

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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North Pacific Fishery Management Council Ecosystem Committee Minutes July 24, 2018

The NPFMC Ecosystem Committee met on July 24, 2018 from 9 AM to 5:00 PM in Anchorage, AK. Committee members present included: Bill Tweit (Co-chairman), Theresa Peterson (Co-chairman), Jeremy Rusin, Jon Kurland, Rose Fosdick, Dave Benton (phone), Stephanie Madsen (phone), David Fluharty (phone), Steve MacLean (Council staff).

Others present included: Diana Evans, Sara Cleaver, Elizabeth Figus, David Witherell, Kerim Aydin, Megan Peterson, Julie Raymond-Yakoubian, Karen Pletnikof, David Holland, Steve Marx, Melissa Hampton, Ernie Weiss, Lauren Divine (phone), Rachelle Daniel (phone), Lori Swanson (phone). Others may also have been present, although not noted by staff.

Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan

The Ecosystem Committee received a presentation on the draft Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan from Bering Sea FEP Team co-chairs Diana Evans and Kerim Aydin, and Council staff Elizabeth Figus and Sara Cleaver. Ms. Evans noted that the FEP Team was interested in all comments from the committee, but requested that the committee pay special attention to the Goals and Objectives in Chapter 2, and review the annotated description of changes made to the document since the committee's last review, the synthesis chapter, and the public involvement plan. Council staff working on the FEP took careful notes of the committee's discussion. Therefore, these minutes reflect the general discussion but do not include specific points or recommendations for change made by the committee.

The Committee appreciates the progress made by the FEP team on compiling this draft of the FEP and look forward to again reviewing the document in October. Committee members noted that the FEP is a Council document and not a NOAA document, and recommended that all statements regarding the preparation of the document and compliance with various laws reflect the Council ownership of the FEP.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The committee suggested a number of specific changes to text in Chapter 1. Those changes were recorded by Council staff. The committee recommended that the role of the FEP as an umbrella document to bring together the Council's Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) and other documents to guide the Council's policy decisions. The FEP was termed a "chapeau" over the Council's policy discussions.

The Committee also appreciated the enhanced discussion of traditional knowledge (TK) and local knowledge (LK). However, they suggested that throughout the document more discussion of local knowledge (e.g., skippers knowledge) and how it is already involved in the Council process (e.g., public testimony, skippers' meetings) should be added. This comment would extend to other chapters as appropriate.

The Committee recommended that some discussion about international agreements to which the Council (or the US) is party should be included. There are fish and other resources that are shared across international borders and in international waters for which formalized management processes exist, those processes should be discussed as part of the overall management structure for the Bering Sea.

Chapter 2 – Goals and Objectives

The committee again made many recommendations for specific changes to language that were recorded by Council staff.

The committee noted that although the goals and objectives are numbered, the numbering should not indicate prioritization. There was discussion about Figure 2-1 and the need for clarification and revision of the relationship between Ecosystem Goals, Process Objectives, Research Objectives, and Ecosystem Objectives. The FEP Team will review and revise the text and figure.

There was much discussion about the goals identified under Ecosystem Objectives. The FEP Team will revise some of the language to reflect the committee's recommendations. There was less discussion about the Process Objectives and Research Objectives, although some suggestions for changes were made to the FEP Team.

Chapter 3 – How the FEP Functions

The committee discussed the language included from the Lenfest report and recommended that some of the language that was general to application of FEPs around the country (or globally) be deleted to focus on the application of the FEP to the Bering Sea. The FEP Team will review and revise the text.

The committee also recommended that the FEP Team revise discussion of the roles of the FEP and FEP Team in the Council's decision-making structure. There was some discussion about the term "onramp" and whether it was new jargon that could be replaced with a more familiar term.

The FEP Team will review and revise the text to address the committee's recommendations.

Chapter 4 – Synthesis of the Bering Sea Ecosystem

Dr. Kerim Aydin presented some language for the ecosystem discussion section that was revised to use familiar terminology, rather than specific, scientific language as requested by the committee in February. The committee appreciated the "simplifying" language and suggested that the FEP Team continue to revise text with familiar language.

There was some discussion about whether some of the information presented in Chapter 4 could be addressed via references to other documents that already present that information (e.g., Ecosystem SAFE). The FEP Team felt that much of the information presented in the FEP is specific to the Bering Sea and recommended that it remain, but the FEP Team agreed to review the text and simplify or revise where appropriate.

It was noted that many of the figures in Chapter 4 are preliminary or placeholder figures and need to be revised before the FEP is finalized. The committee specifically requested a figure that shows all of the communities in the region that the FEP may affect.

The committee also recommended that the discussion be expanded to include more information about the offshore fishing and processing sectors. The document needs to demonstrate the balance that exists between the onshore and offshore sectors, as designed by Council action.

The committee expressed appreciation that the section describing traditional knowledge (TK) and local knowledge (LK) was much clearer than in previous drafts.

The committee also recommended that the discussion about non-fishing activities could be expanded to include shipping that occurs through the Aleutian Island passes through the various great circle routes, and suggested that a discussion about non-consumptive uses include the current and future importance of ecotourism to some communities in the area.

Chapter 5 – Current EBFM Assessment

Chapter 5 of the FEP is relatively unchanged since the committee last reviewed the FEP. However, some specific recommendations were made. The FEP Team will review and revise the text.

Chapter 6 – Risk Analysis

Chapter 6 is a placeholder for a future description of a risk analysis action module description. Some committee members felt that while it is important for the Council to see all the information about action modules, the descriptions should be included in a document separate from the “core FEP” that is presented.

Chapter 7 – List of Action Modules

The ECO has previously reviewed the list of action modules being considered. No additional discussion occurred regarding the list of action modules.

Chapter 8 – Public Involvement Plan

The draft FEP presents a list of activities that have been suggested that could be considered as part of a public involvement plan. The list has not been evaluated or analyzed and serves as a placeholder for a developed public involvement plan. The committee has committed to an additional teleconference meeting in August to discuss the public involvement plan and make recommendations to the FEP Team. **The meeting will take place on August 20, 2018, from 11 AM to 1 PM (Alaska time).**

State of Alaska Draft Climate Action Policy

The committee received a presentation from Nikoosh Carlo, the Alaska Governor’s Climate Change and Arctic Policy Coordinator, about the Alaska Climate Change Policy that is being developed by the Alaska Climate Change Strategy and Climate Action for Alaska Leadership Team.

A draft policy was published in May 2018, a new draft is nearly complete and will be soon made public. The committee felt it was not appropriate to comment on an outdated draft and elected to wait until the new draft is made public before reviewing and providing comment for the Council.

Appendix A: Public Comment

It is Council policy that written public comment will always be accepted at all committee meetings. Oral public comment will be accepted at the discretion of the committee chairmen. All written comments received in advance of the meeting (deadlines are published on the committee agenda and on the Council website) will be included in an appendix to committee minutes.

Comments were received in advance from Mr. Jim Ayers, a committee member who was not able to attend this meeting.

To: Ecosystem Committee members and FEP Plan Team

From: Jim Ayers, Committee member

Re: Comments regarding the Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) July 2018 Draft

Date: July 19, 2018

The latest draft of the Bering Sea FEP (dated July 11, 2018) represents a significant advancement in the move to Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM); and is an improvement from past drafts. I commend the staff on the work and am pleased to see the progress that has been made with this draft. The FEP continues to pose a tremendous opportunity for the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to develop specific mechanisms for further implementing EBFM in the Bering Sea, which supports Alaska indigenous cultures and communities; Alaska commercial, recreational subsistence and personal use fisheries; Pacific coast fisheries and is a significant contributor to our nation's fisheries. It is abundantly clear climate change and other stresses are having severe impacts on our ocean ecosystems and action plans are warranted. In this context it's critical we move forward with implementation of the Bering Sea FEP. I believe we share an overarching concern the Bering Sea FEP become an action document, not a report sitting on a shelf. With counsel and assistance from friends and colleagues, I offer the following comments and recommendations regarding the 7.11. draft FEP.

1. Linking Bering Sea FEP and Council process:

The FEP identifies several linkages for having ecosystem information come forward, through Western science as well as Traditional Knowledge. But, it is not clear from the current FEP draft what path information should take to assure such monitoring, observation and/or research is included in the Council decision process in order to trigger adaptive management outcomes, if needed.

Recommendations Linking Bering Sea FEP and Council process:

- Provide explicit descriptions of how ecosystem information will be packaged, processed, and delivered to the Council (and Committees), as well as potential management outcomes (Section 3.4-3.5).
- Establish a clear process for presenting ecosystem information to the Council. Ecosystem information, concerns and observations, and research could be presented to the Ecosystem Committee after the January FEP Plan team meeting. The Ecosystem Committee could then reviews and make recommendations for action to the Council. As stated in the Process and Research Objectives, Traditional Knowledge and information shared by indigenous communities should be represented throughout this process.
- Include a second part to the Research Objectives section that includes management application pathways.

2. Ecosystem Indicators

Ecosystem indicators are a primary element of the next generation FEPs and Ecosystem-Based Management.¹ The draft BS FEP lists a few proxy or placeholder potential indicators, but only in the Ecosystem Objectives section. Identifying and applying indicators in management is a complex analytical task, but in its current state (it is without true indicators/ thresholds) the BS FEP (and Ecosystem Objectives section specifically) loses efficacy.

Recommendations Ecosystem Indicators:

- Add a new Research Objective that focuses on “selecting and calculating indicators, thresholds and management targets for key ecosystem components,” with special consideration of ecosystem structure and function (biodiversity, predator/prey relationships, primary production).
- Create an Action Module to select and calculate ecosystem and/or species indicators. Thresholds should address ecosystem structure and function in addition to evaluating species-specific indicators. This information could be used to finalize placeholder/proxy Indicators in the Ecosystem Objectives and will elucidate pathways for EBFM application. Qualitative indicators which can more accurately assess sociocultural systems should also be considered.
- By tracking species-specific and ecosystem indicators, the BS FEP Plan Team (and Council groups, as well as ecosystem communities) can follow what’s occurring, and decision makers can proactively address major shifts or declines in marine communities/habitat.
- Consider including potential proxies in the Core document for each Ecosystem Objective.
- Note that Traditional knowledge also represents an important avenue for detecting major shifts in ecosystem function and structure.

3. Traditional Knowledge:

Incorporating Traditional Knowledge into the Council process and ecosystem considerations is a key component of the Bering Sea FEP. This draft represents a major step forward towards the inclusion of Traditional Knowledge in the Core document. Traditional Knowledge also represents a critical avenue for detecting major shifts in ecosystem function and structure.

Recommendations Traditional Knowledge:

- Include tribal/Native representation on the Bering Sea FEP Plan Team to provide input on an ongoing basis.
- On other issues related to Traditional Knowledge and subsistence I support and defer to the comments on this topic submitted by Rose Fosdick on behalf of a number of Western Alaska tribes.
- Encourage, or at least support, compensated participation of Alaska Native tribes and individuals in monitoring, observation and research of Bering Sea ecosystem (outside of the Council process).

¹ As described in the BS FEP Introduction, “[The BS FEP] through ecosystem thresholds and targets, directs how that information can be used to guide fishery management options (p. 7).” This approach is supported by Levin et al. (2017), Lenfest (2016) and in the new NMFS EBFM Implementation Draft Plan (2018), which all highlight selecting and calculating indicators/thresholds as one of the primary elements of the next generation FEPs and EBFM.