

DRAFT

SAFMC WEBINAR MEETING GUIDELINES

Executive/Finance Committee

June 16, 2016

Issue: The Council is conducting some meetings via webinar and there is a need to have a set of guidelines about attendance, voting, etc.

Approach: Council staff researched the process/guidelines used by the South Atlantic Council. Information from ASMFC and the other Councils are included as **Attachment A**. A Draft Communications Report (Item #13 in **Attachment 7b**) provides an overview of the use of webinars and other electronic communications by each of the Councils. Staff prepared a draft set of options for the Committee and Council's consideration.

OPTION 1. NO ACTION. Current South Atlantic Council Guidance:

We have no written guidelines on conducting meetings via webinar. The Council has held a Council meeting via webinar and Council members voted via webinar. Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) meetings are conducted via webinar and we plan to hold some Advisory Panel (AP) meetings via webinar. The SEDAR Steering Committee meets via webinar.

All Council meetings, most AP meetings, and most SSC meetings are broadcast via webinar; portions of SEDAR assessments are broadcast via webinar. Question and Answer sessions and scoping sessions are usually only broadcast via webinar. Most public hearings are broadcast via webinar with some conducted via listening stations where Council members are present to talk with fishermen and Council staff give the public hearing presentation remotely from the office. Public comments are accepted via webinar.

The Council allows remote presentations via webinar and by phone.

OPTION 2. NEW PROPOSED APPROACH

The Council welcomes use of webinar meetings to increase transparency and efficiency while reducing or holding down the cost of conducting meetings. Preliminary NOAA GC guidance is that Council members can participate in a meeting via webinar but cannot vote if not present (in person) at the meeting. (Note: If the entire Council meeting is conducted via webinar, then Council members can vote via webinar.)

The Committee/Council should indicate which of the following types of meetings they would like to have guidelines for conducting via webinar. Any additional guidance would help staff flesh out options in more detail for consideration at the September 2016 meeting.

Which of the following types of meetings would the Council like to establish a policy for webinar meetings:

1. Council meetings
2. Committee meetings
3. SSC meetings
4. AP meetings
5. Question & Answer Sessions
6. Scoping Sessions
7. Public hearings
8. SEDAR Steering Committee and other SEDAR meetings
9. Others?

Would the Committee/Council prefer for Council members to be able to vote at:

1. Council meetings
2. Committee meetings
3. SEDAR Steering Committee and other SEDAR meetings

Any other guidance at this time?

ATTACHMENT A

I. Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC): Webinar Meeting Guidelines

ASMFC does not have a written policy in place, but the practice is for the webinar to be listen-only. No Commissioner or public participation from the webinar. If a Commissioner is not in the room, they can't vote.

II. New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC): Webinar Meeting Guidelines

The NEFMC does not allow Council members to participate at a Council, Committee, or Advisory Panel meeting via remote access, except in very rare instances. The determination on whether to allow it is made by the Executive Director (and the Chair, if need be). An example of where it was allowed was a recent Executive Committee meeting; they deal solely with administrative issues, do not usually take any votes, and there is rarely any public interest.

The Council does not take public comment via webinar unless it is a previously announced public hearing.

Council and SSC meetings are always webcast; on occasion we webcast some of the more important Committee meetings but this is not routine given the additional staff required to run the webinar. As noted, the Council does not take public comment via webinar.

The Council does arrange for presentations at Council or Committee meetings to be made via webinar if the presenter cannot attend. Our technical teams routinely use webinars rather than meetings, but do not take public comment during these meetings.

The North East Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) often (always?) webcasts assessment meetings and usually allows comments to be made remotely, but they have a permanent setup in their conference room that makes running things easier.

So far the Council has not seen a need to incorporate this into a written policy. The Executive Committee and the Council just discussed this at our recent meetings, and everyone was comfortable with this approach.

III. Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC): Webinar Meeting Guidelines

The Council provides audio and presentations during Council meetings.

IV. Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC): Webinar Meeting Guidelines

The Gulf Council allows remote participation by Council members at a Council meeting but no voting. A Council member can make a motion but cannot vote on it remotely. We sometimes have webinar Council meetings where everyone is remote and can vote. We are also going to experiment with having SSC and AP meetings where participants can attend and vote remotely as an alternative to participating in person.

V. Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC): Webinar Meeting Guidelines

The Council has been told in the past, and is our unwritten policy that Council members vote from those present and able. Council members could participate via Internet, but voting is only by those present.

VI. North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC): Webinar Meeting Guidelines

The Council does not meet via webinar. The Council provides audio only for Council meetings, and post documents/motions/presentations

VII. Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC): Webinar Meeting Guidelines

The PFMC does not allow Council members to participate in Council meetings remotely, nor do we allow remote presentations to the Council. We did draft some guidance that we provided to staff officers (below) but have not incorporated this into our COPs or SOPPs. We do have quite a few webinars for our technical/management teams, interdisciplinary plan teams, and advisory subpanels outside of Council meetings. They are useful for both preparation and follow-up from Council meetings, or if an advisory body isn't scheduled to meet at a Council meeting but still has an interest in a particular issue. For the most part we don't allow public testimony at these webinars unless it is important to the recommendations being developed, but the public is welcome to listen in. In our Federal Register and meeting notice we do include a statement that a public listening station will be available at the Council office. We have done enough of these that unless there is a lot of coordination necessary the staff officers can conduct the webinar without IT staff assistance; however, it is sometimes necessary (you may remember the 2013 October CCC webinar we hosted with a "handraising feature"). The guidance to staff from 2014 is as follows (be sure to check out the conference call link at the end of the third paragraph):

Council Staff-

Council staff continue to get questions about conference call participation for in-person Council sponsored public meetings, including both requests for participation by advisory body members as well as questions about when and how public participation can be accommodated. Further, there are questions about a transition in 2014 from in-person public meetings to more webinar-type meetings or pure conference calls. This email describes how you should respond when you get these questions or requests, so that we can achieve a consistent response across all the meetings the Council sponsors. Please feel to forward this email as appropriate.

First, in responding to requests for people to “simply be connected by phone” to an in-person meeting, it is important to understand how this can seem like an easy decision because of the circumstances applicable to the individual at that time: they or someone reliant on them are ill, their agency has disallowed travel for policy reasons or budget curtailments out of their control, their unique travel peculiarities make travel quite difficult, their immediate work schedule cannot afford the time spent traveling, etc.—the list of introspectively reasonable rationale is very long. It is also important to understand that many government agencies that work with the Council allow conference call connections to in-person meetings routinely upon request, albeit this is often without the public participation and other considerations unique to the Council situation.

There are several key considerations about this matter that make our response somewhat different than many government agencies, due to particulars of the Council process. It is important to recognize that we owe the reasonable public the same kind of access to Council sponsored in-person meetings as Advisory Body Members. One of the important strengths of the Council process is its full transparency to the public and openness to all who want to hear, understand participate in the full analysis spectrum involved in decision-making. In Advisory Body meetings, this means full access to the meeting materials and discussion, and often the ability to comment during the meeting. It is also important to let people know that the workload implications of these kinds of requests to a very small Council staff are significant across virtually every position, and often not possible without sacrificing other already-scheduled priority matters. Lastly, it is important for all to recognize the cost in efficiency and operative communication to all involved in the otherwise in-person meeting, including the person(s) on the phone; there are many reasons why conference call connections are widely recognized as an ineffective, incomplete, and generally poor substitute for in-person communication: http://youtu.be/DYu_bGbZiiQ.

Using a webinar-type alternative to try to manage around these compelling problems by if it can be planned for in advance of the meeting, particularly one day meetings. Towards that end, by this email I am asking Staff Officers to search for opportunities in 2014 to plan in advance for webinar-type meetings as a replacement to in-person meetings; in that search, be sure and check with Sandra and Kris relative to tech-host support availability. I would like to look back on 2014 and be able to say we had a significant increase in such meetings compared to prior years.

Thus, please use the following guidance when responding to requests for conference call connections to Council sponsored advisory body meetings. In addition to our obligation for advance notice of routine logistics, it is also important that people understand we will have a consistent pattern of how the meeting will be conducted with regard to such call-in requests.

In-Person Meetings Concurrent with Council Meetings

Please tell people wanting to connect to in-person advisory body meetings at Council meetings that we will be unable to do so. At Council meetings, the stress to staff resources and the cost to the Council process in terms of efficiency and high-quality outcomes are more severe than in situations outside Council meetings. An exception to this would be for special circumstances surrounding an invited speaker to present information over a short period of time.

In-Person Meetings Outside Council Meetings

Because of the aforementioned numerous and genuine problems, please tell people that we will not accommodate requests for conference call participation at scheduled in-person meetings, for the public or for advisory body members. Again, an exception would be for special circumstances surrounding an invited speaker for a reasonably short presentation.

Conference Call Meetings

Please minimize the use of conference calls as a substitute for in-person meetings, to the extent of it being a rare event. When conference calls comes to mind as an alternative to an in-person meeting, please plan on a webinar approach, such as a Go-To-Meeting or similar alternative, as a way of elevating the quality of communication. The 23 day advance Federal Register Notice requirement for Council sponsored meetings should be sufficient time to make the necessary arrangements, including coordination with our IT staff, if planned properly.

Webinars

The question of call-in requests for participation in webinar-type meetings, including the Go-To-Meeting alternative, should be moot. If there is some sort of technology incapacity for individual participation, it should be the responsibility of the individual to solve the problem, absent a disability reason. In this latter situation, please refer the individual to Carolyn Porter to properly address the problem.

VIII. Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (WPFMC): Public Comment Guidelines

The Council does not hold meetings via webinar. There are significant Internet and time zone issues. They do broadcast Council meetings and some other meetings (e.g., SSC, AP, etc.).