

New England Fishery Management Council Guidelines for Providing Public Comments

Council Meetings

Public comments will be accepted at Council meetings on all major agenda items to the extent practicable, in particular on those items requiring final action. The Chairman or presiding officer will schedule comments at an appropriate time during the meeting that is consistent with the orderly conduct of business. This opportunity may occur after the Council has discussed the items under consideration and/or once motions have been made and are under consideration. Council members may ask questions of individuals offering comments.

Individuals offering oral comments must provide their name, affiliation and background and may be asked to provide other details that could enhance Council understanding of their testimony. Each person will be asked to speak for or against the motion under consideration and provide rationale with his or her comments. In addition, it would be very helpful for speakers to comment on whether, in their view, the action will achieve the necessary conservation objectives, whether the proposal is fair and equitable, how communities might be affected, how best to avoid undesirable bycatch and discuss whether there are any safety issues involved.

Limits on Comments

The Chairman may limit or defer public comment on Council meeting agenda items on which no final action is being taken to future oversight committee meetings, public hearings and/or to the Council meeting at which final action will be taken. Where constrained by the available time, the Chairman or the presiding officer may limit public testimony in a reasonable manner by: a) requesting that individuals avoid duplication of prior testimony; b) requiring persons with similar concerns to select a spokesman; and/or c) setting a time limit on individual comments.

Additional Time for Public Comments at Council Meetings

An additional opportunity for public comments will be made available at each Council meeting at a designated time listed on the agenda. Any interested party may address the Council during this period concerning future directions, issues or any initiatives that are relevant to Council business. The Chairman will determine time available for this purpose on a case-by-case basis.

Submission of Written Materials

Written comments received at the Council office three business days before the Council meeting date will be copied and distributed to the Council prior to the meeting. For some purposes, comments may be accepted after the deadline (for example, to accommodate Environmental Impact Statement comment periods). In these instances specific instructions will be provided in a public notice.

Under most circumstances, anyone who is unable to provide their material three business days in advance of the meeting should provide 35 copies to the staff for distribution to Council members. If distribution to the Council is not essential, submission of a single copy is sufficient for the record. All written information submitted to the Council must include a statement of the source and date of such information. Written statements must also include the author's name, affiliation and background.

Public Input at Other Council Meetings

The extent of public comment taken at meetings of the Council's oversight committees or other working groups will be at the discretion of the Chairman or presiding officer.