



#11A

New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116  
C.M "Rip" Cunningham, Jr., *Acting Chairman* | Paul J. Howard, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

December 22, 2010

TO: Council Members  
FROM: Paul J. Howard, Executive Director  
SUBJECT: Touchstone Report – Outreach and Communications; DRAFT  
Strawman Recommendations

At the Council's June 2011 Executive Committee meeting, staff was asked to develop recommendations in response to a report authored by Preston Pate and the SRA-Touchstone Consulting Group. The list below has been compiled to address two specific recommendations provided by the consultants, which were described as "supporting the analyses of the interview data" for the purpose of "creating positive change, recognizing that there will be budgetary and other resource limitations that must be considered."

This list was presented to the Executive Committee on August 9, 2011. The recommendations it supported are shaded. As was discussed at the time, some of the activities may be "a matter of trying things to see what works." Others are not intended to result in dramatic change, but may help create occasions during which all parties could be more accessible for simple conversations about issues.

**Maximize Collaboration: Redesign key engagements to be more collaborative.**

- ✓ **Examine measures other Councils have taken to improve communication and collaboration with stakeholders.**
- ✓ **Redesign the Council meetings to be more collaborative and welcoming to stakeholder participation. Change the layout of room; engage facilitators to keep the meeting focused, and on topic, and to minimize individuals dominating the conversation; and provide coffee and refreshments.**

1. Create a clear and informative "Navigating the Council Process" document. Post on the Council website and have copies at all Committee/Council meetings. (in process and will be coordinated with NMFS).
2. Provide name tags for all Council members and staff. Many members of the public have to struggle with who's who. Nameplates at the table are unreadable from the back of the room. This would be helpful to anyone new to the council process and/or members of the general public who attend meetings sporadically.
3. Serve coffee during two set 30' breaks each Council meeting day. Council members and staff should use these opportunities to have follow-up conversations with constituents. (Wearing name tags will help here.)

4. Hold at least one “super meeting” annually with all Advisors and SSC. Room set-up should be different than regularly scheduled Council meetings, to encourage participation by all parties. Someone other than the Council Chair might facilitate. Invite all members of these parties to a “meet and greet” hour beforehand hosted by the Council.
5. Hold collaborative working sessions at the oversight committee level to tackle problematic issues. Allow industry to help develop compromise solutions, recognizing that Council members have to vote on final outcomes. For example, hold joint Advisory Panel/Committee meetings prior to the Council meeting for upcoming actions.
6. Invite sector managers to provide reports to the Council. Make this part of the Council meeting with a “give and take” flavor. For example, these could be progress reports or a heads up concerning what’s working well and what’s not.
7. \*Hold Staff AND Council member listening sessions the evening before every Council meeting. Many other Councils manage this successfully.
8. \*A social hour open to Council members, staff, constituents and any interested public should be organized on the second night of most Council meetings. All attendees will be responsible for ordering and paying for their own beverages. More work needs to be done on this but most other Councils hold these types of gatherings.
9. As part of new Council member training, include a public communications/meeting management session. As with staff, all comment made by the 18 voting members during any of the NEFMC’s public meetings contribute to the Council’s “image.”
10. Post short Council member bios on the NEFMC website.

**Simplify Communications: Redesign communications to meet stakeholders’ needs.**

- ✓ **The Council (and NMFS) should work with key industry representatives to understand how, when, and what information they want to receive. Provide them with options – emails, letters, and formats.**
  - ✓ **Make Council (and NMFS) outreach and communications easier to understand.**
  - ✓ **Reduce the number of steps external stakeholders need to go through to find information or speak to someone.**
11. Working with the Public Affairs Officer, establish an ad hoc committee to determine where improvements should be made. Share results with NMFS communications staff.
  12. Alternatively, this could be accomplished jointly among the communications staff, but would require further discussion, given that the subject matter the three groups address is very different. It also may be helpful to formalize the collaboration that already exists among the Council and agency communications staff.

13. With respect to distributing information, the NEFMC office already communicates across formats and the staff consistently responds immediately to queries via telephone and email, but improvements are in order. This is also a matter to discuss with key industry reps. Questions include “what are we missing and what could we do differently to address communications issues.”
14. Redo email bang lists by actively soliciting fishing organizations/sector managers that might help distribute Council sign-up cards to update preferences for snail, email and other means of communication.
15. Use the “Navigating the Council Process” discussed earlier guide to help here.
16. Professionally renovate the NEFMC website.
17. Allow an opportunity in Council FMP timelines to write up easy-to-understand public hearing documents that look like information pieces and not FMPs; i.e. use clear fonts (not times new roman), graphics and maps that inform; drop the NEPA-speak and adequately explain when necessary, while maintaining consistency with the EIS itself.
18. Principles that should guide all communications include: objectivity, inclusiveness and focus. Said differently, Council documents should be fair and balanced, address all user groups in equal fashion and be clear and informative about the issues that are most necessary and relevant to the issues under consideration.
19. Fully support the NMFS “Plain Language Initiative.” (Added since the ExComm met).
20. Develop and implement a Council communications plan. (Added since the ExComm met, but discussed with NMFS staff).

Other Executive Committee and meeting attendees suggested the following. Ms. Kurkul suggested **creating a better process for advertising timelines**. Mr. Odlin suggested asking NMFS to include a **public communication/meeting management session to their yearly training for new Council members**. Ms. Tooley suggested **not adding more to the NOAA training, but to have separate training annually, especially for Roberts Rules of Order, for Council members**. Mr. Howard suggested **adding meeting management training to 4<sup>th</sup> day of a Council meeting**.

**Simplifying NMFS outreach and communications.** Despite the use of new methods and channels for outreach and communications, stakeholders feel information from NMFS is confusing and ineffective. Many noted that the volume and language in permit holder notices is not user-friendly. Some complained that important information is buried in the details and gets easily overlooked. Some attributed the complex wording of notices, permit holder letters, etc. to the influence of NOAA legal advice and the need to make sure nothing in such communications, or omitted from them, could make NMFS vulnerable to lawsuit or complicate enforcement.

**Geography and history compound challenges.** Many saw New England as having factors that added complexities that other Regions do not have to face. The two most common factors were geography (more states than other regions, each with its own constituents, politicians, priorities, and representatives) and history (New England has the oldest fishing port, and fishing is deeply embedded in the culture).

## Recommendations for Stakeholders

The following are themed recommendations supported by the above analysis of the interview data. These recommendations are targeted at creating positive change, recognizing that there will be budgetary and other resource limitations that must be considered.

### Starting within 60 days:

**Improve Science Collaboration:** Improve collaboration between NEFSC and research partners, and enhance the cooperative research and Research Set-Aside (RSA) programs.

- Host a series of facilitated meetings between NMFS and external research organizations to identify actions to improve collaboration with NEFSC and transparency into the RSA process.
- Develop an action plan for improving collaboration that will be implemented by NEFSC leadership and reported to participants in a follow-up meeting.

**Simplify Governance:** Leaders from NERO, NEFSC, NOAA Legal, and the Council should clarify expectations of each group and refresh roles and responsibilities. Explore ways to eliminate unnecessarily redundant programs, activities, and resources among NERO, NEFSC, and the Council at key hand-off points.

Joint

- Between NERO and NEFSC: Consolidate data management activities between NERO and NEFSC, and oversee an effort to integrate and simplify IT systems. Improve communications and outreach efforts being done by NERO and NEFSC to help NMFS show up as a unified front.
- NEFSC and the Council: Eliminate redundant reviews and activities occurring between the SAW/SARC and the SSC. Clarify roles and responsibilities between NEFSC and the SSC. Establish a more collaborative working relationship to eliminate multiple back-and-forths.

- Joint  The Council and NMFS: Develop and implement a collaborative process for Council/PDT and NMFS/SFD/GC to create, review, and approve rules. Apply this across all PDTs. Define clear time-reduction initiatives to manage expectations for internal NMFS reviews.

**Maximize Collaboration:** Redesign key engagements to be more collaborative.

- NEFMC  Examine measures other Councils have taken to improve communication and collaboration with stakeholders.
- NEFMC  Redesign the Council meetings to be more collaborative and welcoming to stakeholder participation. Change the layout of room; engage facilitators to keep the meeting focused, on topic, and to minimize individuals dominating the conversation; and provide coffee and refreshments.

**Simplify Communications:** Redesign communications to meet stakeholders' needs.

- Joint  The Council and NMFS should work with key industry representatives to understand how, when, and what information they want to receive. Provide them with options (e.g., email, letters, etc.), and formats.
- Make NMFS outreach and communications easier to understand.
- Joint  Reduce the number of steps external stakeholders need to go through to find information or speak to someone.

**Starting within 120 days:**

- Joint  Scale up the collection and use of socioeconomic data in the FMPs in order to make socioeconomic analysis a more visible and meaningful part of the management process.
- Joint  Conduct a comprehensive analysis of all NMFS data systems to identify areas that will improve data gathering, data management, data analysis and data use.
- Joint  Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the FMP reporting requirements to find opportunities to eliminate unnecessary reporting/analysis/writing (e.g., Does an EIS need to be created for each FMP?) and decrease the reporting workload on Council and NERO staff.
- NEFMC  Begin the creation of a regional vision and strategic plan to define a new model for collaborating with all stakeholders and to set a future direction for the fishery.
- Joint  Consider resources to scale up observer program and aging analysis to eliminate that as a bottleneck in the science process.
- Streamline NOAA communications review protocols to improve the response time to stakeholder request and inquiries.
- NEFMC  Design a cost-effective performance management system to track the progress of decisions and capture lessons learned and best practices.