

Findings/Recommendations from the Staff Operations Meeting

Report to the Council Coordinating Committee Gloucester, MA, May 18, 2017

Senior Staff Representatives from seven of the Councils met yesterday to exchange ideas about best practices for improving Council staff operations. The topics included but were not limited to:

- Improving analytical & decisional documents – Templates, documents organization, project management & technical reviews
- Coordination and implementation - Coordination with NMFS & Commissions, Action Plans, Plan teams, Project descriptions and timelines
- Council staff management issues – Personnel rules, staff training and office procedures; staff meeting and retreats
- Council Staff Development - Staff Evaluations, Staff Motivation, Development, and Training

Understanding that there are differences in needs, processes and resources in every region, suggestions for improving the efficiency of the Council management process in each region were:

- Developing document templates that provide standardized formats for structure and content and provide guidance to analysts on how to approach each section improves efficiency. Councils that have used templates have found that they reduce the review time, reduce the size of the documents by focusing on only pertinent issues directly related to the action, and ensure that all required issues are addressed. Council and NMFS staff and NOAA GC should have an opportunity to weigh in and agree to the templates.
- A working group of RO SFD, other NMFS reviewers, NOAA GC and Council staff should together develop a frontloading process (e.g., action planning) that establishes a standard process for coordinating development and completion of the analyses by the deadline. For some Councils, the working groups could also be helpful for tracking progress and reviewing draft documents before submission.
- The NPFMC and PFMC have successfully used programmatic EIS's (PEISs) and NEPA tiering to reduce the amount of paperwork and time needed to develop specifications. Other Councils who routinely prepare specifications could possibly improve their workflow by exploring the use of PEISs and supplemental information reports.
- Improve communications by scheduling meetings between Council staff and NMFS SFD staff to discuss common issues and coordinate projects. Meetings between Council staff and NMFS Science Center staff can result in more robust analyses and can streamline final reviews.

Findings concerning staff management and administrative issues were:

- Council staffs could benefit from each other by exchanging information on analytical methods, technical knowledge and other issues. An online folder could be set up for Council staff members to share information and documents.
- Having a single comprehensive data set for as many types of data as possible greatly improves the efficiency of management analyses. The NPFMC and the PFMC have benefited from having centralized sources for commercial fishery data (PacFIN, AKFIN). Some Council staffs have found having staff in-house to pull data routinely has improved overall efficiency.
- Staffs and the public could benefit from updating the information on the CCC website which describes each council's process for developing management actions. For example, the structure and process varies in each region and summary materials could be posted to help translate the Council process to the public.
- Having regular staff meetings unrelated to Council agendas are beneficial for generating new ideas for office operations and initiatives for communication.
- Staff operations handbooks are useful and best practices were shared.
- Some Council staff evaluations use numerical criteria while others are qualitative, and are issued as either verbal or written evaluations. The group discussed pros and cons to the different approaches. Formal evaluation frequency ranges from annually to every two years. Self-evaluations by employees were found to be valuable for staff members and supervisors as part of this process. Evaluations can also be an effective time to look ahead to work goals and objective for the upcoming year and to update position descriptions.
- The value of including professional development in performance plans, subject to budget and work constraints, was recognized.

The working group found the meeting very useful. I personally think it provided the best opportunity to date to exchange information about staff operations. And the group is optimistic that it will establish a basis for exchanging ideas in the future