



New England Fishery Management Council

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C.M. "Rip" Cunningham, *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 24, 2013
TO: Council
FROM: Thomas Nies, Executive Director
SUBJECT: Summary of April 22, 2013 Executive Committee Meeting

The Executive Committee met on Monday, April 22, 2013 at the Hilton Hotel in Mystic, CT. Messrs. Cunningham, Stockwell, Blount, Dempsey, and Preble participated in the meeting. Messrs. Nies and Kellogg attended from the Council staff. Mr. John Bullard from NMFS and Dr. Bill Karp of the NEFSC participated as well. The Committee discussed the following agenda items:

Budget overview

Mr. Nies reported that the Council should expect at least a 7.5% decrease in its administrative budget as the result of the sequestration of funding for the 2013 Federal budget. Final budget numbers are not yet known for certain. This information was conveyed to the FMCs in a recent phone call from NMFS headquarters. Mr. Nies also explained, however, that the Council receives an additional 17% in add-on items to its base administrative budget and it was not clear yet how these funds would be affected by the sequestration. On the other hand the Council has carried over some funds from prior years that will enable it to cover some or all of the anticipated decreases in 2013 and 2014, the years remaining in the period under its current grant award. No action was taken by the Committee. Further discussions are planned for the June meeting.

Groundfish analyst position

Mr. Nies reported that six highly qualified candidates had been interviewed and anticipated making a hiring decision soon with the goal of filling the position by June.

Staff assignments update

Mr. Nies stated that Dr. Hogan would be assigned to develop the 2013-2015 specifications for the Skate FMP, but she would also continue to work on groundfish issues. Ms. Neild will be assigned to assist on the Monkfish FMP, although she will complete a few herring related tasks in the transition.

Management Action Timelines

Mr. Kellogg reviewed the timelines for upcoming Council management actions. He explained that timelines had been added for Scallop Framework 25, Multispecies Framework 51, Herring Framework 3, Monkfish Framework 8, Skate Specifications for 2014-2015 and Red Crab Specifications for 2014-2016. (The timelines and descriptions of the actions can be found at: http://nefmc.org/press/council_discussion_docs/Publish/April%202013/2013%20APR%20NEFMC%20Timelines.pdf). A place-holder also was included for an action to implement an industry-funded monitoring program under the Herring and Mackerel FMPs, labeled as Framework 4; however, it is not clear whether the action would be implemented as a framework or some other type of regulatory action. Of particular interest to the Committee was the timeline for Habitat Omnibus Amendment 2. The timeline calls for the Council to approve the DEIS at its November 2013 meeting. The staff explained that while it might still be possible for the Habitat PDT, with input from the Closed Area Technical Team, to complete the DEIS by the end of September, it was very unlikely. One reason was that the PDT cannot get a head start on completing the analysis of alternatives before June because the Groundfish and Habitat Committees still have to finalize the alternatives. Mr. Nies also explained that to complete the DEIS by September, more assistance would be needed from the NERO and NEFSC staff and there could be no delays in completing any of the many tasks required.

NEFMC Assessment Requirements

Mr. Nies explained that it would be helpful for the Executive Committee to discuss the stock assessment needs before the NRCC meeting scheduled for May 1 and 2 because it would be an important topic on the NRCC agenda. When Amendment 16 was developed, the Council anticipated being able to use projections based on past assessments to set ABCs and ACLs; however, the projections were later found to be very unreliable making it critical for the Council to get updated assessment information before adjusting ABCs and ACLs. Dr. Karp commented that he thought the current demands were stretching NEFSC resources to the limit and that either the pool of people or efficiency would have to be increased to meet the demands, but that possible budget constraints could make this very difficult. Mr. Nies added that the NEFSC has indicated how difficult it is to update the assessment for almost every groundfish stock in a single year and as a result, the Council leadership should be prepared to discuss other options. The Committee agreed that the Council should suggest other options such as requesting updates for about one-half the stocks in one year and updates for the others in the following year. This would allow updated assessment information to be used to set ACLs for all groundfish stocks every two years. Mr. Nies added that other alternatives might also be considered. The Committee agreed to suggest to the NRCC updating roughly half the groundfish assessments in each year (2014 and 2015), but additional work was needed to identify the stocks for each year.

Dr. Karp also responded to an October 2012 request from the Council that the NEFSC develop criteria for determining the validity of an assessment for the purpose of setting catch advice and a protocol for setting catch advice in circumstances when the validity of an assessment is rejected. He explained that this issue was being addressed at a national level but that it would be very difficult to develop broad criteria because circumstances in each fishery vary greatly.

Council Discussion Planning

Groundfish/habitat discussion – Mr. Stockwell and Mr. Preble agreed on how to manage the discussion of the information provided by the CATT at the Council meeting.

Groundfish correspondence – The Committee briefly talked about how the Council discussion of Mr. Goethel's letter to the Council would proceed and no action was taken. The Committee also noted that Dr. Weinberg would have the opportunity to address questions raised about setting F_{MSY} proxy for white hake in a letter from Ms. Raymond when he presented the white hake assessment at the Council meeting.

TMGC Membership

The committee recommended that Terry Alexander be appointed to fill a vacancy on the TMGC.

Closed Session – SSC and Advisory Panel Nominations

The Executive Committee discussed SSC and advisory panel nominations in a closed session. It decided to forward recommendations on SSC membership for Council consideration. The Committee also appointed Mr. Hatfield and Mr. Pierdinock to the Enforcement Advisory Panel and Mr. Martens and Mr. Odlin to the Groundfish Advisory Panel.