

Ecosystem Committee Minutes

December 10, 2013 8am-12pm
Birch/Willow Room, Hilton Hotel, Anchorage, AK

Committee: Bill Tweit (chair), Stephanie Madsen, Jim Ayers, David Fluharty (teleconference), Steve Ignell, John Iani (teleconference), Dave Benton, Jon Kurland (teleconference), Diana Evans (staff)

Others attending in person or via teleconference included: Kris Balliet, Melanie Brown, Merrick Burden, Jackie Dragon, Sarah Ellgen, John Henderschedt, John Hocevar, Karen Holser, Kevin Keith, Chris Krenz, Robert Miller, Chris Oliver, John Olson, Donna Parker, Megan Peterson, David Witherell, Stephani Zador

The Chair opened the meeting with introductions and a discussion of the agenda. In October, the Council had tasked the Committee with continuing to develop an ecosystem vision statement, an evaluation of its appropriate scope, and implications for both near-term and long-term Council actions. At this meeting, the Committee drafted a vision statement, and will continue to work on the other tasks.

The Committee began its discussion by considering the example vision statement from the most recent minutes, and hearing public testimony from stakeholders. The Committee debated what information should be included in the vision statement itself, as opposed to in an implementation plan, and agreed that the vision statement should represent a global perspective on an ecosystem-based approach for the Council. In the Committee's view, the vision statement would not supersede existing Council policies as, for example, articulated in the groundfish management approach. Rather, by adopting a vision statement, the Council would reaffirm the focus of its fishery management, and provide direction for long-term planning, specific fishery management actions, and science planning.

After discussing various revisions and additions to the example, the Committee drafted a vision statement in three parts: a value statement, the vision itself, and the beginning of an implementation strategy. **The Committee recommends the following draft ecosystem approach to the Council:**

Draft Ecosystem Approach for the NPFMC

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 challenging environment that is experiencing an unprecedented rate of loss of sea ice and other effects of climate change, and is highly vulnerable to anthropogenic disturbance. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council has an important responsibility to this resource, its current health and its long term sustainability for future generations.

Vision Statement

The Council envisions vibrant sustainable fisheries which (1) are maintained by healthy, biodiverse, resilient marine habitats and ecosystems that provide benefits for harvesters, processors, and fishing communities, and support robust marine mammal and seabird populations and the subsistence way of life; and (2) are managed using a precautionary, transparent, and inclusive process that allows for an analysis of tradeoffs, accounts for changing conditions, and mitigates threats.

Implementation Strategy

It is the Council's intention that fishery management will 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, be based on best available science (including local and traditional knowledge), and engage scientists, managers, and the affected public.

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

During the meeting, the Committee began to identify how specific planned or possible Council actions would fit with the proposed vision statement in an implementation plan. It was noted that the vision statement includes broad language, and could support either an ecosystem-based fishery management (EBFM) focus or a more comprehensive ecosystem-based management (EBM) implementation, depending on the scope of actions considered. While the Committee acknowledged the benefit of evaluating Council actions in this context, ultimately, the Committee did not have time to fulfill the task. The Committee opted instead to get feedback from the Council on the direction it has taken to date with the vision statement, and defer further discussion on implementation to a subsequent meeting.

The Committee did hear public testimony on the implementation of vision statement, in terms of specific priorities and projects. The Bering Sea canyon and coral conservation project was identified, and the Committee heard updates about industry efforts to identify areas of hard bottom on the continental shelf and slope from fishing vessel captains, and an effort to develop an alternative predictive model of coral distribution. Steve Ignell also provided an update on the status of funding for proposed research plans to validate the AFSC's deep sea coral prediction model. Noting that the planned Bering Sea canyons workshop had to be postponed due to the government shutdown, the Committee will be interested to hear the Council's discussion about rescheduling the workshop, and opportunities for further input from the AFSC.

The Committee discussed scheduling its next meeting around the time of the February Council meeting, in order to develop an implementation plan for the vision statement, as well as to continue addressing other Council tasking from October 2013 (tracking international shipping lane designations in the AI, Arctic research funding, the development of the Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan discussion paper, and Bering Sea canyons and coral conservation issues).