of power from the regions to Washington, D.C., which is inappropriate for a planning initiative that is intended to be ecosystem-based and reflect the needs of regional stakeholders.
- The framework is unclear about the relationship between this initiative and existing authorities, such as the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, the requirements for tribal consultation, and State of Alaska law. The Council recommends that this relationship be clarified.
- Additionally, the framework also identifies a requirement for consistency with international law, but is not specific about which international law, and how and in what manner it should be applied.
- While the framework explicitly suggests that there will be no new authorities, there is also indication that agencies will need regulatory or statutory changes in order to comply with the new framework. This seems to be a contradiction.
- The process that is envisioned in the framework is likely to be expensive, and will require much in the way of staff and resource effort on the part of various agencies in order for it to be implemented. The Council agrees that the goals of marine spatial planning are worthwhile, but the governance ideas that are proposed in the framework seem more likely to slow down the process for achieving marine spatial planning, rather than propel them forward, especially given progress that has already been achieved in Alaska.