

Staff-to-Staff Governance Workshop Summary

May 2026

Introduction

The Staff-to-Staff Governance Workshop brought together a subset of staff members from the New England (NEFMC), Mid-Atlantic (MAFMC) and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (SAFMC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). The purpose of this workshop was to facilitate discussion and information sharing around fishery governance topics and generate ideas for improving the spectrum of governance structures (see Appendix A) and processes used for East Coast fisheries. The outcomes from this workshop are intended to support the development of a broader governance workshop among East Coast fishery management bodies, and feed into governance-related projects being undertaken by the three Councils.

The agenda for this workshop was developed in response to the workshop terms of reference (TOR) approved by the [East Coast Coordination Group](#) (ECCG). Specifically, the workshop agenda was designed to identify successes, challenges and opportunities for improvement within the following governance topics:

- Council committee representation and use (TOR 1)
- Advisory Body representation and use (TOR 2)
- Council-to-Council (& Council-to-Commission) liaisons (TOR 3)
- Joint, complementary and coordinated management arrangements (TOR 4)
- General coordination mechanisms and staff to staff communication (TOR 5)

This summary is organized around the governance topics outlined above in order of what received the most attention at the workshop, with the intent of providing a high-level overview of workshop discussions. Specific details around successes, challenges and opportunities for improvement are being considered by the workshop steering committee and will be integrated into more detailed reports being generated by Council governance projects. It is important to emphasize that many of the opportunities identified in this summary are already being applied to greater or lesser degrees by individual management organizations, but in some cases the implementation could be improved on or done more consistently throughout the region. This summary also includes a section highlighting several cross-cutting themes from workshop discussions, which will be further explored through the broader governance workshop and individual Council governance projects. The workshop agenda and terms of reference are included in Appendix B.

Cross-cutting Themes

The Staff-to-Staff Workshop focused on governance topics related to the management of East Coast fisheries. In this context, governance refers to which groups and individuals are involved in management recommendations and decisions for fishery resources, and what their respective roles are relative to one another. When contemplating governance topics, it's helpful to distinguish the relationship between governance and management: "governance" refers to the framework of rules, relationships, and decision-making processes, while "management" refers to the decisions and tradeoffs that occur within this framework.

Over the course of the workshop several themes emerged relating to the challenges and successes of East Coast fisheries governance frameworks, and the need to improve and adapt governance structures in response to environmental changes and resource constraints.

There are several layers to fisheries governance.

Workshop discussions illustrated that there are several different layers to fisheries governance and the systems in place for cross-jurisdictional coordination. These include:

- Representation – who participates in the process and in what role;
- Decision making – how decisions are made and by whom;
- Process – the steps within the decision-making process and the ability to achieve management objectives within it; and
- Transparency – the transparency and predictability of the process, and the ability of the public to understand it and participate in it.

While representation and decision making are central challenges for cross-jurisdictional fisheries, the group also discussed the importance of addressing the process and transparency challenges that constrain the effectiveness, efficiency and openness of the fisheries management process.

Fisheries governance challenges will continue to grow.

As fish stocks and fisheries continue to change in response to environmental drivers, cross-jurisdictional and cross-fishery intersections will continue to grow in prevalence and complexity. Complex East Coast governance structures have always presented challenges that are now being exacerbated by changes in the environment and in the fisheries. This includes changes in the distribution and abundance of fish stocks and fisheries across management jurisdictions, as well as new spatial and temporal dynamics for how fisheries interact with each other and with the environment (e.g., changing rates of protected species interactions). Addressing these challenges will require management bodies to work together in new and non-routine ways and develop better communication and coordination mechanisms to collaborate effectively on novel cross-regional actions.

There are barriers to making substantive governance changes.

While the group explored a range of governance challenges, addressing representation in decision making was identified as the most critical – and yet the most difficult – challenge to address. While the ideas for process improvements and more inclusive representation in advisory groups could be readily implemented, there are few workable ideas for addressing cross-regional representation in decision making. After reviewing the ideas captured in the Scenario Planning Action Menu, as well as additional ideas from regional leadership, the group felt the most promising ideas were: improving representation on committees, evaluating mechanisms for increased cooperative management along a spectrum of different approaches, increasing cross-management body input, and establishing alternative frameworks for joint decision making.

Workshop participants also reflected on past governance discussions and shared concerns about whether actions will be taken to enact substantive changes. While the group discussed a number of tangible ideas to improve governance structures and cross-regional coordination, they noted that it can be challenging for the four management bodies to make these changes a priority and come to an agreement in a proactive way, without stakeholders advocating for a specific change or an external threat of emergency driving action.

Efficiency and nimbleness need to be a central consideration when contemplating changes to governance structures.

While the group felt that additional joint and cooperative management was one of the most meaningful and feasible ways to address representation issues, this suggestion was tempered with the reality of resource limitations and the need to work toward improving efficiency. Evaluating existing joint, complementary, and coordinated management approaches revealed that these arrangements are time and resource intensive, can be inefficient and cumbersome, and present challenges in terms of aligning timelines, requirements, and priorities across management bodies.

Contemplating these pros and cons, the group suggested assessing cross-jurisdictional fisheries with an eye for creating additional alignment on the things that are most important for both management bodies, without adding additional inefficiencies. For example, creating a joint fishery management plan (FMP) where certain decisions are made jointly and authority for more routine actions is delegated to one entity. Participants also noted that for some fisheries it may be more efficient and appropriate for one management body to have jurisdiction throughout the full range of the species, or to have separate regional FMPs to allow the respective fisheries to be managed in response to different local objectives.

Strong working relationships among staff are key to successful coordination.

Reflecting on existing joint, complementary and coordinated management arrangements, the group discussed the importance of strong staff-to-staff working relationships, and that these relationships have been a key ingredient to making this management successful. Continuing to invest in cross-regional staff relationships will be essential for maintaining and enhancing communication and coordination. Participants also discussed how process documentation,

relationship building among Council liaisons, and enhanced coordination of each body's priority setting process would help facilitate cross-regional coordination and overcome traditional regional and FMP silos.

Governance structures may require a paradigm shift to be effective into the future.

While ecosystem changes are driving the need to adjust governance structures, the group also discussed how governance frameworks will need to evolve to address other needs and challenges. For example, management bodies may need to work together to collectively identify what information is needed most to underpin management decisions given reductions in data collection and reduced reliability and frequency of stock assessments. Reductions and variability in federal funding can also impact National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) ability to approve actions, implement regulations, and enact in-season measures in a timely manner. Participants also noted that as fisheries change, Councils and the Commission may need to reassess and redefine goals to reflect new fisheries and stakeholder groups. Lastly, the group discussed the importance of streamlining the management process to reduce the time spent on specifications and create the space to work on other topics and address new challenges.

Summary of Governance Topics

Joint, complementary and coordinated management arrangements (TOR 4)

At the workshop, the group discussed the full spectrum of joint, complementary and coordinated management structures used in the East Coast (see Appendix A). Participants consistently emphasized that strong staff-to-staff relationships are the foundation of successful joint, complementary and coordinated management. Effective communication across management bodies, combined with familiarity built through repeated collaboration, has created a "well-worn path" for many joint processes, particularly for routine actions like specifications. In several cases, joint committees, advisory panels, and technical groups have functioned effectively to bring together perspectives from multiple regions into a single forum. Notable examples include sea scallops, where the fishery is approached holistically rather than as competing regional interests; coastal migratory pelagics, where flexible frameworks allow each Council to act efficiently within a joint plan; and dogfish and blueline tilefish, where joint bodies and subgroups have supported coordinated decision-making. These examples demonstrate that, when communication is strong and roles are understood, joint management can support cohesive, science-based outcomes across jurisdictions.

Challenges largely stem from misalignment of authority, priorities, processes, and information. While joint management is intended to improve coordination, in practice it can introduce additional complexity, inefficiency, and uncertainty when roles and representation are unclear, and structures are not well defined or consistently applied with durable documentation.

The challenges shared related to joint, complementary and coordinated management arrangements include:

Representation

- Misalignment between the geographic scope of fisheries and representation on voting bodies.
- Limited influence of non-lead Councils in setting priorities or advancing actions.
- Power dynamics embedded in “lead” vs. “participating” roles, including control over agendas and timelines.

Lack of Structure and Clarity

- Few documented or durable agreements governing how joint arrangements operate. Existing arrangements are often based on precedent or informal understanding rather than documented agreements, making them vulnerable to changes in leadership or staff.
- Unclear or variable roles, expectations, and processes, especially for non-routine actions.
- Inconsistent guidance on when groups (Advisory Panels (APs), committees, technical bodies) should meet jointly vs. separately.

Communication and Coordination Gaps

- Inconsistent communication across Councils and the Commission and their committees and boards.
- Missed opportunities to align perspectives across bodies (including within states).
- Variable participation and engagement across management partners, sometimes resulting in “checking the box” rather than active collaboration.

Process Inefficiencies

- Joint, complementary and coordinated management requires more time and structure than independent management, which can make the overall process less efficient.
- Large group sizes (e.g., joint APs, committees) can become unwieldy and reduce effectiveness.
- Joint meetings can be difficult to schedule and manage, particularly with simultaneous decision-making across bodies. Synchronized decision-making may also require reconciling or accommodating different meeting and voting procedures, which is often done on an ad-hoc basis.
- Sequential or duplicative processes can slow decision-making.

Misalignment in Priorities and Decision-Making

- Differing organizational priorities can stall actions or prevent progress.
- Decisions across bodies may not align, requiring NMFS to reconcile differences or intervene, which often extends action timelines.

Scientific and Technical Challenges

- Stock assessments and data structures are not always aligned with management boundaries.
- Shared stocks with uneven data availability complicate coordinated acceptable biological catch setting (ABC) and management approaches.

In response to these challenges, the group identified several opportunities to consider:

Develop clearer, more durable agreements

- Document how joint/cooperative arrangements function, including roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes.

Reevaluate how joint management is structured

- Identify opportunities to streamline existing arrangements (e.g., one body leads routine actions like specifications while both collaborate on major amendments).
- Consider alternative ways to distribute authority to improve efficiency.

Expand and refine joint processes where beneficial

- Increase use of joint meetings (Council/board, committees, APs) where they improve communication and reduce duplication.
- Use targeted joint engagement (e.g., subgroups, issue-specific meetings) where appropriate to advance discussions, particularly in early/mid action development stages, rather than relying on the full joint groups and processes for all discussions.

Improve coordination and communication

- Strengthen mechanisms for both informal and formal information sharing across bodies, including within states.
- Ensure consistent participation and engagement across all partners.
- Improve coordination during priority setting processes to align on science and management priorities, and coordinate staff capacity across organizations to help define roles and establish realistic timelines.

Establish guidance for when and how to use joint management

- Develop criteria for when joint, complementary, coordinated, or independent management is most appropriate.
- Create structured, data-driven thresholds for considering transitions between management approaches over time.

Promote flexibility while maintaining efficiency

- Explore hybrid approaches that balance coordination with streamlined decision-making.
- Build in adaptability to adjust arrangements as fisheries and priorities evolve.

A key consideration discussed over the course of the workshop is whether joint management (i.e., where authority and decision making is shared) is always the most appropriate approach,

as different regions may have distinct goals and priorities for the same fishery. The group considered whether it makes more sense to “put them together or pull them apart”. In some cases, separate management may better reflect regional differences and visions, while in others, joint management is needed to support the stock as a unit. It is important to note that joint management places significant demands on staff and Council/Commission member bandwidth, and these capacity constraints can limit effectiveness.

Practical considerations such as permit structures and reporting requirements, which can constrain the ability to merge or separate management approaches, and the reciprocal nature of tradeoffs between Councils, also shape what is feasible. Ultimately, participants emphasized that decisions about management structure should be guided by what best supports the stock, while balancing efficiency, representation, and the realities of implementation.

Council committee representation and use (TOR 1)

Workshop discussions primarily focused on Council committees, though the group also discussed use of Commission boards. Participants shared that there are notable differences across regions in how Council committees are structured, used, and integrated into the management process. The meeting timing and function of committees vary, which can affect how organizations collaborate and develop cross-jurisdictional actions. It was noted that effective committee use depends heavily on strong leadership and well-prepared members. When functioning well, committees provide an important forum for detailed discussion, idea generation, and early shaping of management actions. Cross-regional representation on committees, such as in dogfish and scallops, was viewed as a success, allowing perspectives from multiple regions to be incorporated earlier in the process and improving communication across management bodies. Committees can also create a valuable record of ideas and rationale through motions, which can inform Council deliberations even when committee members do not have voting authority at the Council level.

Challenges center on unclear expectations, inconsistent use of committees across organizations and FMPs, and misalignment between committees and Councils. Without clear guidance on composition, roles, and function, committees vary widely in effectiveness, and their influence on final Council outcomes can be inconsistent, at times undermining their intended role in the process. The specific challenges around committee representation and use shared by participants include:

Participation and Effectiveness of Committee Members

- The level of engagement from members representing other organizations is inconsistent and highly dependent on the individual.
- Expectations around what constitutes an ideal level of committee engagement are not clearly defined (e.g., preparation, motion-making, active participation).
- Effectiveness of individual engagement varies widely, with some committee members contributing substantially to outcomes while others are minimally engaged.

Committee Composition and Representation

- There is no clear guidance on committee size, composition, or goals for representation.
- Cross-regional representation at the committee level, while valuable, is not sufficient to address broader representation gaps at the Council level due to lack of voting authority.
- Single-seat representation from other regions can limit effectiveness (e.g., difficulty getting motions seconded).

Alignment Between Committees and Councils

- Management recommendations put forward by committees are not always aligned with the full Council, leading to frustration and inefficiency. When Council decisions diverge significantly from committee recommendations, the value of committee deliberation is reduced and, in some cases, this has led to committees being underutilized or abandoned entirely.

Process and Logistical Constraints

- Committees of larger sizes (i.e., more than around 15 members) can become unwieldy, making meetings harder to manage and less effective. Scheduling challenges, particularly for larger committees, can limit participation.
- Virtual meetings improve accessibility and participation but may reduce engagement and quality of discussion.
- For joint Council-Commission FMPs, the respective species management board is the primary decision-making body for the Commission and there is not an equivalent of a “committee” consisting of a subset of the board. For these plans, Council committee meetings are infrequent due to lack of consistent and efficient procedures for involving the Commission.

In response to these challenges, the group identified several opportunities to consider, including:

Committee Composition and Representation

- Establish clearer guidance for committee size, composition, and cross-regional representation. Consider structured approaches (e.g., general criteria or metrics such as stock distribution and landings) to inform representation.
- Explore providing a minimum of two seats for other regions to allow members to caucus in advance of meetings and increase the likelihood of perspectives from other regions to be discussed at the committee level.
- Develop processes for adjusting committee membership over time as fisheries and priorities evolve (e.g., the Commission uses a “declared interest” process, that may provide ideas for developing a protocol for adjusting Council committee representation driven by who has ecological, economic, or geographic interests in a fishery).
- Improve reciprocity in committee representation across management bodies.

Selection and Expectations for Committee Members

- Strengthen the committee appointment process (e.g., application-based selection, process for re-evaluating membership, potential alignment with priorities).
- Leadership should select members based on engagement, expertise, and ability to contribute.
- Establish and clearly communicate expectations for participation, preparation, and contributions.

Role and Function of Committees

- Where needed, reengage committees in more substantive roles, including idea generation and early action development.
- Better align committee work with Council priorities (e.g., using a 1-3-year outlook to inform membership and focus).
- Clarify when committees vs. full Council should be used, recognizing the tradeoffs of each approach.

Consistency and Coordination Across Regions

- Consider greater consistency in how committees are used across Councils to improve transparency and stakeholder understanding, and to increase effectiveness of cross-regional representation.
- Considering the importance of reciprocity in arrangements, work across Councils to align approaches to committee representation.

Joint Committees and Cross-Body Coordination

- Expand the use of joint approaches to better address cross-jurisdictional fisheries, such as using joint committees (i.e., a single committee comprised of representatives from the respective management bodies), holding joint committee meetings (e.g., where the respective Council committee(s) and Commission board meet jointly), and the most promising approach for joint Council/Commission meetings may be establishing subcommittees or targeted joint forums to support more efficient deliberation and coordination (e.g., special subgroups, joint meetings for specific issues, expanding representation on committees and subcommittees to bring in additional expertise and/or regional perspectives).
- For example, SAFMC has used subcommittees composed of a subset of committee members, SSC members and additional NMFS staff to focus on specific topics. The group also discussed convening a joint subcommittee for plans with Council/Commission joint management to enable more focused discussion and action development for these fisheries (e.g. summer flounder, scup and black sea bass). Given the complexity of these joint plans, subcommittees with Council and Commission members could also be used in a targeted fashion to focus on a particular fishery or topic.

A key consideration the group discussed is how to balance the benefits of committees as spaces for detailed discussion and idea generation with the need for alignment and efficiency in Council decision-making. While “committee of the whole” approaches can improve alignment

by involving all decision-makers early, they may reduce the depth of deliberation and limit opportunities for broader participation, particularly from non-Council members. The group emphasized throughout the workshop that cross-regional representation through committees improves communication and input but does not address limitations in voting authority. It was shared that the role of Commission staff serving on Council committees is very useful to bring in-depth knowledge across plans that is comprehensive and impartial. However, Commission staff can be limited in their ability to convey policy positions of the management boards and/or individual states unless those positions are clearly defined in advance.

Advisory Body representation and use (TOR 2)

Advisory Panels

Participants discussed the important role of advisory panels (APs) in the management process and noted that some APs function better than others, especially when there is more at stake. In general, APs for more active, lucrative, and/or contentious fisheries tend to function well, and are often populated by individuals that are knowledgeable and vested in the Council process. The group noted that strong AP leadership, effective communication within the AP and between the AP and other Council bodies, and ownership of AP input all contribute to the success of APs.

Participants also identified several challenges with APs:

Consistency in the use of advisory panels

- APs are used differently across the three Councils and the Commission, and in some cases, across different FMPs within the same organization. These differences can cause confusion for AP members and the public who participate in the management processes for multiple fisheries and across multiple organizations.

Participation and engagement

- It has become more difficult to populate APs and to get stakeholders to actively participate in AP meetings.
- Virtual meetings can increase accessibility and lower the time burden for AP members but can often lead to less engaging and productive discussions compared to in person meetings.

Representation

- The diversity of representation on APs can be lacking, including balancing representation from different geographies, sectors, interests, and perspectives.

Connection to the process

- APs can feel like their input is not being heard, and it is unclear how their input is being considered in the decision-making processes at the committee/board or

Council/Commission levels. This is one likely reason why participation and engagement have dropped off in many APs.

In response to these challenges, the group identified several opportunities to consider, including:

Improve the connection to the Council/Commission decision making process

- Closing the loop with APs to communicate how their input was considered in the process and the rationale for Council/Commission decisions.
- Increasing communication with Council/Commission leadership to reinforce the role and value of AP input (e.g., committee Chair opening AP meetings, AP Chair attends committee meetings).
- Enhancing linkages between APs and other Council/Commission bodies (e.g., joint AP/committee meetings; opportunities to interface with other APs, increased engagement with internal technical bodies such as plan development teams (PDTs), fishery management action teams (FMATs), or technical committees (TCs), or external processes such as data assessment workshops).

Strengthen the role of advisory panels in the process

- Emphasizing AP input by providing AP chairs with the opportunity to address management bodies directly and allowing more time for AP input at Council/Commission meetings.
- Providing periodic updates to APs throughout the year to keep them informed.
- Enhance involvement of APs in bigger-picture operational discussions such as priority setting discussions.
- Creating opportunities for APs to take more ownership of their input, such as self-selecting AP chairs, taking a larger authorship role in meeting summaries and reports.
- Enhancing onboarding for AP members to help prepare and equip them to be successful in their role.

Enhance representation on advisory panels

- Establishing clear goals for each AP in terms of size, composition and representation (geographies, sectors, gear types, perspectives), structure and use.
- Providing additional space and support for AP members from other regions to effectively share their input and ideas.
- Revisiting the AP appointment process to achieve AP membership goals (e.g., updated AP application process, flexible appointment process to recruit AP members and fill representation gaps between major recruitment efforts, establish term limits, stagger membership).
- Establishing clear expectations for AP members (e.g., require AP members to reapply after each term, establish attendance requirements, allow for flexibility to adjust membership to promote active and productive participation).

The group also discussed the challenge of engaging and communicating with stakeholders outside the management body's traditional jurisdiction. As fisheries continue to shift their range, it will become more important to expand stakeholder engagement to ensure stakeholders are aware of regulations, current actions, and how to engage and provide input. Participants noted the benefits of collaborating with staff from other management bodies to expand the scope of outreach and the need to establish approaches for identifying new constituent groups and effectively engaging underserved communities.

Technical Bodies

One of the most notable successes of technical body collaboration for cross-jurisdictional species was the approach used for blueline tilefish ABC setting. Using a joint Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) subgroup, the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Councils were able to coordinate setting of catch limits for the portion of the stock with an assessment that overlapped jurisdictions (coastal waters off Cape Hatteras, NC to the NC/VA border). There are other less formal ways technical bodies collaborate for joint, complementary and coordinated fisheries (e.g., joint meetings of technical bodies, having representatives from other regions on technical bodies), but direct technical collaboration is rarer on the SSC level.

Participants also identified several challenges with coordination of technical bodies that centered around complexity and inconsistency:

Size and complexity of joint technical groups

- Joint processes can result in very large technical teams (e.g., implementation plan teams (IPTs) spanning multiple Councils; joint FMAT-PDTs for Council-Commission actions), making coordination more difficult and reducing efficiency.
- Joint technical groups may have co-chairs from multiple organizations, which, while increasing staff capacity, can also create inefficiencies and confusion over roles.

Inconsistency in how technical bodies are structured and used

- For fisheries managed jointly by MAFMC and the Commission there is inconsistency and lack of clarity in when Commission technical committees (TCs), Council monitoring committees (MCs), or other groups meet jointly or separately, creating confusion and inefficiencies.
- Across regions and fisheries, technical bodies can be more or less involved in the analysis and development of analytical documents supporting Council actions. This can be due to a number of factors, including Council and NMFS analytical capacity, traditional divisions of labor, and access to data. Council technical teams can be constrained when they don't have access to the data needed to analyze and develop Council actions.

Sequencing of how stock assessments enter the management process

- When stock assessments are reviewed by the SSC prior to being reviewed by technical teams, technical teams and Council/Commission staff lack the opportunity to ask

questions about the assessment and address areas of uncertainty. This is a missed opportunity for a more robust assessment review process and can result in different recommendations coming from the SSC, technical teams and staff.

- Relatedly, when state agencies aren't involved in the assessment process and provided the opportunity to review the final assessments prior to transmission to the SSC, the assessment may lack important context related to the fishery and that data used in the assessment.

In response to these challenges, the group identified several opportunities to consider:

Expand use of joint technical bodies where appropriate

- Evaluate the utility of using joint technical bodies in terms of balancing the need to improve coordination and maintain efficiency for each FMP (e.g., across Councils or with the Commission for shared stocks or similar initiatives like essential fish habitat (EFH)).

Enhance SSC collaboration across jurisdictions

- Providing opportunities for SSC input across regions, particularly in shared fisheries, could strengthen scientific consistency and improve confidence in outcomes. For joint plans where one SSC leads scientific advice, establish mechanisms to integrate input from the SSC and technical body of the other entity could improve scientific advice.

Establish clearer expectations for group size and structure

- Developing guidelines or best practices for the size and composition of technical groups could improve efficiency and manageability. Guidelines may also include additional parameters, such as when action-based technical teams should be convened, and the process for how NMFS assigns members to technical bodies.

Increase cross-regional participation and knowledge sharing

- Inviting staff or technical experts from other regions to participate in action-specific technical bodies (e.g., FMATs) on an interim basis to transfer lessons learned and promote consistency in approaches.

Provide access to relevant databases for Council and state agency staff

- Having direct access to NMFS databases (e.g., dealer, observer data, vessel trip reports) for Council/Commission staff and technical team members can improve overall collaboration and efficiency, especially under budget constraints within the federal government.

Improve early coordination with states

- More structured engagement with state partners during stock assessment development and review process could improve data inputs, reduce errors, and strengthen shared understanding before SSC review.

The group discussion emphasized the overarching need to balance consistency across jurisdictions with the flexibility required to reflect regional differences in governance structures, data availability, and management priorities. While increased alignment can improve coordination, a one-size-fits-all approach for how technical bodies are populated and used may not be appropriate or effective. Relatedly, differences in how technical bodies, such as PDTs, MCs, TCs, IPTs, and SSCs, are structured and interact across regions highlight the importance of clearly defining and communicating roles when engaging in joint processes. Finally, it was discussed that there is a continued need to improve how technical information is communicated to stakeholders; the complexity of stock assessments and technical body workflows for cross-jurisdictional plans can limit transparency and stakeholder understanding.

Council-to-Council (& Council-to-Commission) liaisons (TOR 3)

Participants discussed the role of Council and Commission liaisons and identified several challenges and opportunities for improving the role of liaisons to strengthen communication and coordination across management bodies. The group spent less time on this TOR compared to other topics; therefore, the summary focuses on potential ways to enhance the role of liaisons to improve collaboration and representation across regions and entities.

Clearly articulate and communicate the role of Council liaisons – The group noted that the role of Council liaisons is not clear and suggested better defining the purpose and expectations for liaisons (e.g., representing their Council’s interests, representing their fishery or experience, and/or communicating information between Councils). Specific ideas included documenting the role of liaisons, selecting liaisons who are best suited to serve in that capacity, and encouraging liaisons to be more active in their role. While participants felt a more active liaison role would be beneficial for communicating priorities and interests across regions, they also noted that there may be limitations on what could be expected of the liaison in terms of the ability to speak for their whole Council.

Provide additional support for Council liaisons – The group felt that improvements could also be made when preparing and supporting liaisons in their role. Specific ideas included providing an orientation to the role, assigning a staff member to help liaisons prepare for meetings, show them where relevant information can be found online, and encouraging liaisons to reach out to staff from the other Councils/Commission for pre-meeting briefings. Participants also highlighted that liaison-to-liaison relationships have contributed to the effectiveness of some past liaisons and suggested fostering relationships among the selected liaisons.

Improve consistency in the role of liaisons – The group felt that a more consistent approach for Council-to-Council liaisons might be helpful, as well as creating more space for liaisons during Council meetings (e.g., chairs ask liaisons to comment if they have not already participated in the discussion).

Consider if additional Commission liaisons would be helpful – Participants also discussed the differences and nuances with Commission-to-Council liaisons. Commission staff serve as the

liaisons between the Commission and the three East Coast Councils. While Commission staff are highly effective in this role, there may be circumstances where an additional liaison seat, filled by an active Commissioner, might be helpful to represent the Commission's interests. It can be awkward for Commission staff to articulate policy positions on behalf of the Commission, unless they are already clearly established by the Commission itself.

General coordination and staff-to-staff communication (TOR 5)

Council and Commission staff coordination

Participants described strong cross-regional coordination, especially among staff. Informal staff communication, built on strong relationships and shared understanding, supports efficient information sharing. Coordination has been most effective on overlapping issues, such as Northeast habitat work and offshore wind efforts between Mid-Atlantic and New England staff, with Council Coordination Committee (CCC) working groups also serving as valuable forums. At the leadership level, Northeast Regional Coordination Council (NRCC), ECCG, and Southeast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) provide structured coordination, while Commission liaisons help maintain awareness across Councils. Informal practices like "heads-up" emails, shared channels, and staff roles for tracking other regions further support coordination, though participants also noted challenges in sharing information and coordinating actions across regions.

Lack of structure and consistency in information sharing

- While informal communication works well in some cases, it can be highly variable between different staff members and is not always sufficient to ensure that all relevant information is shared broadly or reaches the right staff.
- Work often occurs within organizational silos, and with the volume of ongoing activities, it can be difficult to track what is happening in other regions or recognize when coordination is needed. Even within organizations, certain topics can be siloed, which can contribute to deficiencies in information sharing with other organizations.

Relevant information is not always easy to find

- Even when documents are publicly available, the key details can be buried in agendas or reports, requiring staff to know where to look. These challenges are often more pronounced for newer staff who may lack established relationships or familiarity with processes across regions.

Coordination on cross-regional actions can also be difficult

- Particularly when there is no established process or precedent, unclear roles and communication pathways can lead to fragmented or inefficient processes or outcomes. This can extend and complicate action timelines and lead to frustration and tension among the management bodies and staff involved.

Differences in priority-setting processes across Councils and the Commission

- Different approaches for priority setting can make it challenging to align efforts, limiting the effectiveness of coordination on shared issues.

In response to these challenges, the group identified several opportunities including:

More proactive and organized information sharing

- Suggested improvements included expanding email distribution lists (e.g. ASFMC follower lists), sharing annotated agendas and meeting summaries between and within organizations on a more routine basis, and potentially assigning one staff person to track activities in other regions.
- Participants also noted the potential for technological tools—such as shared documents, messaging channels, dashboards, or AI-supported systems—to help centralize and streamline communication and document development.

Proactively identify cross-regional intersections and coordination needs

- Early sharing of information on upcoming actions and priorities across management bodies, especially when shared directly between staff to provide context, could help staff recognize where coordination is needed earlier in the process.
- There may also be a role Communications staff can play in sharing information with other organizations in a more targeted way.
- It was also suggested that periodic meetings of technical staff members from each entity on the east coast could help improve awareness of emerging issues and provide an opportunity to share best practices.

Improving alignment of priorities across Councils and the Commission

- The priority setting process is another important opportunity to improve coordination and communication. This could include coordinating on joint priority-setting for shared actions, more targeted communication across organizations during the priorities setting process, or using existing groups, such as NRCC or ECCG, to highlight misalignments and opportunities for better coordination. Additional alignment during the priority setting process could also support efficiency and targeted staff tasking, while still articulating the specific priorities and needs of each individual organizational

Improving downstream communication from leadership-level coordination efforts

- Providing short summaries or written digests from meetings such as NRCC, ECCG, and SEDAR to all staff could help ensure broader awareness and support more effective coordination by improving the flow of information internally.

Coordination with NMFS and general funding constraints

Participants noted that staff-to-staff coordination with NMFS generally functions well, supported by established relationships and regular communication. In-person engagement was highlighted as particularly valuable. For example, regular MAFMC/NMFS Greater Atlantic

Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) staff-to-staff meetings, particularly those held in person, were described as highly productive and important for relationship-building and alignment. While similar interactions vary by region, and may be less effective when conducted virtually, they still provide useful opportunities for coordination.

Participants also noted several challenges collaborating with NMFS on cross-jurisdictional issues, particularly at the leadership level and under increasing resource constraints.

- Reduced certainty and predictability from NMFS affects planning and execution of management actions. Shifts in national priorities, staff capacity and unanticipated direction from headquarters can disrupt established workflows and complicate Council priority-setting.
- Participants also noted that NMFS regional offices and science centers may be less able to commit to Council/Commission timelines or requested deliverables, making coordination more difficult.
- These challenges are especially evident in the stock assessment process, which underpins many management decisions. Delays or limitations in assessment production can slow or stall management actions.
- NMFS priorities, particularly within science centers, do not always align with Council needs, further complicating coordination.

In response to these challenges, the group identified several opportunities to strengthen coordination under constrained resources including:

Enhance coordination across NMFS science centers

- Particularly for coastwide science and stock assessments. Improved collaboration could help better align scientific inputs with shifting resource distributions, although this will require navigating differences in regional priorities.

Adapt management approaches to reduced data and assessment capacity

- If fewer stock assessments are available, Councils may need to rely more on alternative information sources, such as local knowledge, citizen science, and advisory panel input. Recent examples, such as the incorporation of citizen science data into the SAFMC red snapper assessment, were cited as promising models.
- There is a general need to adjust expectations and explore ways to make decisions with more limited science in the face of reduced resources and capacity.

Simplify management processes and increase flexibility

- In response to limited resources, this could include streamlining regulatory approaches, adjusting timelines, and distributing workload more evenly throughout the year. Efforts such as the NEFMC Omnibus Management Flexibility amendment were noted as examples of this type of adaptation.

Greater transparency from NMFS regarding resource availability and priorities

- Clearer communication about what resources are secure, and where limitations are likely, would help Councils plan more effectively and set realistic expectations.

Summary

Overall, the staff workshop provided a strong foundation for future conversations on governance and cross-jurisdictional collaboration among East Coast fishery management organizations. Over the two-day workshop, staff generated more than 75 specific ideas in response to the terms of reference, which focused on Council committee representation and use, advisory body roles, Council-to-Council liaisons, joint and cooperative management arrangements, and broader coordination and staff-to-staff communication.

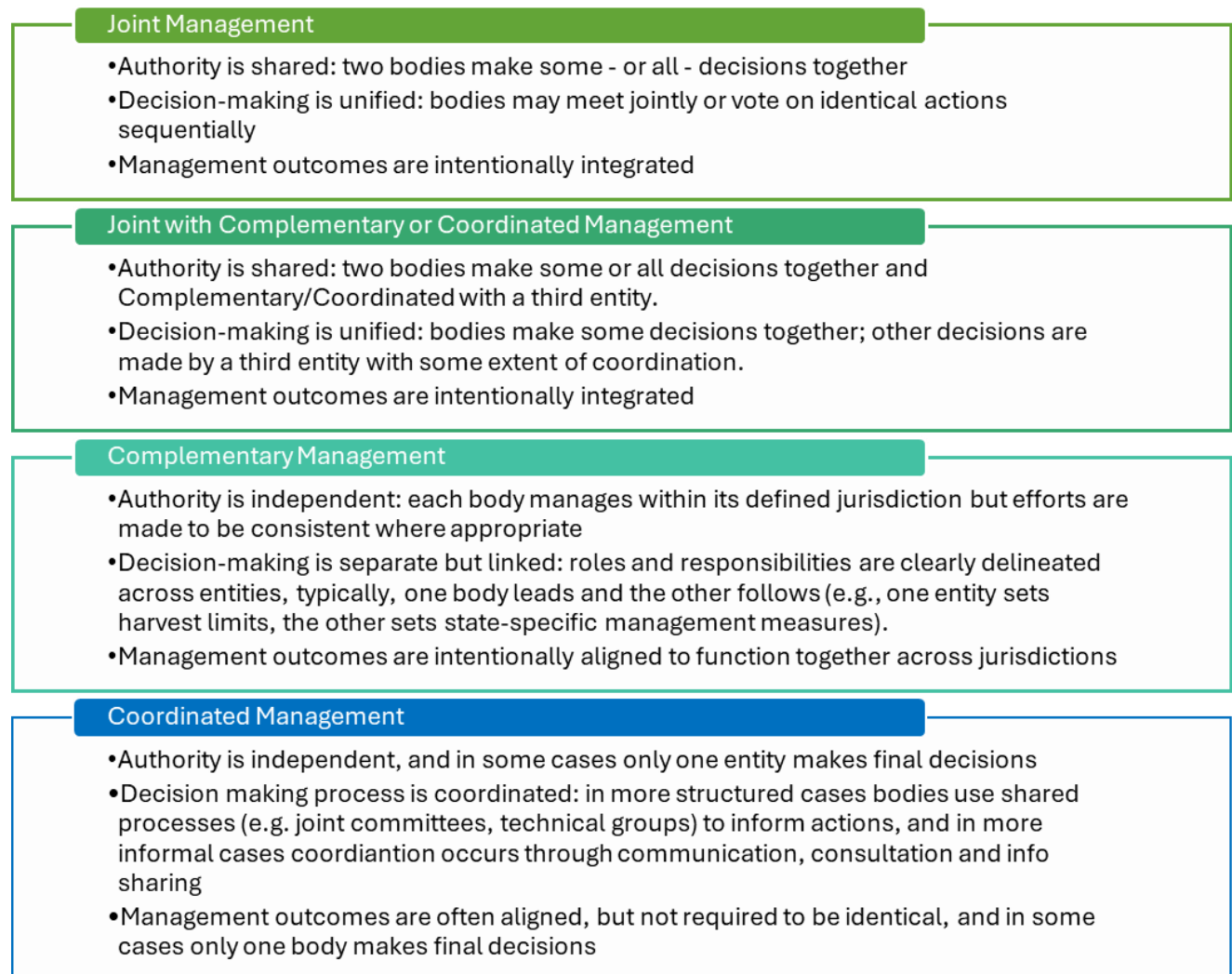
The workshop also served as an effective forum for sharing best practices and highlighting the range of approaches used across regions to address similar governance challenges. While all entities operate under a similar overarching framework, differences in structure and process reveal opportunities to learn from one another and identify areas for greater alignment. These discussions underscored that many existing approaches are working well, but could benefit from clearer expectations, improved documentation, and more intentional coordination.

Building on this initial effort, a follow-on workshop is being planned with a broader group of participants, including Council and Commission members, NMFS partners, and additional staff, to further refine and advance the ideas identified. Furthermore, the results of this staff workshop will be shared with ongoing governance-related efforts within each Council to support continued collaboration and progress on these topics. Importantly, participants consistently noted the value of having dedicated time and space to learn from one another, gaining insight into how other organizations approach similar challenges and identifying practical ways to improve their own processes.

Appendix A – Cross-jurisdictional Fisheries Governance Structures

There is a wide range of governance structures used in cross-jurisdictional fisheries management on the east coast. Figure 1 was developed for the workshop to support the discussion of various governance structures and identify key differences in authority, decision-making processes, and management outcomes. The draft figure below has been updated based on initial staff feedback and will continue to be refined.

Figure 1 – Spectrum of cross-jurisdictional fisheries governance structures used on the US east coast (Draft)



Appendix B – Agenda and Terms of Reference for Staff-to-Staff Governance Workshop

Staff-to-Staff Governance Workshop

February 25 - 26, 2026
Homewood Suites by Hilton Charleston Historic District
415 Meeting Street, Charleston, SC 29403

Final Workshop Agenda

Day 1 | Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Meeting Room: Magnolia

9:00 – 9:20 am

Welcome & Introductions

- Participant Introductions
- Workshop objectives and agenda overview

Part 1. Existing “Joint” and Cooperative Management Arrangements (TOR 4)

9:20 – 10:50 am

Management Structures, Successes and Challenges

Session Objective: Explore the challenges and successes with current joint and cooperative management arrangements, considering governance, decision-making processes, and staff coordination. (TOR 4.1)

Session Introduction & Inventory of Joint and Cooperative FMPs

Introduction to Case Study Examples

- Spiny Dogfish
- Monkfish/Skates
- Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass
- Spanish Mackerel
- Blueline Tilefish

Discussion Questions:

- What are the challenges and successes with other joint and cooperatively managed fisheries?
- Where are there similarities and differences across fisheries and regions? What does this tell us about the underlying drivers and nature of the challenges?

10:50 – 11:00 am Break

11:00 – 12:30 pm Coordinating Actions and Use of Technical Bodies

Objective: Explore how Councils and the Commission coordinate on routine actions (e.g., specifications) and non-routine actions (e.g., FMP amendments) and identify challenges and opportunities for improving and streamlining coordination among staff members and technical bodies. (TOR 2.1 – 2.3, 4.1, 5.1)

Discussion Questions:

- What challenges have you run into coordinating actions across management bodies (e.g., timelines, process, requirements)?
- What are the pros and cons of different strategies for joint actions (e.g., shared decision making vs. one entity taking the lead)?
- How are Council and Commission technical bodies used in the development of actions (SSC, MC/TC, PDT/FMAT/IPT)? Are there established procedures for how these groups work together?
- How can Councils/Commission better align on action development?

12:30 – 1:45 pm Lunch (on own)

1:45 – 2:30 pm Documentation of Management Arrangements

Session Objective: Discuss documentation challenges with current joint and cooperative management arrangements and identify objectives for improved documentation. (TOR 4.2 – 4.3)

Discussion Questions:

- Are management arrangements well documented? If not, what challenges does this create?
- What are the goals for improved process documentation (e.g., consistency, transparency, onboarding)?
- What are the tradeoffs and considerations we should be thinking about (e.g., formal vs. informal documentation, detailed vs. flexible)?

Part 2. Committees, Liaisons and Representation Challenges

2:30 – 3:30 pm Regional Use of Council Committees & Committee Representation

Objective: Explore how the three East Coast Councils use Committees to facilitate their respective Council process and consider how Committee composition reflects the range of fishery interests. (TOR 1.1 – 1.3, 1.5)

Discussion Questions:

- What are the pros and cons of the different approaches the Councils use for Committees in their decision-making process?
- How well do Committee rosters represent the range of interests, sectors and geographies? What is your Council's process for populating and revisiting Committee rosters?
- How do Committee representation considerations intersect with ASMFC Boards and other groups?

3:30 – 3:45 pm

Break

3:45 – 5:00 pm

Breakout Discussion: Addressing Representation Challenges and Improving Use of Committees

Objective: Identify and evaluate opportunities for improving the use of Council Committees and Council/Commission Liaisons, utilizing Committees more consistently across Council regions, and addressing representation concerns. (TOR 1.3 – 1.5, 3.1 – 3.2)

Discussion Questions:

- What are some workable solutions to address representation issues in decision making (e.g., ways to improve voting equity; ways to leverage Committees and Liaisons within current MSA constraints)?
- What does it mean for all respective states/interests to have a seat at the table? Are there different thresholds or gradients to this?
- What are the challenges, benefits and logistical questions associated with utilizing Committees more consistently across Councils?

5:00 – 5:30 pm

Breakout Discussion Recap & Synthesis

7:00 – 8:30 pm

Group Dinner (optional)

Location: Edmund's Oast Brewing Company (1505 King St. #115, Charleston, SC 29405)

Day 2 | Thursday, February 26, 2026

Meeting Room: Magnolia

8:15 – 8:30 am

Day 2 Welcome / Day 1 Reflections

Part 3. Advisory Panels & Stakeholder Communication and Engagement

8:30 – 9:00 am

Breakout Discussion: Regional Use of Advisory Panels

Objective: Explore the use, composition and structure of Advisory Panels and identify challenges and opportunities for improving function, consistency and representation for Advisory Panels. (TOR 2.1 – 2.3)

Discussion Questions:

- What works well with the way your Council/Commission uses Advisory Panels? Where do they fall short in representing the range of interests (e.g., sectors, geographies) and providing input?
- For joint/cooperatively managed fisheries, what are the pros and cons of Advisory Panels meeting together or separately?

9:00 – 9:30 am

Breakout Recap & Expanding Stakeholder Engagement

Objective: Review opportunities for improving Advisory Panels and discuss challenges and strategies for engaging stakeholders outside the Council/Commission's traditional geographic range. (TOR 2.1 – 2.3, 5.1)

Discussion Questions:

- When managing fisheries that extend beyond your jurisdiction, how do you reach stakeholders and communicate regulations with fishermen outside your region?
- For joint or cooperatively managed fisheries, do your stakeholders understand the responsibilities of the different management bodies?

9:30 – 9:45 am

Break

Part 4. Looking Ahead: Opportunities for Enhanced Collaboration

9:45 – 10:30 am

Breakout Discussion: Increasing Coordination and Information Sharing

Objective: Identify opportunities to enhance communication and information sharing when stocks aren't jointly managed but have cross-jurisdictional relevance or issues that span FMPs. (TOR 5.1)

Discussion Questions:

- What are some examples of where we've done a good job coordinating and sharing information across regions (e.g., EFH)?
- For fisheries where there isn't shared decision making or established cross-regional interests, how can Councils and the Commission improve communication on relevant topics (e.g., courtesy heads up)?

10:30 – 10:45 am

Quick Breakout Group Recap

10:45 – 11:30 am

Cooperative Management Under Funding Limitations

Objective: Explore how capacity and funding limitations influence cooperative management strategies now and into the future. (TOR 4.1)

Discussion Questions:

- What are the implications of reduced federal science and management capacity for joint and cooperatively managed fisheries?
- How should Councils and the Commission be thinking about governance structures in the face of uncertain federal funding?

11:30 – 12:15 pm

Lunch (pre-order)

**We will pre-order lunch for delivery; please bring cash to cover the cost of your lunch.*

12:15 – 1:30 pm

Breakout Discussion: Positioning Ourselves for Future Collaboration

Objective: Identify potential strategies and frameworks for contemplating and initiating changes to governance structures. (TOR 1.4, 4.5)

Group Discussion

- Where are we running into complications with existing jurisdictional frameworks or seeing new cross-regional intersections pop up (e.g., monkfish, squid)?
- What considerations should the Councils/Commission be thinking about when contemplating a new joint/cooperative management arrangement or revisiting existing arrangements (e.g., criteria for initiating the conversation, tradeoffs between different structures; thresholds for different types of representation)?
- How can the Councils/Commission weigh the benefits of more joint or coordinated management with the need to be nimble and efficient?

1:30 – 2:00 pm

Synthesis & Wrap Up Discussion

Objective: Review highest priority challenges, most promising ideas, and themes of discussion that would be productive for the larger governance workshop.

2:00 – 4:00 pm

Optional Informal Discussion

Staff are welcome to continue informal discussion and cross-regional information sharing after the close of the formal workshop.

Workshop Terms of Reference (next page)

Staff-to-Staff Governance Workshop Terms of Reference

1. Evaluation of Council Committee Representation and Use

- 1.1. Review information compiled to date on Council committee representation and use. In this context, a review of representation means examine the demographics of each committee and determine how well current rosters represent the range of interests and geographic perspectives in the focus area of each committee.
- 1.2. Provide feedback on how well current committee representation and use is working for various FMPs, and identify specific challenges under the current structures.
- 1.3. Consider the scenario planning potential action menu item to enhance the role of committees in the decision-making process and consider utilizing committees more consistently across Councils, and comment on the potential challenges, benefits, and logistical questions associated with this approach.
- 1.4. Suggest criteria or guidelines that could be used to address committee representation concerns.
- 1.5. Consider how changes to Council committees might intersect with the work of ASMFC's Management Boards or other groups.

2. Advisory body use and representation

- 2.1. Review information compiled to date on membership and use of other advisory bodies: Advisory Panels, FMAT/PDTs, Monitoring/Technical Committees, SSCs, etc.
- 2.2. Generate ideas for additional, shared guidelines for the Councils/Commission to consider when establishing membership for these groups.
- 2.3. Identify challenges and potential opportunities for improvement concerning the use of these advisory bodies.

3. Use of Council-to-Council liaisons

- 3.1. Discuss how liaisons are currently used by each Council, including if they are used consistently between the regions, how they are used between the Councils and the Commission, and explore differences in approach between the appointees who have served in the role.
- 3.2. Evaluate the challenges and opportunities that exist for these roles and that do not require legislative change.

4. Joint and cooperative management arrangements; developing/formalizing agreements

- 4.1. Discuss the challenges and successes with current joint and cooperative management arrangements (both formal and informal), considering both governance and decision-making processes, and the logistics of staff coordination.
- 4.2. Discuss the degree to which current joint management arrangements are documented and what elements any documentation includes.
- 4.3. Recommend key elements of a joint agreement.
- 4.4. Outline a process that would be useful for documenting/modifying existing agreements, and/or developing new joint agreements.
- 4.5. Describe criteria that could be used to determine if a joint agreement is needed/appropriate, including how we know we need to start a conversation about joint governance.

- 4.6. Identify any specific joint agreements that should take priority for development/refinement in the near term.
- 5. General coordination mechanisms and staff to staff communication (applicable to a range of issues beyond joint management)**
 - 5.1. Building on joint and cooperative management discussion, develop mechanisms to enhance communication and knowledge sharing when stocks are not jointly managed but have cross jurisdictional relevance or for issues that are not FMP focused (e.g., habitat conservation and management, SSC collaboration)
 - 5.1.1. Describe existing coordination mechanisms and staff to staff communication methods.
 - 5.1.2. Clarify where they are effective and where improvements are needed.
 - 5.1.3. Identify opportunities for improved coordination and communication.
 - 5.1.4. Categorize improvement opportunities based on whether they will require buy-in from leadership or if they could be implemented independently by staff.
- 6. Prepare for broader governance workshop**
 - 6.1. Identify the most promising areas for discussion at the broader workshop.
 - 6.1.1. Ensure that priority opportunities and focus areas identified by each organization are part of the plans for the broader workshop.
 - 6.2. Determine briefing materials required and other preparation work needed.
 - 6.3. Discuss recommended participants.