

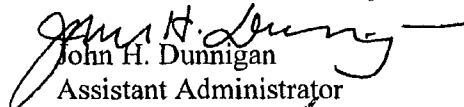
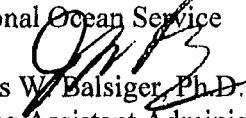


# 2  
**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**JUL 30 2008**

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** Regional Fishery Management Council Chairs  
National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Chairs

**FROM:**

  
John H. Dunnigan  
Assistant Administrator  
National Ocean Service  
  
James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.  
Acting Assistant Administrator  
National Marine Fisheries Service

As you know, past NOAA actions have highlighted the opportunity for improved coordination and collaboration concerning the promulgation of fishing regulations in our Nation's marine sanctuaries. The National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) are both important pieces of marine resource legislation administered by NOAA.

The attached flowchart graphically traces NMSA and MSA regulatory actions from initial concept to promulgation to clarify the role of Regional Fishery Management Councils, Sanctuary Advisory Councils, Treaty Tribes, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) in this process.

As you may recall, this document was presented to you for comment on January 6, 2006. Since then, a working group of NOAA staff from NMSP and NMFS as well as attorneys from the General Counsel for Fisheries and the General Counsel for the Ocean Service, both from headquarters and the field, met to address your comments. Each comment was considered and a consensus was reached regarding the appropriate action to take. Subsequently, changes were made to the document and the final Flowchart updated version was agreed upon by NMFS and NMSP and is enclosed with this package.

Thank you very much for your continued participation in the conservation and management of our Nation's marine resources. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure the health of the ocean and coastal ecosystems for the benefit of future generations.





**NOAA'S REGULATION OF FISHING IN NATIONAL MARINE  
SANCTUARIES**

**JULY, 2008**

**This document describes how NOAA will administer the regulation of fishing in National Marine Sanctuaries as mandated by the National Marine Sanctuaries Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The regulatory processes under each authority are described in flowcharts followed by detailed text with emphasis on new efforts at integration indicated by italics.**

## Executive Summary

This document details how NOAA will administer the regulation of fishing in National Marine Sanctuaries as mandated by the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). The regulatory processes under each act are described in flowcharts followed by detailed text with emphasis on new efforts at integration, collaboration and communication.

**Parties involved in the processes:**

Primary Statutory Participants: NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP)  
 Sanctuary Advisory Councils  
 NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)  
 Regional Fishery Management Councils (RFMC)

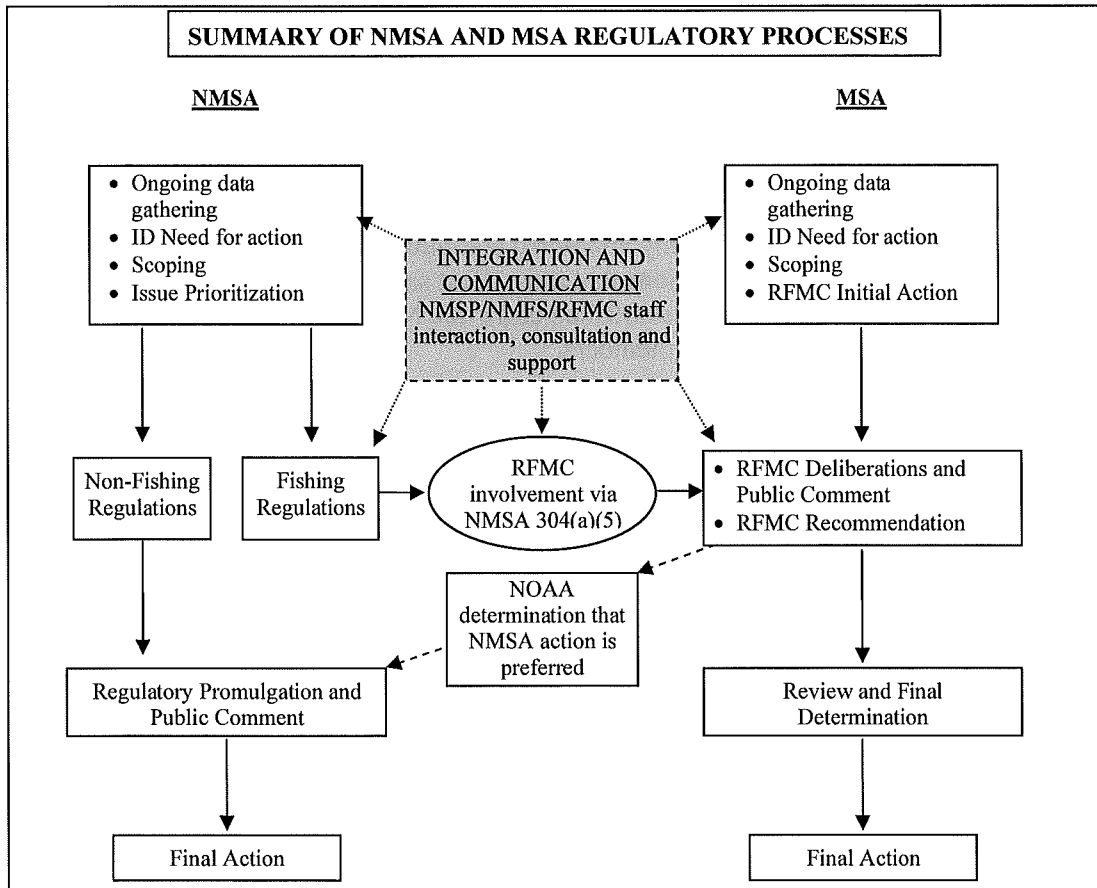
Government to

Government consultations: Federally recognized Indian Tribes

Public input/consultations: States

Other Federal Agencies

Interested parties



### **Major Sections:**

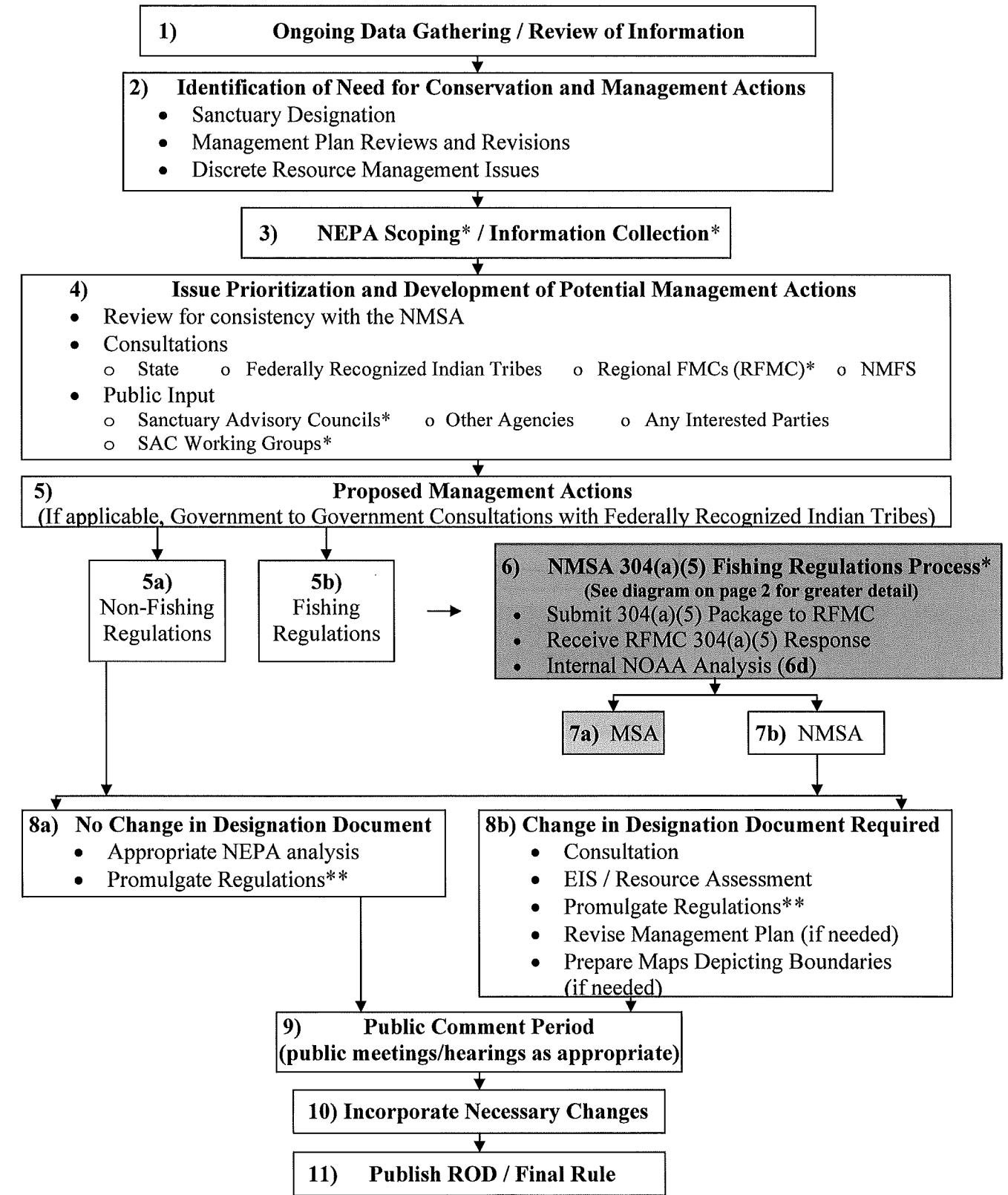
1. pp. 1-8. Flowchart and text describing the National Marine Sanctuaries Act regulatory process for addressing issues in National Marine Sanctuaries, with emphasis on the process for addressing fishing issues from initial concept through implementation.
2. pp. 9-13. Flowchart and text describing the Magnuson-Stevens Act Regulatory process. The flowchart and text traces a fishery management action under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) from initial concept through implementation.

### **Integration and Communication:**

Overall, this document describes the efforts to improve coordination and communication among NMFS, NMSP and RFMCs. The document highlights opportunities for increased coordination, most of which are described below.

1. Frontloading - The first step in each flowchart is entitled, "Ongoing Data Gathering / Review of Information." This describes the concept of communicating in an ongoing fashion between NMFS, NMSP and RFMCs with respect to issues that may arise in a National Marine Sanctuary regarding fishing or issues that may arise before a Regional Fishery Management Council that may affect NMSP resources or sites.
2. Scoping - The third step in each flowchart includes this phase. NMSP will expressly notify and include personnel from NMFS and RFMCs in developing Goals and Objectives for NMSP action where fishing issues exist. RFMCs will expressly notify and include personnel from NMSP in Fishery Management Action Teams, which develop Action plans for fishing issues.
3. Action Development - NMFS/RFMC staff will invite NMSP staff to attend and participate at standing or specially appointed committee meetings regarding potential fishery management considerations that may affect sanctuary resources. Sanctuary Advisory Councils, which are established under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, often include NMFS or RFMC members.
4. RFMC actions regarding NMSP fishing issues - NMSP staff will ensure that adequate information is provided to the RFMC and will work to coordinate and clarify issues during the RFMC process as needed. Subsequently, NMFS staff will ensure that NMSP staff have received draft analyses for potential management actions that may affect sanctuary resources. The NMSP will also be given an opportunity to review any such documents for those RFMC actions developed to fulfill sanctuary goals and objectives.

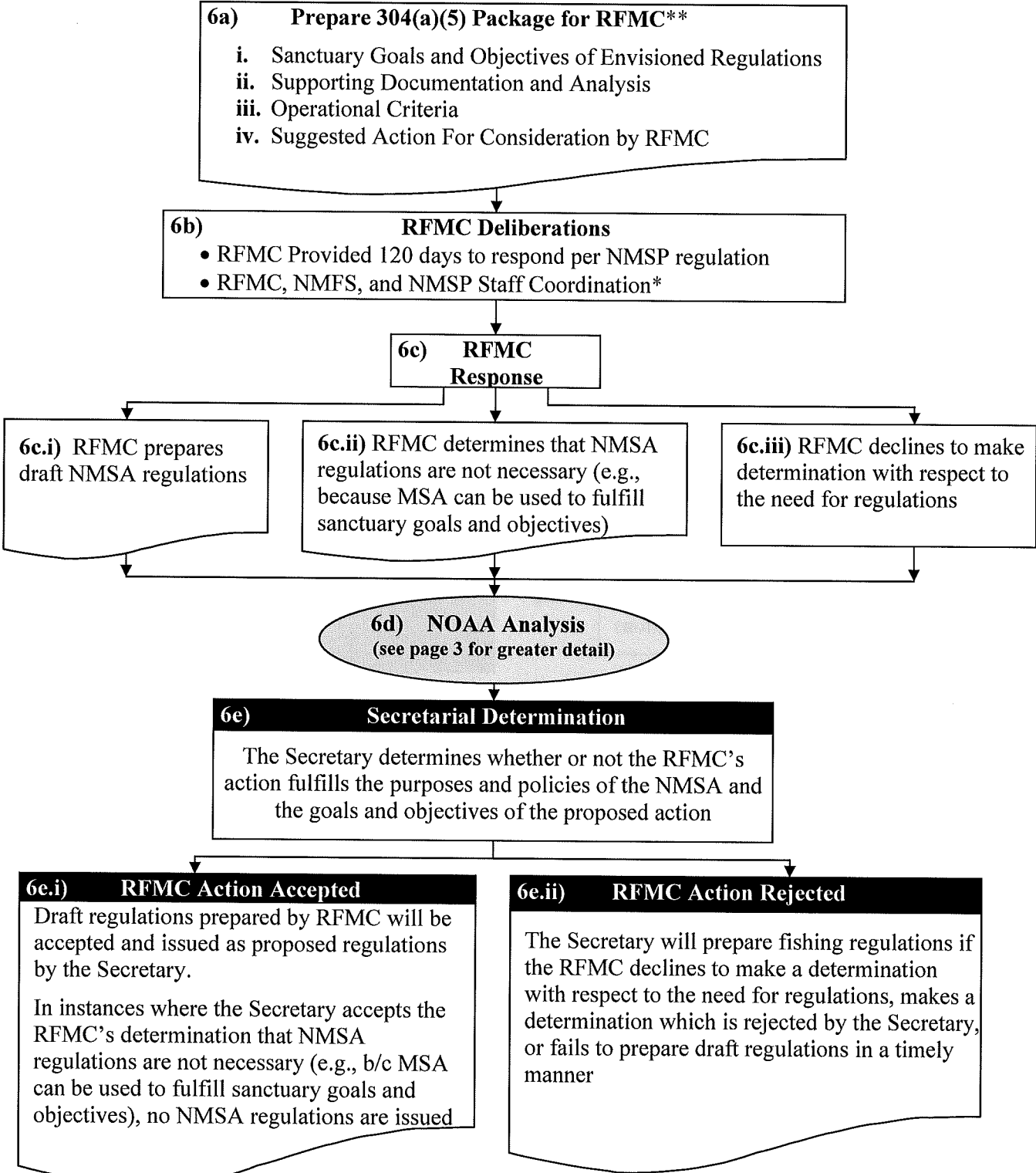
# National Marine Sanctuaries Act Regulatory Process



\*These highlighted items represent specific steps in the process by which NOAA will actively engage the appropriate RFMC. Please see accompanying text for more detail.

\*\*During final development of draft fishing regulations, staff of the NMSP, NMFS and RFMCs coordinate as appropriate to ensure that any resulting regulation fulfills sanctuary goals and objectives.

**6) NMSA §304(a)(5) Fishing Regulations Process**  
 (Expansion of Box 6 on page 1. When this process is complete return to 7a, 7b, or both – p.1)



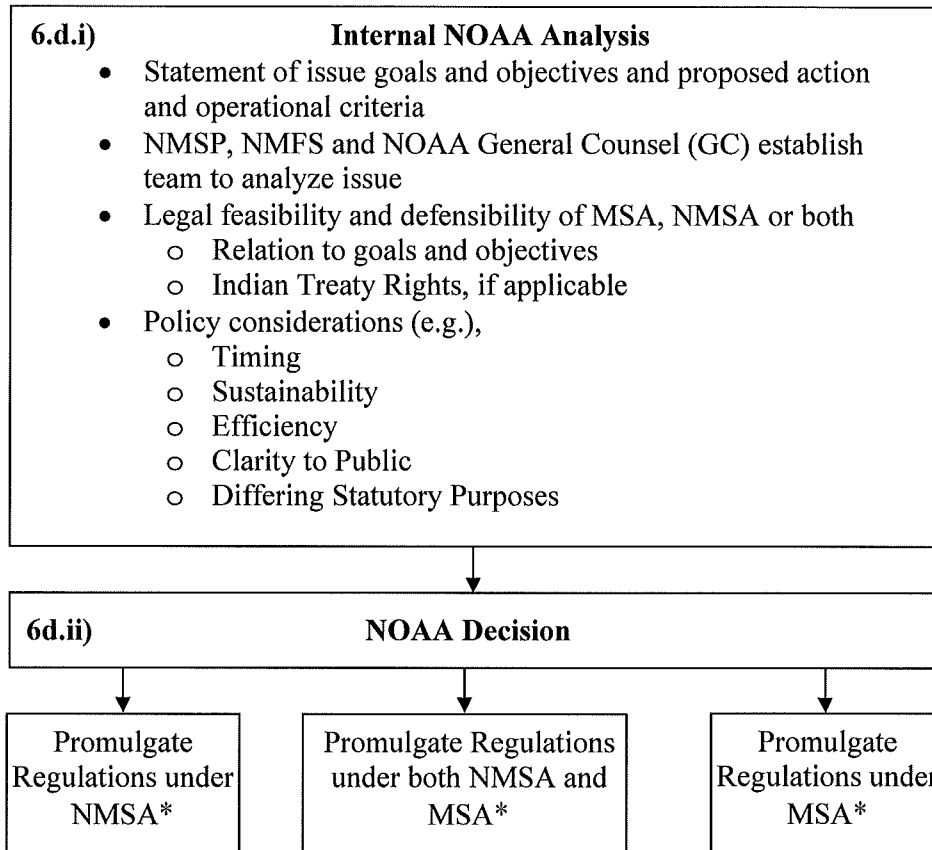
\* This highlighted item is a step in the process by which NOAA will actively engage the RFMC. Please see accompanying text for more detail.

\*\* These materials are developed from the Scoping and Issue Prioritization steps in the process.



## 6d) NOAA Analysis

(Expansion of Box 6d on page 2. When complete, return to 6e – p.2)



\* During promulgation of regulations resulting from the NMSA 304(a)(5) process, staff of the NMSP, NMFS and RFMCs will coordinate as appropriate to ensure the resulting regulation fulfills its intended goals and objectives, regardless of the statute(s) under which it is promulgated. NOAA will ensure that any proposed regulations are consistent with Indian treaty fishing rights.

The flowchart graphically traces a National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) as well as Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) action from initial concept through implementation. The following text bullets correspond to the numbered boxes on the flowchart and are intended to more fully explain the contents of the boxes and identify the points of consultation for three players (NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP), NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Regional Fishery Management Councils (RFMCs)) at the different stages in the generic process of developing fishing regulations, and decision criteria used in moving from one step to the next in the decision making process.

## National Marine Sanctuaries Act Regulatory Process

- 1) **Ongoing Data Gathering / Review of Information.** *The NMSP collects information on an ongoing basis with regard to resource protection, resource use, issues of concern, etc. In an effort to increase “frontloading” with regard to issues involving fishing, the NMSP will seek out opportunities to engage the appropriate RFMC(s), NMFS Science Centers, NMFS Regional Offices, and other experts in ongoing data gathering and review of information in order to efficiently and effectively further adaptive management approaches through the application of state of the art science and policy.*
- 2) **Identification of Need for Conservation and Management Actions.** This represents the initial concept or idea stage of what may eventually develop into a proposed federal action. Three typical categories of actions are most often taken by NMSP: a proposed sanctuary designation, a sanctuary management plan review and revision, or a regulatory proposal that is developed in response to a discrete Sanctuary resource issue. An Environmental Impact Statement under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is required when a major federal action significantly affecting the human environment is taken under the NMSA, or when a change in a term of designation for the sanctuary is proposed.
- 3) **NEPA Scoping / Information Collection.** A scoping process is undertaken which includes community outreach, public meetings, and literature review. Scoping provides a framework for identifying environmental issues and coordinating with interested parties. *NMFS, the appropriate RFMC(s) established under the MSA and Federally Recognized Indian Tribes are identified among the interested parties and will be expressly notified at this step because of their role under the NMSA and fisheries expertise. Obtaining best available information, that is both high quality and composed of transparent data and methodology, is a primary goal in this stage of the process. It is here that early goal and objective consideration begins. NMFS and RFMC input in this process are critical to the successful development of final Goals and Objectives in the following step.*
- 4) **Issue Prioritization and Development of Potential Management Actions.** A Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) is charged by NOAA under the NMSA to advise throughout the process. Representatives from NMFS and the appropriate RFMCs are invited to be members of SACs or SAC Working Groups. *SACs are appointed to represent multiple stakeholders and provide advice and recommendations to NMSP management. NOAA in turn makes final determinations. The SAC prioritizes issues that may be addressed by the NMSP. The SAC may also form issue specific working groups to assist the SAC. For instance, if there are fishing issues associated with designation or management of a Sanctuary, a fisheries working group could be formed. Such working group could consist of representatives from NMFS (e.g., regional office and /or science center staff), the RFMCs, other agencies, Federally Recognized Indian Tribes, State marine resource management*

*departments, the fishing industry, non-governmental environmental groups, and subject-matter experts and other interested parties.* SAC working groups may be charged to develop potential management actions and recommendations to the SAC. The SAC in turn provides NMSP with recommendations. As a result of activities related to NMSP or SAC issue prioritization, an RFMC may pursue actions under the MSA. Refer to the Magnuson-Stevens Act Regulatory Process diagram for further description of the ensuing process. *NMSP draft goals and objectives are developed at this step for internal NOAA review, which includes another opportunity for NMFS comment.*

- 5) NMSP Proposed Management Actions.** The recommendations provided by the SAC and interested Indian tribes are considered by the NMSP in its development of draft goals and objectives. The draft goals and objectives are ultimately reviewed within NOAA and become an agency statement of proposed goals and objectives for that sanctuary (“goals and objectives”). Because the draft goals and objectives become a statement of NOAA goals and objectives for that sanctuary, NOAA will conduct government to government consultation with any potentially affected federally recognized Indian tribe(s). These goals and objectives are the benchmark by which a RFMC recommendation under NMSA §304(a)(5) is assessed. Management recommendations normally come about through a SAC deliberative process as described in 4) above. The potential regulatory actions for a given sanctuary are divided into non-fishing and fishing actions (5a and 5b) by the NMSP prior to proceeding to the next step

**6)**

## **NMSA §304(a)(5) Regulatory Process**

**6)** Section 304(a)(5) of the NMSA requires that the appropriate RFMC(s) be given the opportunity to prepare draft regulations for fishing within the Exclusive Economic Zone of a sanctuary’s boundaries. When such regulations appear desirable, NOAA develops and presents a 304(a)(5) package to the appropriate RFMC(s). All of the materials provided to the RFMC(s) as part of the §304(a)(5) package are intended to help the RFMC make a determination of what would best fulfill the sanctuary goals and objectives. The entire package is reviewed and approved by NOAA and provided to the RFMC.

- a. Prepare 304(a)(5) Package for RFMCs.** NOAA develops a §304(a)(5) package (package) and provides it to the appropriate RFMC(s). These materials are developed from the Scoping and Issue Prioritization steps in the process. Copies are made publicly available and given concurrently to the appropriate NMFS regional office(s). The package usually consists of, but is not limited to:
- i. Sanctuary specific goals and objectives.** (Refer to boxes 3,4 and 5 for the process a sanctuary goes through to develop goals and objectives.)
  - ii. Supporting documentation and analyses** come from a variety of sources including: literature and reports authored by the NOAA Science Centers or interagency and university scientists, notes and reports of the working group and SAC, data and/or analyses obtained via contract from consultants, NMSP assembled socio-economic and biological information, along with NMSP prepared GIS maps and relevant supporting information. *NOAA will ensure that adequate environmental and socioeconomic information is provided to the RFMC to inform them of the consequences of the “requested action”.*
  - iii. Site-specific operational criteria** are developed and approved by NOAA (NMSP and NMFS staff) to better define the goals and objectives.

- iv. **Suggested action(s) for consideration by RFMC** is the recommended actions developed throughout the process of **NEPA Scoping / Information Collection (3)** and Issue Prioritization and Development of Potential Management Actions (4).
- b. **RFMC Deliberations.** The RFMC is provided 120 days to respond to the 304(a)(5) package (15 CFR 922.22(b)). Extensions to this 120-day time limit may be, and often are, requested and granted to accommodate RFMC agendas and workloads. *During the 120-day period staff of RFMC, NMFS (e.g., regional office and /or science center staff) and NMSP may coordinate as necessary to clarify issues, address questions and provide preliminary feedback.*
- c. **RFMC Response.** The RFMC may take any of three actions at this point. The RFMCs will make their determination by following their standard operating procedures and certain MSA procedural requirements. The RFMC could:
- i) Prepare draft NMSA regulations. If the RFMC determines that regulations should be promulgated under the NMSA, the RFMC may prepare draft NMSA regulations and submit them to the NMSP. If the RFMC determines that regulations should be promulgated under the NMSA and the RFMC chooses not to provide draft regulations, then NOAA will draft the regulations. In either case, the RFMC may conduct such analyses as it considers helpful to making its determination. While the RFMC is not required to comply with all the MSA requirements for developing or amending an FMP (e.g., public notice and comment), it must rely on the MSA national standards as guidance to the extent that the standards are consistent and compatible with the goals and objectives of the proposed sanctuary designation or action. NOAA will develop the required NEPA and other analyses for the NMSA action.
  - ii) Determine that NMSA regulations are not necessary (e.g., the RFMC could recommend that sanctuary goals and objectives be fulfilled by the MSA or could recommend that no action be taken). *If the RFMC determines that sanctuary goals and objectives could be fulfilled under MSA, an explanation of the specific regulatory mechanisms, FMP changes, legal basis, and projected timeline should accompany its recommendation.*
  - iii) Decline to make a determination with respect to the need for regulations
- d. **NOAA Internal Analysis.** NOAA determines, through the following internal process, whether or not the RFMC's proposed action would fulfill sanctuary goals and objectives.
- i. **Analysis.** The internal NOAA analysis consists of NOAA NMSP, NMFS and GC staff examining the RFMC submission and determining whether the submission fulfills the sanctuary goals and objectives. As necessary, this team will analyze the feasibility and legal defensibility of the RFMC's proposed action. The team will also identify any relevant policy considerations (e.g., timeliness, sustainability, efficiency, clarity to the public, monitoring and research needs, and ease of enforcement) of the RFMC's proposed regulation(s).
  - ii. **NOAA Decision.** After the team considers all aspects of the analysis, it makes a recommendation regarding acceptance / rejection of the RFMC proposal. If unable to reach consensus, or if the recommendation is to reject a RFMC

proposal, the team would elevate the issue to the Assistant Administrators (AAs) of the National Ocean Service and NMFS for a decision, and to the Administrator of NOAA as appropriate.

- e. **Secretarial Determination**<sup>1</sup>. Once the NOAA decision has been made regarding a RFMC submission, the §304(a)(5) process is concluded.
  - i. **RFMC Action Accepted.** If NOAA determines that draft NMSA regulations prepared by the RFMC fulfill the sanctuary goals and objectives and the purposes and policies of the NMSA, the regulations will be issued as proposed regulations for public comment. If the RFMC determines that NMSA fishing regulations are not necessary because sanctuary goals and objectives can be fulfilled by the MSA, and the Secretary accepts that recommendation, no NMSA regulations are proposed and regulations are pursued through the MSA regulatory process, if appropriate (see accompanying diagram and text).
  - ii. **RFMC Action Rejected.** If NOAA determines that a RFMC submission fails to fulfill the goals and objectives of the sanctuary and the purposes and policies of the NMSA, then NOAA will prepare proposed fishing regulations for the sanctuary. NOAA will communicate the decision to the RFMC and coordinate as appropriate with the RFMC on the development of the fishing regulations.

**7a) Magnuson-Stevens Act Regulatory Process.** If the NOAA analysis of fishing actions (6d) determines the appropriate course of action is to pursue the proposed action fully or partially under the MSA, then the appropriate regulations are pursued under the MSA process.

**7b) NMSA Regulatory Process.** If the NOAA analysis of fishing actions (6d) determines the appropriate course of action is to pursue the proposed action fully or partially under the NMSA, then the appropriate regulations and supporting documentation (e.g., NEPA, APA, Reg. Flex) are prepared by the NMSP, including any change to a sanctuary designation document (per NMSA paragraph 8).

**8) Sanctuary Designation Document.** A designation document is prepared as part of a sanctuary's designation process. The terms of designation are defined by the NMSA as: 1) the geographic area of a sanctuary; 2) the characteristics of the area that give it conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, research, educational or esthetic value; and 3) the types of activities that will be subject to regulation to protect those characteristics. A sanctuary can only prohibit or restrict an activity listed in its designation document. A sanctuary designation document can, however, be amended if a discrete resource management issue arises or during the routine sanctuary management plan review processes outlined in the NMSA.

- a. **No Change Required in Designation Document.** If proposed regulations do not necessitate a change to the sanctuary's designation document, then the NMSP proceeds to promulgate regulations accompanied by the appropriate level NEPA analysis. *During final development of draft fishing regulations, staff of the NMSP, NMFS and RFMCs coordinate as appropriate to ensure that any resulting regulation fulfills sanctuary goals and objectives.*
- b. **Change Required in Designation Document.** Designation documents are changed following the applicable procedures for designation of a sanctuary (sections 303 and 304 of the NMSA). Some steps (e.g., consultation, draft EIS preparation) can be

---

<sup>1</sup> The Secretary's authority under the MSA and NMSA has been delegated to NOAA.

initiated as part of earlier actions under 4) Issue Prioritization and Development of Potential Management Actions. To issue a regulation prohibiting or restricting a fishing activity in a sanctuary for which a designation document does not have fishing as one of the activities subject to regulation, the sanctuary's designation document must be amended to include fishing as an activity subject to regulation. *During final development of draft fishing regulations, staff of the NMSP, NMFS and RFMCs coordinate as appropriate to ensure that any resulting regulation fulfills sanctuary goals and objectives.*

- 9) **Public Comment Period.** Publish the proposed rule, Notice of Availability of a draft environmental impact statement or environmental analysis, and amended sanctuary designation document (if one is being amended) in the *Federal Register* to start the public comment periods (minimum 45 days DEIS; proposed rules generally have a 60-day review period). Hold public meetings or hearings as appropriate and collect public comments.
- 10) **Incorporate Necessary Changes.** Consider the public comments and revise regulations and analyses as appropriate.
- 11) **Publish Final Rule.** Issue the Record of Decision (ROD) and the final rule. If a final EIS was prepared, the ROD and final rule are issued after the required 30-day wait period from publication of the Notice of Availability of a final EIS. If there is a change to the designation document, the change becomes effective after a period of 45 days of continuous session of Congress (NMSA §304(a)(6)). During this final 45-day review period the Governor (when state waters are included) has the opportunity to certify to NOAA that the change to the terms of designation is unacceptable, in which case the unacceptable change to the term of designation shall not take effect in that part of the sanctuary that is within the boundary of that State.

## Magnuson Stevens Act Regulatory Process

**I) MSA Ongoing Data Gathering /Review of Information**

**II) Identification of Need for Conservation and Management via:\***

- Fishery Management Plan
- Fishery Management Plan Amendment
- Rulemaking/Regulatory Action

**III) Planning and Scoping**

- Frontloading, Action Plan
- Public Scoping Meetings (if required)
- Formation of Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT)\*

**IV) Preparation / RFMC Initial Action\***

- Preliminary DEIS (if required)
- Selection of Preferred Alternative(s)
- Completion of Other Required Analyses

**V) RFMC Deliberation and Public Review\***

- Issue DEIS
- Public Hearings
- Committee / RFMC Meetings
- Consider Public Comments

**VI) RFMC Final Action / Preparation of Final Documents\***

- Make Final Revisions to Documents
- RFMC Vote to Recommend Management Action
- File Final EIS

**VII) Secretarial Review and Final Determination**

- Proposed Rule (if any) with Public Comment Period
- FMP / FMP Amendment with Public Comment Period
- Record of Decision
- Approve, Partially Approve, or Disapprove

Approved or Partially Approved

**VIII) Final Action**

- Final Rule (if any)
- Notice of FMP / FMP Amendment

Disapproved or Partially Disapproved Actions Returned to RFMC with Rationale

\*These highlighted items are steps in the process by which RFMC and NMFS will actively engage NOS. Please see accompanying text for more detail.

## Magnuson Stevens Act Regulatory Process

**MSA Process for the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.** This flowchart traces a fishery management action under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) from initial concept through implementation. The following descriptions correspond to the numbered boxes on the flowchart and are intended to more fully explain the contents of the boxes and identify the points of consultation for three players (NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP), NMFS, and RFMCs) at the different stages in the generic process of developing fishery-related regulations.

As part of internal NMFS efforts to manage expectations and outcomes, the agency has developed draft Operational Guidelines<sup>2,3</sup> that emphasize the importance of early involvement of interested parties and identification of issues (“frontloading”). The draft Operational Guidelines identify key phases and steps that apply to all MSA fishery management actions whether the action is a rule, an FMP or an FMP Amendment, and whether it will be supported by an Environmental Assessment (EA), Categorical Exclusion (CE), or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The flowchart depicts a summary of these key steps.

The time it takes a proposed fishery management action to be developed varies depending on the complexity of the proposal, resources available to conduct the analyses and draft the documents, and a multitude of other contingencies. Staff resources to prepare FMP/rulemaking activities are pooled between RFMC and NMFS to variable degrees across the six NMFS regions and eight RFMCs.

We note that an RFMC recommendation proceeding from the NMSA 304(a)(5) process would not necessarily follow the steps outlined for full-blown MSA-based rulemaking.

**D) Ongoing Data Gathering / Review of Information:** The MSA requires that RFMCs conduct regular public meetings, and submit periodic reports, and submit recommended management action<sup>4</sup> for any fishery under their jurisdiction that requires conservation and management.

Typical routes of initiating FMP/rulemaking by a RFMC include:

- a) NMFS submits information pertinent to Federal fisheries to the appropriate RFMCs.
- b) Constituents, fishing industry representatives, agency staff, RFMC members, and/or non-governmental organization representatives write or testify to the RFMC of their concern and may request a particular action.
- c) Some actions get on a RFMC agenda due to acts of Congress, which may require specific actions within statutory time frames. NMFS has an intermediate role between the Executive

<sup>2</sup> Draft Operational Guidelines: For Development and Implementation of Fishery Management Actions. August 23, 2005. [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/domes\\_fish/OperationalGuidelines/DraftOGs\\_082405.pdf](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/domes_fish/OperationalGuidelines/DraftOGs_082405.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> NMFS has requested the Councils implement the Guidelines on a test basis. NOAA will review and consider revising this document as appropriate based on further decisions about implementation of the Guidelines and on other applicable procedures.

<sup>4</sup> The term “fishery management actions” should be interpreted broadly to include a wide range of activities taken pursuant to the MSA, including proposed and final rulemakings, FMPs with no implementing regulations, and other substantive actions by the agency that promulgate or are expected to lead to the promulgation of a final rule or regulation, including notices of inquiry, and advance notices of proposed rulemaking.



Branch and the RFMC, and is ultimately responsible for deadlines and actions required by the Secretary of Commerce as a result of legislation.

*In an effort to increase “frontloading” with regard to issues involving sanctuary resources NMFS will seek out opportunities to engage the appropriate NMSP staff. The NMSP may provide information about potential relevant fishery management considerations that may affect sanctuary resources. Early identification of such issues will permit RFMCs to begin assessing potential management actions for fisheries.*

**II) Identification of Need for Conservation and Management.** This is the point at which a RFMC determines that there may be a need to recommend action and may begin assessing the need for fishery management measures. *NMFS staff and NMSP staff will coordinate on a continuing basis regarding potential management actions that may affect sanctuary resources or the need to regulate fishing within Sanctuaries.*

At this stage ideas are developed for a response to an identified fisheries conservation or management need. The types of major Federal actions typically undertaken by RFMCs include: A new fishery management plan (FMP); an Amendment to an already approved FMP; and regulatory actions developed in response to a discrete marine conservation or management issue. FMPs and FMP Amendments must be consistent with the MSA national standards and other applicable laws, several of which require analysis of alternatives. Although it infrequently begins sooner, in most cases the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process starts here.

### **III) Planning and Scoping.**

The draft Operational Guidelines recommend the development of an “Action Plan” which describes objectives, resources, alternatives and applicable laws, prior to commencement of drafting the initial NEPA document. These Guidelines rely heavily on the concept of frontloading, which means the early involvement of all interested parties to address and resolve issues. The draft Operational Guidelines also recommend formation of a fishery management action team (FMAT) as a project management activity intended to identify and task those necessary to work on a particular action from the beginning. The FMAT will generally include representatives of the RFMC and NMFS, as well as other NOAA components and federal agencies, as necessary. *Draft Operational Guidelines will include “flags” to remind RFMCs that personnel from the NMSP will be invited to participate on FMATs regarding potential fishery management considerations that may affect sanctuary resources. Those regions not using FMATs should also involve the NMSP in early issue identification.*

Through deliberations of the FMAT, NOAA General Counsel, and agency NEPA advisors, determinations are made as to the appropriate MSA type of action (FMP or regulatory) and level of NEPA analysis (CE, EA, or EIS), or whether supplements or amendments to existing NEPA analyses are appropriate for compliance and any action necessary to comply with section 304(d) of the NMSA. *Section 304(d) of the NMSA requires federal agencies to consult on any federal action that is likely to destroy, cause the loss of, or injure any sanctuary resources. (Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary has a special standard, and consultation is required when a federal action “may affect” a sanctuary resource.)*

**IV) Preparation / RFMC Initial Action.** This step includes actions taken by preparers and the RFMC to complete preparation of the Draft NEPA analysis and all other required analyses.

Regulatory language, analyses and information collection requirements may be examined and preliminary estimates made of the costs and benefits of regulations depending on the nature of the proposed action and associated Federal permits, licenses, or other entitlements, and their respective accompanying analyses that will be required prior to implementation. RFMC standing committees or specially appointed committees may be asked by the RFMC to prepare components of actions for RFMC consideration. All meetings are advertised and open to the public, and public comments are taken each time an aspect of the proposed action appears on the agenda of the respective RFMC or one of its committees. *NMFS/RFMC staff will invite NMSP staff to attend and participate at standing or specially appointed committee meetings regarding potential fishery management considerations that may affect sanctuary resources.*

Preliminary Draft EIS: If schedules permit and the RFMC chooses, it may include a summary action, such as “Approve DEIS for Public Review” on the agenda. That would necessitate preparation and presentation of a preliminary DEIS to the RFMC (and public, because every action is open to the public).

Selection of Preferred Alternative: Because early identification of a preferred alternative facilitates compliance with the substantive requirements and procedural timelines of the MSA, ESA, and APA and other applicable law, the Draft Operational Guidelines encourage identification of the preferred alternative at the DEIS stage, though this is not always possible. *If consultation on a potential management action is required under §304(d) of the NMSA, it will be initiated at this stage, if it has not already been initiated.*

**V) RFMC Deliberation and Public Review.** Completed draft analyses are circulated for public review. *NMFS staff will ensure that NMSP staff have received draft analyses for potential management actions that may affect sanctuary resources. The NMSP would also be given an opportunity to review any such documents for those MSA actions developed from the NMSA 304(a)(5) regulatory process to fulfill sanctuary goals and objectives.* RFMC meetings or hearings are held to facilitate understanding of the documents, collect public comment and have RFMC deliberations. If deemed necessary, the NMSP shall provide NMFS with reasonable alternatives that will protect sanctuary resources. After public review and comment, the analysis documents are revised as necessary and provided to the RFMC.

**VI) RFMC Final Action / Preparation of Final Documents.** The RFMC holds a vote on the proposed action at a public meeting. After the RFMC votes to submit an action to the Secretary, RFMC and NMFS staff prepare the action document and any accompanying draft regulation and analyses for submission to the Secretary. It is anticipated that some work on the necessary supporting documentation will continue after the RFMC’s vote. However, if NOAA or the Council determines that the supporting analyses have been substantively changed at this point, the model in the Draft Operational Guidelines would call for reconsideration by the RFMC. All parts of a final EIS (FEIS) analysis must be completed and assembled prior to NMFS filing the FEIS with the EPA, who in turn publishes a Notice of Availability (NOA) of the FEIS in the *Federal Register*.

The MSA also requires that NMFS initiate formal public review of the RFMC’s proposed measures by publishing in the *Federal Register* the NOA of an FMP or FMP Amendment and/or the proposed rule to implement the RFMC’s recommendation. The NOA of an FEIS is different from a NOA of an FMP or FMP Amendment and is published in a different part of the *Federal Register*.

**VII) Secretarial Review and Final Determination.** The MSA limits the time for Secretarial review and decision on new FMPs and FMP Amendments to ninety days. NMFS must publish the NOA of the FMP or FMP Amendment immediately (within 5 days) of the transmittal date for a 60-day public comment period. The transmittal date is established by the NMFS Regional Administrator when all of the necessary documentation is determined to be complete.

*The NMSP would be given an opportunity to review any such documents for those MSA actions developed from the NMSA 304(a)(5) regulatory process to fulfill sanctuary goals and objectives*

Within 30 days of the close of the comment period, the agency must approve, partially approve, or disapprove the RFMC's recommendation. A Record of Decision is issued at this time. The determination to approve, partially approve, or disapprove is made by reference to the MSA's National Standards, other provisions of the MSA and other applicable law.

**Approved:** If a FMP or FMP Amendment is found to comply with the ten National Standards, contain all the required FMP components, and otherwise comply with all applicable laws and E.O.s, it is approved and the process is complete but for final publication of the regulations.

**Disapproved or Partially Approved:** If an FMP or FMP Amendment does not comply with the ten National Standards, contain all the required FMP components, and otherwise comply with all applicable law, it is disapproved. The NMFS Regional Administrator must specify in writing to the RFMC the inconsistencies of the FMP or FMP Amendment with the MSA and/or other applicable laws, the nature of inconsistencies, and recommendations for actions to make the FMP or FMP Amendment conform to applicable laws. If the RFMC is not notified within 30 days of the end of the comment period on the FMP or FMP Amendment of the approval, disapproval, or partial approval, such FMP or FMP Amendment shall take effect as if approved. If an FMP or FMP Amendment is disapproved or partially approved, the RFMC may resubmit a revised FMP or FMP Amendment and revised proposed rule, where applicable.

**VIII) Final Action.** For approved actions or partially approved actions a notice of availability of the final FMP or FMP amendment is issued and final regulation (if any) is published.

