



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Dan Hull, Chairman
David Witherell, Executive Director

Executive Director's Report

Staff News

I am pleased to announce that Dr. Elizabeth Figus has been hired to fill our Fishery Analyst position that became vacant with the promotion of Diana Evans. Dr. Figus recently completed her Fisheries PhD through the University of Alaska Fairbanks, with a focus on social science. Her dissertation was entitled "Eyes on the Sea: Demonstrating the usefulness of local knowledge to inform commercial fisheries management in Poland and Alaska". She has also been a commercial salmon fisherman and has participated on the IPHC setline survey. Dr. Figus will staff the Observer Committee and work on observer issues and other projects. Welcome aboard Elizabeth!

DeMaster to Retire

Dr. Doug DeMaster has announced his retirement date of April 2. This will therefore be his last Council meeting as the Science and Research Director of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, a role he has served since 2001. Previously he served as Director of the National Marine Mammal Laboratory (NMML), leader of the NMML Cetacean Assessment and Ecology Program, and head of the Marine Mammal Division at the Southwest Fisheries Science Center. Dr. DeMaster is recognized as one of the leading experts on marine mammal stock assessment and marine mammal-fishery interactions, and he has published more than 100 peer-reviewed journal articles and reports on marine mammals. He has worked closely with the Council throughout his tenure, providing guidance on the conservation measures for Steller sea lions and other marine mammals, fisheries, and marine ecosystems. His knowledge and wisdom, positive attitude, and friendly demeanor will be sorely missed by all of us in the North Pacific. Best wishes in your retirement Doug, and a big *mahalo nui loa* for your dedication to the conservation and management of marine ecosystems off Alaska!

Public Comments

Beginning in October of this year, we extended the comment deadline from Tuesday to Thursday before the meeting to allow a longer public comment period. With the help of AKFIN, we have developed and implemented an online commenting portal (comments.npfmc.org) to further streamline the process of providing public comments and making them accessible to members and stakeholders. This new commenting process allows the public to select a specific agenda item and comment either via a form or add attachments. Comments will be reviewed and available to view at the close of the comment period. Because this application makes it easy to make and view comments, paper copies of public comment are no longer necessary, allowing the deadline to be extended to the Friday before the meeting.

Additionally, the staff has developed a written comment sample, or template, to assist members of the public with preparing written testimony. It will be available and posted on our website when finalized.

Council Coordinating Committee

In January, the NPFMC took over chairmanship of the Council Coordination Committee (CCC). Chairman Hull and I have been coordinating with NMFS on the interim CCC meeting, which will be held in Washington DC on February 27-28. A draft agenda for that meeting is **attached**.

We have also been preparing to host the annual CCC meeting, which is set for May 22-24 in Sitka, Alaska. We will cover travel costs for Council members who wish to attend. Please let me know (or remind me!) if you will be attending so I can get a better estimate on how many rooms to reserve, as we are making final arrangements with the Westmark Hotel, as well as planning meeting activities and evening receptions.

The CCC meetings are open to the public, and the agenda and meeting materials will be posted on the NMFS website <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/partners/council-coordination-committee>

IPHC Commissioner Nominations

NOAA Fisheries is seeking nominations to fill two non-NOAA commissioner seats on the International Pacific Halibut Commission. One Commissioner must be a resident of Alaska (currently held by Linda Behnken). The other Commissioner must be a non-resident of Alaska (currently held by Bob Alverson). IPHC Commissioners are appointed for a term not to exceed two years but are eligible for reappointment. Nominations and any supporting documentation must be received by February 28, 2018. Additional details are **attached**.

Oil and Gas Offshore Leasing

On January 8, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) issued a notice of availability of the 2019-2024 Draft Proposed Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program, and the notice of intent to prepare a programmatic environmental impact statement. Comments are due March 9. All interested parties can submit comments on the draft proposed program and the scope of the Programmatic EIS, including significant issues to be addressed. The notice notes that comments providing scientific information, geospatial or other data, or other evidence to support the input are most useful, and this information can be provided as attachments to comments. The FR notice, together with other related information, is **attached**.

The plan proposes 19 lease sales in the Alaska Region, encompassing the entire EEZ with the exception of the North Aleutian Basin (Bristol Bay) Planning area, which has been under Presidential withdrawal since December 2014. The lease schedule includes sales by year as follows:

- 2019 Beaufort Sea
- 2020 Chukchi Sea
- 2021 Beaufort Sea, Cook Inlet
- 2022 Chukchi Sea
- 2023 Beaufort Sea, Cook Inlet and the rest of Alaska (except North Aleutian Basin).

The Council may wish to provide comments on the Programmatic EIS, noting the importance of these areas to fisheries and fishing communities, as well as potential impacts on essential fish habitat. We could also provide links to available information.

Wakefield 2019 - Collaborative Research

Sea Grant has selected the topic for the 32nd Wakefield Symposium, which will take place next year from May 7-10, 2019. The symposium will focus on collaborative research and may include sessions highlighting collaborative research in different disciplines (e.g., methods to reduce fishery impacts, or social science), or with different types of research partners (agency-academic-industry-international). Sea Grant is in the process of identifying a steering committee. If you are interested in being involved, or have ideas for structuring the symposium, please contact Sue Keller at Sea Grant (sue.keller@alaska.edu <<mailto:sue.keller@alaska.edu>>).

Legislative Update

In December, the House Committee on Natural Resources met to consider several bills to amend the MSA including H.R. 200 "Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act" and H.R. 3588 "RED SNAPPER Act". These two bills were adopted by the Committee as amended. Full session materials are found here:

<https://naturalresources.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=403567>

H.R. 3588, which was adopted without amendment by the Committee, is **attached**. A section by section summary of H.R. 200, the substitute bill language, and approved amendments are **attached**. I have also **attached** the most recent Congressional Activities reports from the CCC's legislative liaison Dave Whaley.

The Legislative Committee will be reviewing these bills and providing recommendations to the Council on how to proceed. For reference, the Council's previous comments on H.R. 200 and other fishery related bills can be found here:

https://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/CM/2017/101817/10Oct_SullivanLegislativeLtr.pdf

Recent Staff/Council Activities

In early January, Mr. Tweit gave a presentation on behalf of the Council at the 6th EA Workshop on Ecosystem Assessment Guidance and Integrated Ecosystem Assessment. The workshop was convened by Ecosystem Assessment expert group, which was formed by the Arctic Council to guide their work on developing an ecosystem approach to managing the Arctic.

Sara Cleaver (staff/Alaska Sea Grant Fellow) attended the national workshop of regional council SSCs held in San Diego on January 16-18. Members of the NPFMC SSC attending include Farron Wallace, Ian Stewart, Matt Reimer, and Anne Hollowed.

In January, Elizabeth Figus gave presentations on her PhD research at the Alaska Marine Science Symposium and the at the annual meeting of the Pollock Conservation Cooperative Research Center.

On January 22-26, Chairman Hull and I attended the IPHC Interim meeting in Portland. Chairman Hull and I provided a report on recent Council activities related to halibut, and a preliminary response to issues raised in their letter from January 17. Copies of our report, presentation, and comments are **attached**. IPHC Executive Director Dr. David Wilson will be providing a report of the Annual IPHC meeting in a later B report.

Committee Meetings

The Halibut and Sablefish IFQ Committee will meet Monday, February 5, from 8am-5pm to review the two IFQ discussion papers and make recommendations on proposals to amend the IFQ program.

The Legislative Committee will meet Monday afternoon, February 5, from 1-4pm to review H.R. 200 as

amended and other fishery related legislation. A draft agenda is **attached**.

The Ecosystem Committee will meet Tuesday from 8am-5pm to review the draft Bering Sea FEP, discuss a process to facilitate input from Bering Sea communities, and review the Arctic exploratory fishing discussion paper.

Events this Week

On Wednesday, there will be an all-day Ecosystem Workshop convened to provide an overview of current scientific efforts to understand the impacts of climate change and to consider how this knowledge can be incorporated into Council processes. Details are posted on the Council website at [<https://www.npfmc.org/ecosystem-research-workshop/>](https://www.npfmc.org/ecosystem-research-workshop/).

On Wednesday evening, from 6-9pm, there will be a reception in the Madison Ballroom hosted by the North Pacific seafood industry. All are welcome to attend. A flyer announcing the reception is **attached**.

On Friday at 4pm, we have a closed meeting of the Finance/Executive Committee to establish a performance review process for the Executive Director and receive a report on Council's current financial and administrative status.