

June-January 2023-2025

SSC Handbook

for members of the

North Pacific Fishery Management Council's
Scientific and Statistical Committee

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	3
2	TERMS OF REFERENCE	3
3	SSC MEMBERSHIP	4
3.1	Appointment and reappointment process and membership criteria	4
3.2	Attendance, leaves of absence, and SSC alternates.....	5
3.3	Standards of Conduct	5
3.4	Financial disclosure / Conflict of interest.....	6
3.5	Duties of Chair and Vice Chair.....	<u>76</u>
3.6	Duties of all SSC members	<u>87</u>
4	SSC MEETING PROCEDURES.....	8
4.1	Agenda Items	<u>98</u>
4.2	Executive Sessions	9
4.3	Process for developing recommendations.....	<u>109</u>
4.4	Preparation of SSC Report	<u>1140</u>
4.5	Presenting the SSC Report.....	12
5	COMPENSATION, TRAVEL, AND VIRTUAL MEETINGS.....	<u>1342</u>
5.1	Compensation	<u>1342</u>
5.2	Travel	13
5.3	Virtual meetings	15
6	REFERENCE MATERIALS.....	<u>1745</u>
6.1	General information on Council operations.....	<u>1745</u>
6.2	Overview of the Council's Decision-making Process.....	<u>1847</u>
6.3	Annual cycle of Council issues.....	<u>2048</u>
6.4	Types of SSC actions.....	<u>2149</u>
6.5	Primary Council staff administrative contacts	<u>2523</u>
ATTACHMENT 1 NPFMC POLICY ON ADDRESSING ALLEGATIONS OF HARASSMENT OF PROCESS PARTICIPANTS OTHER THAN COUNCIL EMPLOYEES		<u>2624</u>

1 Introduction

This handbook has been written to provide a more comprehensive reference manual for the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), expanding on the Council's Statement of Organization, Practices, and Procedures (SOPP). It is also intended to increase efficiency of SSC meetings and to provide additional information for new SSC members. Section 2 of the handbook is excerpted directly from the Council's SOPP (~~dated 2023~~) and provides the overarching terms of reference for the SSC. Sections 3 and 4 provide additional details and guidance on SSC membership and SSC meeting procedures. Section 5 provides guidance on SSC member compensation, travel rules, and reimbursement for travel expenses. Section ~~5.36~~ provides reference material on Council operations generally, as well as the Council's decision-making process and the types of actions that the SSC reviews. Finally, Section ~~6.56.4~~ provides contact information for primary Council administrative staff.

2 Terms of Reference

From the Council's SOPP: As required by the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) at Section 302(g)(1), the Council shall establish, maintain, and appoint the members of an SSC to assist it in the development, collection, evaluation, and peer review of such statistical, biological, economic, social, and other scientific information as is relevant to the Council's development and amendment of any of its fishery management plans.

The SSC will provide the peer review process for scientific information used to advise the Council about the conservation and management of the fisheries. The review process, which may include existing committees or panels, is deemed to satisfy the requirements of the guidelines issued pursuant to Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-554—Appendix C; 114 Stat. 2763A-153).

Objectives and Duties

As requested by the Council, through the Council Chair or the Executive Director, the SSC shall:

- 1) Provide ongoing scientific advice for fishery management decisions, including recommendations for acceptable biological catch, overfishing limits, maximum sustainable yield, and achieving rebuilding targets, and report on stock status and health, bycatch, habitat status, social and economic impacts of management measures, and sustainability of fishing practices.
- 2) Provide expert scientific and technical advice to the Council on the development of fishery management policy, fishery management plans and amendments, their goals and objectives, proposed regulations, and criteria for judging plan effectiveness.
- 3) Assist the Council's planning and execution of fishery management by determining the best scientific information available, as required by [National Standard 2](#).
- 4) Advise the Council by providing comments on any relevant fishery management plan or amendment prepared by the Secretary or Secretary's delegate pursuant to Section 304(c) of the MSA.
- 5) Submit to the Council reports deemed appropriate by the Committee or requested by the Council.
- 6) Serve as the Council's peer review body for influential scientific information pursuant to requirements of the Information Quality Act (Section 515 of Public Law 106-554) and NOAA information quality guidelines.
- 7) Perform other appropriate duties as may be required by the Council to carry out its functions under the Act.

The SSC is the Council's scientific review body, and as such provides recommendations on all aspects of the Council's process with respect to whether the Council's decision making is scientifically supported. In addition, the SSC members are a direct link to the scientific community, and members help communicate and facilitate research needs and the incorporation of science into policy decision-making by the Council.

3 SSC Membership

From the Council's SOPP: The SSC is composed of experts in biology, statistics, economics, anthropology/sociology, and other relevant disciplines from the federal, state, and private scientific communities and other appropriate sources. Members appointed by the Council to the SSC shall be federal employees, state employees, academicians, or independent experts and shall have strong scientific or technical credentials and experience. Independent experts on the SSC cannot be employed by an interest group or advocacy group.

The Council website identifies the current [members of the SSC](#) and a curriculum vitae for each SSC member is posted online. The website also provides a table identifying the affiliation and expertise of all SSC members.

There are two types of SSC members. Each statutory agency designated as a member of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council by the MSA may have a member on the Scientific and Statistical Committee; the Council may also appoint additional 'at large' members who may be from the same agency or another agency, an academic institution, or who are an independent expert (see explanation later in this section).

In general, the Council has adopted the 2003 [Policy of the National Academies](#) with respect to SSC composition and balance, and conflicts of interest for committees developing reports. In brief, the policy calls for appointing committee members who are highly qualified and capable individuals, and stipulates that the composition of the committee take into account the balance of individuals' knowledge, experience, and perspective. The work of the committee should not be compromised by issues of bias and lack of objectivity, but some level of bias is not necessarily a disqualifying factor as long as it is taken into account in balancing the committee. The policy provides very specific guidance about conflict of interest, defining the term as "any financial or other interest which conflicts with the service of the individual because it (1) could significantly impair the individual's objectivity or (2) could create an unfair competitive advantage for any person or organization." Statements of financial interest and potential conflicts of interest are disclosed annually by members of the SSC using a standardized form (see section 3.4 below).

The Council SOPPs note that an independent expert on the SSC cannot be employed by an interest group or advocacy group. It is acceptable, however, for SSC members to conduct research with funds that were provided by industry or interest groups, often handled through a separate board that makes funding decisions (for example, the Bering Sea Fisheries Research Foundation). This does not constitute "employment" for the purposes of qualifying for SSC membership.

3.1 Appointment and reappointment process and membership criteria

From the Council's SOPP: The SSC will consist of no more than 20 members. SSC members shall be appointed by, and serve at the pleasure of, the Council. They shall be appointed for one year, and may be reappointed. Vacancies may be filled for the remainder of an unexpired term.

The key requirement in appointing members or alternates is for the Council to maintain the highest level of objective scientific and technical expertise. Members should be able to make unbiased and objective scientific recommendations to the Council. Additionally, SSC members shall maintain high standards of ethical conduct and fully abide by the Council's anti-harassment policy.

All prospective SSC members, regardless of whether they are at large or statutory agency appointees, are subject to approval by the Council and must meet the expertise, objectivity, and conduct qualifications identified in the SOPPs. Prospective SSC members must submit a letter of interest and a curriculum vitae in response to the Council's call for nominations in ~~October~~[June](#). The Council will review prospective members and appoint them as appropriate at the December Council meeting. SSC terms are for one year.

To the extent possible, the Council will consult with the SSC Chair(s) to identify expertise needed on the SSC when calling for nominations, and to evaluate potential candidates.

For members requesting reappointment, it is not necessary to resubmit a letter of interest, but simply to respond to an email from Council staff identifying whether they would like to submit their names to be reappointed. An updated-revised curriculum vitae should be attached to this email response, if it needs updating.

3.2 Attendance, leaves of absence, and SSC alternates

From the Council's SOPP: Each statutory agency designated as a member of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council by the Act may have a member on the Scientific and Statistical Committee. That member may have an alternate, although it is expected that the primary member from an agency will attend meetings of the Scientific and Statistical Committee in person whenever possible. The statutory agency may nominate the alternate for their primary member, notifying the Chair of the SSC by letter of that selection. Alternates will be appointed for the same period as the primary member (i.e., one year).

Other Scientific and Statistical Committee members may have an alternate on a case-by-case basis (to be approved by the Council Chair or Executive Director in advance of the next meeting) when the member would be unable to participate for an extended period of time. It is expected that those alternates would be experts in the same field as the member and familiar with the work of the SSC and the Council.

SSC members are expected to attend all SSC meetings and participate fully at these meetings. Generally, acceptable absences will be the result of or involve personal emergencies or unavoidable conflicts related to the member's area of expertise or employment. SSC members wishing to be excused from a meeting should contact the SSC Chair. While a remote participation option is available, in-person attendance is strongly encouraged and members should try to attend in-person unless contagious.

Periodically, SSC members elect to take a leave of absence from their regular employment, such as a 6 to 12 month sabbatical leave. In these cases, the SSC member should contact the SSC Chair and Deputy Director in advance, and discuss whether an alternate SSC member can be identified who is familiar with the Council process and who has similar expertise. The Council Chair will decide whether to appoint that person as an alternate for the duration of the leave of absence, based on the membership criteria identified in the SOPPs.

3.3 Standards of Conduct

From the Council's SOPP: No member of a Council advisory group shall use or allow the use, for other than official purposes, of information obtained through or in connection with his or her Council employment which has not been made available to the general public.

The Council will not tolerate harassment, or retaliation against those who report harassment. For purposes of this policy, harassment includes unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, older age (beginning at age 40), disability, or genetic information (including family medical history). This policy does not cover allegations of incivility not based on a protected characteristic. However, this policy is not intended to limit in any way the Council's ability to address incivility, inappropriate behavior, or other issues in an appropriate manner for the context. Any Council process participant who observes or receives a report of harassment of a Council process participant must report the incident to the Executive Director, Deputy Director, or Chair or Vice Chair of the Council as soon as possible.

SSC members are expected to maintain a high standard of conduct and act in a professional and courteous manner during SSC meetings. SSC members are prohibited from misusing government resources, Council information, or their affiliation with the Council. In other words, while it is acceptable to note your experience on the SSC on your resume, you are prohibited from mentioning your SSC affiliation on

business cards, letters to the editor, etc. See pages 6 and 7 of the Department of Commerce/ NOAA's [Rules of Conduct for Staff and Advisors of Fishery Management Councils](#).

The Council's policy on addressing harassment of process participants is provided in Attachment 1.

Political campaigning or showing outward support for a political party or candidate for any election (e.g., wearing badges, buttons, pins, signs) is prohibited while the SSC is in session¹.

The Council has adopted the following Code of Conduct for all NPFMC meetings:

Participants in the Council process are expected to participate in a manner that is professional and respectful of Council members, staff, advisors, committee members, and the public. Harassment will not be tolerated. All Council participants are responsible for holding each other accountable to the following ground rules:

- Treat everyone with respect.
- Listen and seek to understand differing views or opinions.
- Represent information honestly and openly.
- Refrain from using offensive, disrespectful, or derogatory language.
- Personal or organizational attacks or insults will not be tolerated.

Reports of inappropriate behavior will be taken seriously and followed through to resolution per the Council's Statement of Organization, Practices, and Procedures, which also includes the NPFMC policy on addressing allegations of harassment.

3.4 Financial disclosure / Conflict of interest

From the Council's SOPP: Each member of the SSC shall be treated as an affected individual for purposes of financial interest disclosure provisions for SSC members as specified in the Act. Financial interest disclosures for SSC members will be reviewed annually by the Council prior to appointment, and when updated by an SSC member reporting any substantial changes in financial interest. Financial interest disclosures will be kept on file by the Secretary.

It is unlawful for members of the SSC to knowingly and willfully fail to disclose, or falsely disclose, any financial interest. In addition to penalties in regulation, a violation may result in removal of the individual from SSC membership.

SSC members are required to complete a financial interest disclosure on an annual basis. These are public documents which can be publicly accessed upon request. Council staff will contact each SSC member in January to ensure that the correct form is completed, but SSC members should also contact the Council office if there are any substantial changes in financial interest during the course of the year, requiring the disclosure to be updated.

If an SSC member has a financial conflict of interest (defined in the 2003 [Policy of the National Academies](#) and discussed in Section 3) with an SSC agenda item, the member should recuse themselves from participating in SSC discussions on that subject, and such recusal should be documented in the SSC report. In cases where an SSC member is an author or coauthor of a report considered by the SSC, that individual should recuse themselves from discussion about SSC recommendations on this agenda item, however that SSC member may provide clarifications about the report to the SSC as necessary. If, on the other hand, a report is prepared by individuals who are under the immediate line of supervision by an SSC member or are an immediate family member, then that SSC member should recuse themselves from leading the SSC recommendations for that agenda item, though they may otherwise participate fully in the SSC discussion after disclosing their affiliations with the authors.

¹ In session means the time when the SSC starts each morning until it adjourns in the evening (normally 8am-5pm daily), for the duration of the SSC meeting.

3.5 Duties of Chair and Vice Chair

From the Council's SOPP: The SSC Chair and Vice Chair shall be nominated by the Committee from among its members and confirmed by the Council for one-year terms.

The SSC requires strong leadership, as the SSC frequently evaluates highly contentious allocation and conservation issues. The SSC Chair and Vice Chair are elected from among members of the committee. Due to the workload involved in chairing, the SSC may choose to elect ~~two~~ Co-Chairs, who can either share duties during a single meeting or choose to alternately chair successive meetings.

The SSC **Chair or Co-Chair's** duties and responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- In consultation with the Executive Director and/or Deputy Director, establish an agenda and schedule for each meeting.
- Assign SSC members to lead and assist with review of each agenda item.
- Determine seating arrangement for SSC members around the table.
- Officiate and conduct SSC meetings in accordance with the SSC terms of reference and the procedures outlined in this handbook.
- Provide leadership and ensure that SSC members are aware of their obligations and that the SSC complies with its responsibilities.
- At the beginning of the meeting, ask all SSC members to divulge any conflicts of interest that may influence their ability to conduct an impartial review of the science of each issue on the agenda.
- Ensure there is sufficient time during the meeting to fully discuss agenda items, and address scheduling changes or public testimony time limits as needed.
- Ensure that discussion on agenda items is on-topic, productive, and professional.
- Working with Council staff, identify review items that are considered to be influential scientific information (ISI), according to the OMB Peer Review Bulletin, and ensure the SSC report includes the requisite documentation for such actions (see Section 4.4).
- Keep a record of SSC member comments during deliberation to help with finalizing the report and answering questions from the Council during oral presentation.
- Present the SSC report to the Council.
- Approve the SSC report for final distribution after review. Work with the Vice Chair to accept/reject proposed edits to the report.

In addition, the SSC Chair(s) or their respective proxy, will participate in the Council Coordinating Committee (CCC)'s Scientific Coordination Subcommittee (SCS), a group of Chairs from each of the Regional Council Scientific and Statistical Committees. The function of the SCS, in conjunction with Council staff, is to plan and conduct meetings or workshops to discuss scientific issues of national importance based on terms of reference or topics provided by the CCC.

The SSC **Vice Chair's** duties and responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Keep records of SSC deliberations and recommendations to help with editing the SSC report when requested by the Chair.
- Track the names of public testifiers on each issue, and ensure that public comment on documents considered to be influential scientific information, according to the OMB Peer Review Bulletin, are summarized in the SSC report.
- During review of SAFE report documents, verify that the correct tables of OFLs and ABCs are used in the SSC report.

- Compile the SSC report from member submissions, and assist the Chair in preparing the oral report to the Council.
- After the meeting, work with the Chair/Co-Chairs to ensure the SSC report is finalized, complete, and accurate, and submit it to the Council office within 30 days of the end of the meeting. Substantial changes shall be approved by the Chair.

3.6 Duties of all SSC members

The duties and responsibilities of **all SSC members** include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Attend all SSC meetings and stay until the SSC meeting adjourns, insofar as possible.
- Arrive at the SSC meeting prepared. Be familiar with all the documents in advance to understand the issues and be sufficiently informed to effectively participate in discussions. For issues for which you are assigned as lead, become intimately familiar with the topic and be prepared to ask insightful questions and provide expert guidance to the analysts to assure that the documents represent the best available science, to the extent practicable for the situation.
- Act professionally during the meetings. Keep the discussions civil and respect others' viewpoints. [Adhere to the NPFMC Code of Conduct \(Section 3.3\).](#)
- Prepare and review assigned sections of the SSC report in a timely fashion.
- Disclose any potential conflicts to the Chair regarding a particular topic at the time that SSC assignments are being made before each meeting, and publicly at the beginning of the meeting.

In addition to providing recommendations to the Council on scientific issues, the SSC provides other important functions. Because SSC members are a direct link to the scientific community, members can help communicate research needs and the incorporation of science into policy decision-making by the Council.

4 SSC Meeting Procedures

From the Council's SOPP: The SSC shall meet as a whole, or in part, at the request of the Chair of the SSC, with the approval of the Chair of the Council, as often as necessary to fulfill the SSC's responsibilities, taking into consideration time and budget constraints. Normally, the SSC will meet prior to the scheduled Council meetings. The SSC shall hold its meetings in conjunction with meetings of the Council, to the extent practicable. The Executive Director of the Council shall provide such staff and other support as the Council considers necessary for SSC activities, within budgetary limitations. Notices of SSC meetings shall comply with notice requirements specified in Section 3.1 of the SOPP².

The SSC generally meets for three days during the ~~five-four~~ regularly scheduled Council meetings, in ~~February~~, April, June, October, and December. The SSC is generally scheduled to meet on Monday through Wednesday during the Council meeting date range³. The Council's [meeting schedule](#) is generally specified for the next 2-3 years. Occasionally, the Council will hold an out-of-cycle meeting that requires the SSC to convene in addition to this schedule. The SSC may also choose to hold an additional, SSC-only special-topic meeting during the summer months, [either as a whole or in SSC subgroups](#). Council staff will consult with the SSC Chair in planning such meetings, and alert members with as much advance notice as possible.

² Section 3.1 describes the notice requirements that apply to Council meetings: timely notice of any meeting, including the time, place, and agenda of the meeting, shall be provided by any means that will result in wide publicity in the major fishing ports of the region, and in the Federal Register.

³ Note, when the SSC and Council meet in virtual mode only, this timing may change (see Section 5.3).

SSC meetings are recorded and livestreamed, and are archived on the Council's YouTube channel. SSC members should not provide personally identifiable information (PII) or business identifiable information (BII) during the meeting, as any such information shared during the meeting will be publicly available.

4.1 Agenda Items

From the Council's SOPP: The agenda for each SSC meeting shall be developed by the SSC Chair in consultation with the Deputy Director or Executive Director.

The issues on the SSC agenda for each meeting typically include reviews of draft analyses at the initial review stage, SAFE report documents, research priorities, and other papers directly stemming from scientific matters, such as progress on ecosystem-based management (see Section 6.3 for further discussion). Council agenda items not normally sent to the SSC for its recommendations include agency reports, issues for which the SSC previously provided recommendations (e.g., final action analyses), annual industry reports or updates, or high-level policy decisions that are not based on scientific evaluation of different alternatives. Nevertheless, the SSC may consider any topic or issue it deems important to bring to the Council's attention, time permitting, and with the concurrence of the Council Chair, Executive Director, or Deputy Director.

The Council agenda is generally developed 4-6 weeks before the next meeting. The SSC Chair will work with the Deputy Director to identify which issues on the Council agenda should be reviewed by the SSC, and to prioritize among agenda items if necessary to allow sufficient time to complete review within 2.5 days. Ideally the remaining half day should provide an opportunity for the committee to develop and review the SSC report as a group. The agenda will typically be finalized approximately 3 weeks before the start of the meeting.

Scheduling changes may be required during the meeting to maintain timeliness. Schedule changes may require the SSC to take up a topic prior to the originally scheduled time, take agenda items out of order, work late, adjust public testimony time limits, or drop agenda items due to prioritization of time remaining in the meeting. The SSC Chair will consult with the Deputy Director or Executive Director regarding schedule changes to ensure staff availability.

4.2 Executive Sessions

From the Council's SOPP: SSC meetings are open to the public, unless closed pursuant to Section 3.4 of the SOPP⁴.

Section 302(i)(3) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act allows the SSC to close a portion of the meeting to the public to address a limited number of issues (national security, internal administrative matters, employment matters, or briefings on litigation). If an SSC meeting is closed, the Council shall provide advance notice, including in that notification the time and place of the meeting. Notification is not required regarding any brief closure of a portion of a meeting in order to discuss employment or other internal administrative matters. The portion of a meeting that is closed without notice may not exceed 2 hours.

Examples of internal administrative matters include procedures on preparing SSC minutes, election of officers, evaluation of resumes and recommendations on plan team membership, issues of public decorum or medical conditions of SSC members. In deciding whether to close a portion of a meeting to discuss internal administrative matters, the SSC should consider not only the privacy interests of individuals whose conduct or qualifications may be discussed, but also the interest of the public in being informed of operations and actions.

⁴ Section 3.4 describes the conditions under which Council, SSC, or AP meetings may be closed to the public. Those conditions are described in the text in this section.

Before closing a meeting or portion thereof, the SSC Chair should consult with NOAA General Counsel (or if not available, the Executive Director or Deputy Director) to ensure that the matters to be discussed fall within the exceptions to the requirement to hold public meetings described above. Actions that affect the public, although based on discussions in closed meetings, must be taken in public.

4.3 Process for developing recommendations

From the Council SOPP: SSC meetings will follow established protocols. Following staff reports, the public will have an opportunity to testify on scientific aspects of an issue prior to SSC deliberations. SSC members shall disclose any potential conflicts regarding a particular topic prior to any discussion of that issue. SSC decisions will be reached by consensus, whenever possible; however, if a decision is required and consensus cannot be reached, the opinion of the majority will prevail.

The process used by the SSC to develop its recommendations to the Council reflects the normal Council decision-making process, except that the SSC does not use motions and voting to arrive at recommendations.

Staff report

For each agenda item, staff will provide an overview of the issue, and identify the key points for scientific evaluation with respect to that agenda item. SSC members should ask staff questions of clarification as needed, particularly as related to any recommendations that they may have prepared for leading the SSC deliberation discussions. Raise all major points to appear in the SSC report with staff during staff questioning.

Public testimony

Following the staff report, the SSC will take public comment. Members of the public should sign up online to provide public testimony, through the SSC eAgenda. The Chair may choose to remind the public that testimony should focus on the issues on which the SSC will be deliberating, namely the scientific evaluation of the issue or analysis, rather than advocating for a particular policy outcome, in accordance with the SSC's role. Unless the Chair indicates otherwise, each individual will have a 5-minute time limit for providing public testimony. Depending on the number of testifiers, the Chair may adjust downward the time limit for oral testimony by agenda item, in order to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak.

SSC deliberations

Following public comment, the SSC will discuss and deliberate a recommendation. More information on the different agenda items that come before the SSC, and typical SSC action on these items, is provided in Section 6.3. Generally, recommendations by the SSC should be appropriate to the scope, timeline, and feasibility of the Council action; that is, the Council is not looking for a perfect analysis, but one that will allow for a reasonably informed decision based on the options as identified, and the best scientific information available as applied to those options. SSC review is different than peer-review of a journal manuscript, to the extent that SSC members can have a collegial relationship with staff allowing for interactions before, during, and after review to improve the analyses and their documentation.

The Chair will look to the assigned leads to begin the discussion, before opening it up to the SSC as a whole. The Chair will ensure that every SSC member be given the opportunity to provide discussion, to ensure all points of view are provided. The SSC report cannot include substantive comments that are not verbalized during the deliberation, so it is important to introduce all potential recommendations. Ideally, the SSC will develop a consensus recommendation; if there is disagreement, the Chair will work to find common ground and identify conclusions that can inform the Council with respect to the action at hand. Once the discussion is complete, the Chair will summarize the major recommendations and points of discussion to be included in the SSC report.

If an SSC member has a conflict with respect to a particular agenda topic, either because of financial interest (see discussion in Section 3.4) or because s/he has been involved in the research or contributed to the analysis being reviewed, they must disclose it at the beginning of the meeting and prior to SSC deliberations. Note, the SSC member may provide comments for clarity or address questions on the research with respect to that agenda item, but may not offer opinions or recommendations.

4.4 Preparation of SSC Report

From the Council's SOPP: A report of the meeting shall reflect the discussion and deliberations that were made during the SSC meeting. The SSC Chair, or designee, will be responsible for reporting the SSC's recommendations to the Council. A report of the SSC meeting will be made available to the public on the Council's website after the meeting.

Report preparation is one of the most important duties of SSC members. The SSC report should reflect the discussions of the SSC, as a body, during the SSC meeting. The report serves multiple purposes: (1) a record of what transpired at the meeting; (2) scientific advice to the Council and to the public; and (3) the “institutional memory” of the development of SSC guidance regarding various issues. As such, it is important that the SSC report be clearly written, accurate, and transparent. The following guidelines are meant to assist in achieving these goals.

Before the meeting

1. Before the meeting, the SSC Chair will assign individuals to lead and assist with review of each agenda item. The Chair will attempt to distribute the workload evenly among attending SSC members, while still ensuring that each agenda topic receives scientific review by someone with the appropriate expertise.
2. If you are assigned an agenda topic that relates to your own research, or that creates a conflict of interest, let the Chair know so that s/he can reassign the topic.
3. Each SSC member should read the documents pertaining to their assigned agenda item(s) particularly carefully. Look for the key issues involved and research previous SSC comments on the item. The SSC preview document, prepared by the SSC Chair with the assistance of the Deputy Director, will provide a summary of the agenda item, what is being asked of the SSC, and when the SSC previously addressed this agenda topic.

During the agenda item

4. Members assigned to an agenda item should be prepared to take the lead at the meeting in asking questions of staff and the public, and formulating SSC advice on those agenda items.
5. The Chair will summarize the main points that constitute SSC advice. Members assigned to an agenda item should be sure to write these points down.
6. If you have detailed edits on the document that are not substantive, it is appropriate to give these directly to staff to address.

Writing up the SSC discussion

7. Get together with other individuals responsible for writing the report on the particular agenda item. Decide how to divide up the task. One person should assume the lead to assemble written and electronic submissions cohesively and to give the draft section to the SSC Vice-Chair.
8. The start of the SSC agenda topic write up should contain the agenda number and title and a list of staff members and the public who spoke before the SSC. After that, provide a summary of previous consideration of this item and address what are key issues being discussed by the SSC.
9. The SSC report should provide an accurate description of the scientific discussion. Therefore, sufficient detail should be provided to reflect the range of opinions that were expressed.

10. Use bold font to highlight key statements that should be emphasized by the Chair when presenting the report to the Council. Try to write the report with this aspect in mind. For example, detailed criticisms of methodology or results meant for the analysts should appear in separate paragraphs, so that the Chair can easily navigate through the reading of the report to the Council.
11. If possible, provide the Chair with a PowerPoint summary of the key statements for the report to the Council. There may be a template to assist with preparation of this summary.
12. Avoid recommending changes of a substantive nature that were not discussed at the meeting. You may come up with a brilliant idea that should have been considered at the meeting, but wasn't. The idea does not belong in the SSC report. Reconsiderations by individual SSC members should be brought to the attention of the entire SSC and, if warranted, included in a subsequent SSC report.

Influential scientific information

13. For documents considered to be influential scientific information (ISI), according to the OMB Peer Review Bulletin and as determined by the Chair, the SSC shall, in its report, indicate who testified, characterize the nature of the public testimony, and indicate how the SSC responded to the testimony in discussion. Typically, the main ISI documents that the SSC reviews are the annual SAFE reports and any Council analyses that require an environmental impact statement (EIS).

Compiling and finalizing the report

14. All SSC members are encouraged to read the draft sections of all agenda items as the report is being compiled, and provide comments to the leader of that agenda item. Please make your comments constructive and clear. If you have suggested changes, please write these out legibly. Avoid ambiguous advice such as "Put something in about ...", "This is not clear to me", "This needs work..."
15. After the meeting, the SSC Vice Chair will send the draft report out to all members, and/or post it on Google Docs, and members are encouraged to recommend final changes.
16. The SSC Chair has final responsibility for approving the SSC report, but will work with the Vice Chair to ensure the report includes SSC member edits. The Chair may change or delete language from the report for clarity, style, scientific logic, and accuracy.

4.5 Presenting the SSC Report

The SSC Chair is responsible for presenting the SSC report to the Council. The Chair should plan to stay through Friday of the meeting at which s/he is chairing, in order to finalize the minutes, provide presentations of the SSC report on agenda topics as they are taken up by the Council, and give the balance of the SSC report on any issues not yet addressed by the Council ~~on Friday afternoon.~~ The Chair should work with the Deputy Director to plan timing for this 'Balance of the SSC report' presentation, but it is often scheduled for 1pm on Friday. In the extenuating circumstance that the Chair is not able to stay through Friday, s/he should work with the Deputy Director or Executive Director to identify a designee or an alternative, or to give the report remotely.

In giving the oral report, the Chair will present the key points of SSC recommendations on each agenda topic taken up by the SSC. Preparing these key points in a PowerPoint presentation format may be a useful way to convey the SSC's recommendation to the Council.

Reporting to the Council can be challenging, particularly on complex and contentious issues. The Chair will be asked to capture the essence of the SSC discussions when requested, and provide responses to Council member's questions that justify the SSC's recommendations and conclusions. The oral report on the SSC deliberations is critical to the Council's decision-making. The report is important not only to

Council members, who are relying on the SSC to evaluate the scientific merit of the information on which to base their decisions, but also to the public trying to understand the issue prior to testimony.

5 Compensation, travel, and virtual meetings

5.1 Compensation

From the Council's SOPP: SSC members shall serve without compensation, except that (subject to the availability of appropriations), a stipend may be paid to members of the SSC who are not employed by the Federal government or a state marine fisheries agency.⁵

The Council's compensation policy for SSC members is as follows:

- The current rate for SSC stipends is \$300.00 per day.
- Compensation is limited to attendance at formal meetings of the SSC (actual meeting days), or to the Chair, Vice-Chair, or designee while officially finalizing⁶ and reporting SSC minutes during the course of a Council meeting.
- Compensation may be paid on a per day basis whether attendance was in excess of eight hours a day or less than eight hours a day, unless participation is by webinar. To be compensated for webinars, the meeting must last more than one hour before compensation is paid. Any webinar lasting 1-4 hours will be paid at 50% of the daily stipend rate.
- "Homework" time in preparation for any meeting, training, or attendance of any meeting other than those specified above, is not compensable nor is travel time to or from such meetings.
- The Council can provide payment via direct deposit.
- Stipend payments are subject to annual tax reporting through Form 1099/1096. All new SSC members are required to submit signed form W-9 to the Finance Officer prior to receiving any compensation.

5.2 Travel

From the Council's SOPP: Non-Federal members of the SSC may be reimbursed for travel expenses incurred in the performance of Council duties, including transportation, room, meals, and incidental travel expenses, at per diem limits established by the federal government for the applicable geographic locale. Provided meals will not be reimbursed. Claims for reimbursement are to be submitted on specified forms to the Finance Officer within 30 days following completion of travel.

Federal employees serving in the above capacity are subject to the reimbursement rules of their agencies.

SSC members will be reimbursed for travel expenses when attending SSC meetings in accordance with applicable law and Council policy. The Council is not authorized to reimburse expenses for members of the committee who are employed by the Federal government. Unless explicitly specified below, the Council follows Federal travel regulations for staff and member travel (41 CFR 301-10).

Hotel Reservations

Reservations for the hotel should be made under the Council room block, in advance of each meeting. The Council's travel coordinator will email details, and members are asked to make reservations accordingly. These rooms are part of a contract for the whole meeting, and to meet our room block

⁵ as defined in 50 CFR 600.134

⁶ In general, compensation for finalizing minutes will be limited to 1 day per meeting in excess of actual meeting days, plus days on which an SSC report is provided to the Council, unless prior authorization is granted by the Executive Director.

obligations, SSC members are expected to stay at the Council hotel. Members ~~may~~will be responsible for excess costs if reservations are made after the room block deadline.

After confirming your hotel stay and finding that you must cancel, please let the hotel and Council administrative staff know as soon as possible. If you do not arrive at the hotel on the confirmed day of check-in, the hotel may charge a fee for that night's stay, and you may be responsible for the no-show expenses if for something other than a medical or family emergency.

Airline Reservations

All fares must be booked as coach class, and economy (although not Alaska Airlines "saver" class) fares are preferred and encouraged when available. There are many coach airfare options, please book your airfare to result in the best economic value. We understand that flexibility is necessary to engage effectively in the Council process. Therefore, you do not have to buy the cheapest ticket available, but rarely is it necessary to purchase the most expensive coach fare. We intend to remain as flexible as possible in this regard, as long as overall travel costs remain within our budget. Please do

Purchase of first-class airfare is not allowed except in extenuating circumstances, and always needs prior approval from the Council Executive Director. If you purchase a first class fare you will only be reimbursed for the coach fare equivalent. Upgrading flights to first class is allowed using an individual SSC member's points, credits, or elite mileage plan standing, so long as the original purchased fare was for coach class.

The Council's travel coordinator will set up a user account for each SSC member through the Alaska Airlines EasyBiz program. EasyBiz allows for airfare to be booked at the Council's expense, thus avoiding the need for reimbursement. The program operates the same as other Alaska Airlines purchases, you will still be eligible to earn miles, mileage program upgrades, and any other perks you may have associated with your flyer status. You must still submit flight itinerary copies with your travel claim regardless of the use of the EasyBiz program. The travel coordinator will also provide a discount code for use when booking airfare to SSC meetings on Alaska Airlines; this code can be used regardless of your EasyBiz status. Please do not select the Allianz travel insurance or carbon credit offset add-ons.

In order to get the best rate possible, travelers should use provided discount codes and book flights once the meeting schedule is released, generally ~~~30 days~~4-6 weeks prior to the meeting. Members will be responsible for the difference in fare if reservations are made within 3 weeks of the meeting. A written explanation for any last-minute bookings should be provided to justify the increased fare cost, which is subject to approval by the Executive Director. Last-minute airfare changes should only made if the Chair formally announces a schedule change. The Deputy or Executive Director must approve requests to change your airline reservation if the cost to the Council exceeds \$100.

In extenuating circumstances and with advance notice, the Executive Director may authorize travel reimbursement to and from locales other than your normal home location.

Travel Expenses and Reimbursement

SSC members will be reimbursed for travel expenses to SSC meetings, including transportation, lodging, meals, and incidental travel expenses, at per diem limits established by the Federal government for the applicable geographic locale. However, there will be situations when standard limits for hotel room rates must be exceeded, for example, for last minute travel or during the busiest tourist season in some locations.

The Finance Officer will send out a travel claim form in advance of each meeting, showing daily per diem limits, including per diem for travel days. All expense items other than per diem (for example, baggage fees or taxis) should be itemized, no matter the value. Receipts are required for reimbursement for all airline tickets (including those purchased through EasyBiz), hotel expenses, and other expenses over \$75. Advance approval is necessary from the Executive Director for any rental car reimbursement. Typically,

we do not reimburse for rental cars for Council meetings. If a rental car is preapproved for your travel, the receipt is required for reimbursement.

Travel expenses will be paid for each day an SSC member attends the SSC meeting. Note that the SSC purposefully schedules time for members to work collectively on the SSC report as part of their agenda. This is considered part of the SSC's scheduled meeting for travel reimbursement purposes.

In some cases, the SSC meeting will end ahead of schedule; in these cases, travel expenses will be paid for the scheduled days of the SSC meeting, should an SSC member wish to stay and help with minutes and/or attend some of the Council meeting. SSC members may also choose to depart immediately after the SSC meeting adjourns. Fees associated with changing flight reservations or hotel stays may should be approved by the Executive Director or Deputy Director.

If the SSC is scheduled to end at noon, members are expected to travel home that afternoon (for expense purposes, this is considered a travel day). If the SSC is scheduled to end at 5pm, SSC members can stay overnight and hotel expenses will be reimbursed for that evening (and the following day will be considered a travel day for expense purposes).

If the meeting is in your hometown (within 50 miles of the meeting location), and thus you are commuting, then expenses are reimbursed for mileage, parking, and lunch. Breakfast and dinner expenses are authorized if you are attending a Council related post-meeting workshop or session, or arriving early or staying late to work on minutes or attend to other critical SSC business. Any additional extenuating circumstances require advance approval of the Executive Director.

Personal travel combined with Council travel is generally allowed, with hotel, airfare, and rental car expenses prorated for your personal travel days. For airfare, provide documentation as to what travel would have cost for work alone at the time you booked your ticket. You are responsible for the difference between that and the actual cost for personal airfare. You are not eligible for per diem on personal travel days.

Travel forms will be emailed to committee members in pdf format, and can be completed and signed digitally. The forms, with scanned receipts, can be submitted via email to the Finance Officer, or sent by mail. Claims for reimbursement are to be submitted within 30 days following completion of travel. Claims received later than 30 days following completion of travel may not be reimbursed unless there are exceptional circumstances, and reimbursement is approved by the Executive Director. In no case will claims be reimbursed 30 days after the end of a funding year (normally December 31st), so SSC members will need to quickly submit travel claims following the December meeting.

5.3 Virtual meetings

At times, the Council may need to hold SSC meetings by teleconference or webconference. For regularly-scheduled SSC meetings, this may mean that the SSC needs to meet longer than the typical three-day meetings identified in Chapter 4. The Executive Director will make changes in consultation with the SSC Chair(s), and will provide as much advance notice as possible when changing meeting dates. Meeting protocols for virtual meetings will be distributed in advance to SSC members, ~~but may include SSC meetings being recorded and livestreamed or archived on the Council's website for some period of time. SSC members should not provide personally identifiable information (PII) or business identifiable information (BII) during the meeting, as any such information shared during the meeting will be publicly available. In general, remote participation will not be available if the meeting is also being held in person.~~

~~The Council will reimburse costs incurred for internet or phone use during SSC online meetings, up to an established amount determined by the Executive Director. The Council may not reimburse costs for Federal employees. Claims for reimbursement should be submitted within 30 days of the meeting, and late claims are subject to the same constraints as travel claims (Section 5.2). Subject to available funds, the Council may also loan any equipment necessary for participation in the meeting.~~

6 Reference materials

The following sections provide some general information about Council and SSC operations and guiding principles, SSC actions, and primary contacts on Council staff.

6.1 General information on Council operations

Regional fishery management councils were established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (also known as the Magnuson-Stevens Act, or MSA). Title III of the [Magnuson-Stevens Act](#) (beginning on page 58) sets the national standards, applicable requirements for councils, requirements for fishery management plans, and other requirements and authorities. You can find out more about the regional councils on the all-councils website (www.fisherycouncils.org/). NOAA Fisheries also has developed a training course for newly appointed council members which covers a variety of topics such as provisions of the MSA and other applicable laws, stock assessment science and procedures, and council operations. While attendance at the training is limited, many of the materials are available online (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/partners/council-training>).

The Council's website, www.npfmc.org, also provides useful information about the Council process, current issues, and upcoming meetings. The Council has posted a number of flyers on our website that describe [navigating the Council process](#), which provide a helpful overview.

The SSC generally meets ~~five-four~~ times each year, in conjunction with the Council and Advisory Panel (AP). The "[Three-Meeting Outlook](#)" provides our best estimate of issues to be addressed at upcoming meetings, ~~as well as a list of m~~ Meeting dates for the next two ~~three~~ years [can be found on the Council's Future Council Meetings webpage](#). The SSC [generally](#) meets for the first three days (almost always Monday-Wednesday) of the listed date range.

The Council's [Statement of Organization, Practices, and Procedures](#) (SOPP) provides details on the Council's function, organization, procedures for Council meetings, standards of conduct, and information about the employment practices for the staff.

We also post a list of commonly used [acronyms and abbreviations](#) on our website. We use quite a few acronyms and abbreviations in our documents and discussion, so you might find this a useful reference.

Complete [Council](#) meeting materials ~~since 2013, and some earlier documents,~~ are available in the [Council's eAgenda meeting archive on the website](#), along with the Council newsletter that reports on Council actions at each meeting. [Note that the SSC has had a separate eAgenda from the Council since 2019; prior meetings combined SSC and Council agenda items.](#) There is also a specific [archive library](#) of all [newsletters and](#) meeting minutes [on the Council's website](#), including [SSC reports](#).

Our website also provides information about the current composition of the [Council](#), [AP](#), and [SSC](#), together with a list of [NPFMC Committees](#) and membership and a list of Council [staff](#). Collectively, along with long-term stakeholders, you may hear this group referred to as the Council 'family.'

Fishery management plans

The Council has prepared and implemented six FMPs for fisheries off Alaska, described below. The Council spends much of its time on amendments to the groundfish FMPs, which have each been amended more than one hundred times. Summary reports provide an overview of the amendments for the [BSAI Groundfish FMP](#), the [GOA Groundfish FMP](#), the [BSAI Crab FMP](#), as well as amendments affecting the [IFQ program](#). A similar report has also been developed for [area closures](#) in Alaska waters.

- **Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish FMP:** this FMP includes all species of groundfish (pollock, cod, flatfish, sablefish, rockfish, etc.) except halibut, which are managed by the International Pacific Halibut Commission. The FMP establishes management measures for

vessels using trawl, longline, pot, and jig gear, including limited entry programs, time/area closures, bycatch and effort controls, and monitoring requirements. Inseason management of these fisheries is conducted by the NMFS Alaska Regional Office.

- **Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMP:** The GOA groundfish FMP also includes the major groundfish target species except for halibut and a few that are managed by the State of Alaska. Many management measures mirror the BSAI groundfish FMP.
- **Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King and Tanner Crab FMP:** The FMP establishes a State and Federal cooperative management regime that largely defers crab fisheries management to the State of Alaska, with Federal oversight. The FMP includes all species and fisheries for king and Tanner crab (red, blue, and golden king crab, Tanner crab, and snow crab). Specifying annual catch limits for each fishery is a Federal responsibility, as well as determining if stocks are overfished or are approaching an overfishing condition; if either of these occurs, the Council must immediately end overfishing and develop an FMP amendment to rebuild the stock within prescribed timelines.
- **Alaska Scallop FMP:** This FMP is also jointly managed with the State of Alaska, and establishes a limited entry program to control fishing effort such that a maximum of 9 vessels may hold licenses for the fishery.
- **Alaska Salmon FMP:** The Salmon FMP was developed to prohibit fishing for salmon in the EEZ except by a limited number of vessels using troll gear in Southeast Alaska. The FMP is being revised to also manage commercial salmon fishing occurring in the EEZ portion of Cook Inlet. All commercial salmon fisheries conducted in State waters are managed by the State of Alaska.
- **FMP for Fish Resources of the Arctic Management Area:** The FMP includes snow crab, Arctic cod, and saffron cod, and was developed in response to changing ecological conditions of the Arctic which could create conditions leading to commercial fishery development in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) north of the Bering Straits. The FMP establishes a management framework for considering requests to develop future commercial fisheries based on best available science.

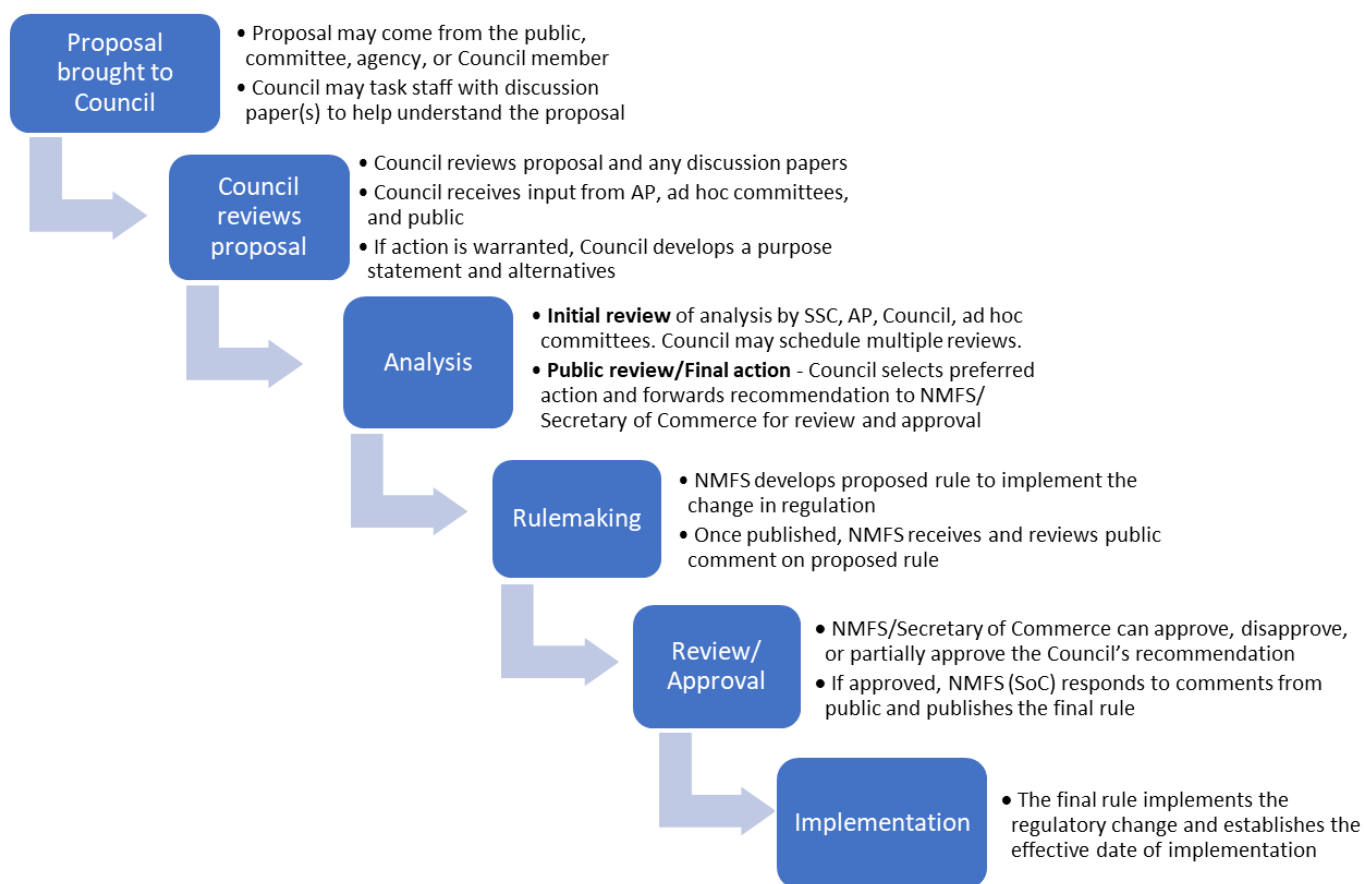
6.2 Overview of the Council's Decision-making Process

The procedure for changing Federal fishing regulations follows a standardized process, set forth by a combination of laws, regulations, operational guidelines, policies, as well as adjustments and adaptations developed by the Council to increase efficiency, provide public participation, and produce quality outcomes. As shown in [Figure 1](#), and discussed below, there are several key steps in the process. The SSC plays a very important role in the development of fishery regulations by: 1) ensuring that the environmental and economic analyses used for decision making by the Council are scientifically adequate; and 2) establishing scientifically-based annual catch limits as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act and detailed in the National Standard 1 guidelines.

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Figure 1 Council decision-making process



The process follows several distinct steps, as detailed below.

Proposal for Change

Concerns and proposals for change are brought to the Council's attention by the public through the AP, SSC, or other committee, or directly to the Council via written or oral public comment during the 'Staff Tasking' agenda item at each Council meeting. For example, at the SSC meeting during discussion of an agenda item, testimony or deliberations may reveal a scientific conservation issue that the SSC feels should also be addressed, and the SSC may recommend initiating an analysis or discussion paper to explore the issues. It is helpful to the Council if the SSC provides rationale for recommending new scientific issues to be addressed.

Discussion Paper

A discussion paper is frequently prepared by staff as a first step to flesh out the scope of the problem identified, and discuss issues that may be of concern in the development of alternatives. For very complex issues, several discussion papers may be necessary to explore the full scope of an issue before reasonable alternatives can be developed. For relatively simple changes, where the problem and alternatives are self-evident, a discussion paper may not be necessary, and the issue can go straight to analysis, even without developing a problem statement and range of alternatives. The SSC does not normally review issues at the discussion paper stage, unless they specifically relate to scientific matters.

Initial Review of Analysis

Normally, the Council adopts a problem statement (or thoroughly describes the problem) and identifies alternatives to be considered, and then staff prepares a draft analysis that integrates analytical requirements of applicable laws and executive orders. The analysis is released for review about 2-3 weeks before the meeting. The analysis is reviewed by the SSC for scientific merit, particularly with respect to distinguishing among the identified alternatives. If the SSC has deemed the analysis inadequate and not ready for Council final action, or if the Council determines that additional alternatives or other substantial changes to the analysis are required, another initial review may be scheduled before the issue is scheduled for final action. If the analysis is to be released, the Council may designate a preliminary preferred alternative to focus public comments on their indicated course of action. For some high priority items that require timely decision-making, the SSC may be requested to review an analysis at the final review stage.

At the Initial Review stage, the SSC can recommend: a) additional information that would assist in future decision-making, but which can be incorporated into the final action draft; b) another initial review if adding a substantial amount of information or new alternatives; or c) the Council move forward and release the document for final review.

Final (formerly 'Public') Review of Analysis

After initial review, staff revises the analysis based on SSC, AP, and Council comments, and the analysis is posted on the Council website about 3-4 weeks before the meeting. The SSC will generally not see this version of the document unless there is a scientific issue to be decided. The Council will make a final recommendation, generally by adopting a preferred alternative.

Rulemaking

The NMFS regional office prepares draft regulations based on Council action, and, once cleared by the region and OMB, a proposed rule is published in the Federal Register. The public is provided time to comment on the proposed rule. After the comment period closes, NMFS regional staff summarize comments, and may make adjustments to the rule based on these comments. These comment summaries, the revised rule, and final approval decision are published in the Federal Register, and the action is implemented.

6.3 Annual cycle of Council issues

The following represents a typical cycle of Council issues that come before the SSC. In addition, the SSC will also review initial review analyses, exempted fishing permits, discussion papers, and reports throughout the year.

February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Norton Sound red king crab specifications, Crab Plan Team report ○ Model scenarios for use at May Crab Plan Team ○ Crab modeling workshop report ○ Marine mammal conservation status reports ○ Economic SAFE reports for groundfish and crab ○ Research priorities (every 3 years) ○ Exempted fishing permit application reviews (if submitted) ○ Workshop on selected topic (when time permits)
April	<u>Salmon specifications agenda item</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Scallop SAFE report (every 2 years) <u>Other issues</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Salmon genetics reports for Chinook in BS and GOA, and chum in BS ○ <u>Research priorities (every 3 years)</u>Interagency seabird workgroup report
June	<u>Crab specifications agenda item</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ BSAI Crab specifications – AIGKC every year; PIGKC, WAIRKC triennially ○ Crab model scenarios for October Crab Plan Team <u>Other issues</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual Observer Report / <u>preview of Annual Deployment Plan</u>
August (periodically)	○ possible workshop and/or subgroup meeting
October	<u>Crab specifications agenda item</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Ecosystem Status Report as relates to crab</u> ○ Crab survey results ○ BSAI Crab specifications – BBRKC, EBS Tanner, EBS snow every year; SMBKC, PIBKC biennially; PIRKC triennially ○ <u>Model scenarios for use at May Crab Plan Team</u> ○ <u>Crab modeling workshop report from January</u> <u>Groundfish proposed specifications agenda item</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Ecosystem Preview</u> ○ Preliminary groundfish specifications ○ Groundfish model scenarios for use at November Plan Team ○ Observer Annual Deployment Plan <u>Ecosystem Preview</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exempted fishing permit application reviews (if submitted)
December (meeting may be scheduled for 4 days)	<u>Groundfish specifications agenda item</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Ecosystem Status Reports</u> ○ Groundfish survey results ○ Groundfish specifications <u>Crab specifications agenda item</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ecosystem Status Reports<u>Norton Sound red king crab specifications, Crab Plan Team report (note, this may move to October)</u> <u>Cook Inlet salmon specifications agenda item</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Cook Inlet salmon specifications (note, the timing of this agenda item is still fluid)</u>

6.4 Types of SSC actions

ABC/OFL Specification, SAFE report review

Federal fisheries managers strive to use the best available scientific and commercial data and analyses when making regulatory decisions. Scientific peer review is a useful process for ensuring the quality and integrity of scientific assessments that are used to determine biologically acceptable catch limits. By conducting a stock assessment review, the SSC helps NMFS fulfill its stewardship mission to manage and conserve our Nation's living marine resources in a scientifically sound manner.

The purpose of the review is to assess the scientific validity of the stock assessment, including any assumptions, methods, results and conclusions. Specific aspects of the review will vary, but may include: quality of the data collected or used for the assessment, appropriateness of the analyses, validity of the results and conclusions, and appropriateness of the scope of the assessment (e.g., were all relevant data and information considered).

After reviewing the stock assessment document and receiving the report of the Council plan team that also reviewed the stock assessment, the SSC shall make the final determination regarding the tier level of the assessment and will recommend ABC and OFL limits for groundfish, crab, and scallops, for each assessed stock or complex. Alternate (e.g., staircase) procedures may be recommended to arrive at ABC recommendations, at the SSC's discretion. Such procedures have been used in the past as precautionary measures to avoid large fluctuations in ABC recommendations across years. In its report, SSC recommendations regarding future research priorities and direction will also be made.

Typically, three SSC members will be assigned as the lead reviewers for each stock or stock complex. These lead reviewers will be members that are not directly responsible for the production of the stock assessment or directly supervising the person producing the assessment. The lead reviewers will lead the discussion on that particular assessment and will draft the portion of the SSC report dealing with that species. Recommendations may be made to the stock assessment author, plan team, or Council and the report shall clearly explain to whom the SSC's recommendations are directed.

The October SSC meeting is generally when detailed examination of any new stock assessment models for groundfish (benchmark assessments) occur; for crab, these models are generally presented in June. More scrutiny should be given at this stage to methods of model construction, fitting, and new data sources used. Additional workshops or reviews may be recommended to resolve any outstanding technical questions in a proposed new assessment prior to implementation. CIE (Center for Independent Experts) reviews are also conducted on a rotating or as-needed basis on stock assessments at the request of NMFS, and the SSC will typically also receive a presentation on the findings of the CIE panel. Stock assessments are reviewed for setting ABC and OFLs at the December SSC meeting for groundfish, and for crab at the October SSC meeting.

Initial review for fishery management plan amendments

As described in Section 6.2, the SSC also evaluates initial review drafts of fishery management plan amendment analyses for scientific merit. The SSC considers whether the analysis provided is adequate, meets the analytical requirements of applicable laws and executive orders, and provides the Council with a sufficient understanding of the probable impacts of a decision among the alternatives identified for analysis. The SSC may identify additional information that is relevant to the decision and should be included in the analysis, may critique the methodology used for impact analysis, or may provide other feedback about the adequacy of the analysis. Based on this review, the SSC will determine if the analysis is 'sufficient to inform the Council for final action,' which is the stage that refers to staff first making revisions as requested from the SSC, AP, and Council, and releasing a revised document on which the Council will take final action. Once the document passes initial review, it is unlikely to come back again before the SSC unless there is a decision point on which the SSC's scientific expertise is needed, or the SSC specifically requests to see the document again.

LAPP reviews and other reviews requested by the Council

The Council is required under the Magnuson-Stevens Act to conduct periodic reviews of its limited access privilege programs (LAPPs). The purpose of these reviews is to evaluate whether the LAPPs have been and continue to meet goals of the LAPP with which they were implemented. These LAPP reviews are crucial for evaluating the extent to which the objectives of a program have been met, and whether the program has resulted in any unintended and/or unforeseen negative consequences. NMFS has developed guidance for development of LAPP reviews, and the role of the SSC is to advise the Council on whether the LAPP review document adequately meets these benchmarks. As part of the review process, the SSC would review a staff-prepared program review workplan. The objective of the workplan is to describe the proposed scope of the LAPP review and to serve as a starting point of what should be included in the LAPP review. Depending whether the LAPP review is reusing an established methodology, and whether there are significant new circumstances at work in the fishery since the last program review, the SSC may simply review the workplan and not the final review report.

Additionally, the Council periodically sets itself an objective to review new programs after a set amount of time, and may request that the SSC provide recommendations on these reviews. For example in the past, the Council requested a 5-year review of the restructured observer program, and has set 3-year reviews for each of the amendments that allow sablefish fishing with pot gear in the GOA and BSAI. In these instances, it is the role of the SSC to determine whether the analysis adequately assesses the review objectives as requested by the Council in their motion.

Comments on national guidance or NMFS scientific issues

The SSC is periodically asked by the Council to review scientific guidance, policy, procedure, or research issues. These may take the form of draft policy or procedural documents developed by NMFS at the national level, such as revisions to national standard guidelines, or the NMFS Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management Roadmap. Alternately, the request could be to review, for example, the Alaska Fisheries Science Center plan for survey deployment under a reduced budget scenario. Depending on the workload and timeframe involved, the SSC may choose to create a subgroup to work on these detailed reviews, and report back to the full SSC to provide comments that the Council can consider and submit, as appropriate.

Research priorities

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council's research priorities cover a wide range of topics and are organized and managed within a publicly accessible [database](#). Ranking of research topics is done using four priority categories: *Critical ongoing monitoring*, *Urgent*, *Important (near term)*, and *Strategic (future needs)*. These priority categories have specific [definitions](#) that emphasize the correspondence of research to the Council's time horizon of management concerns. In accordance with Council procedures, the SSC and Council review research priorities each year at the Council's June meeting. Prior to Council review, the Council's Plan Teams review existing research priorities and make recommendations for modifications or additions, as needed. Following the June meeting, the updated five-year research priorities are provided to NMFS as well as research and funding entities.

Over the last several years, the SSC has been working to improve its research priorities process in order to streamline the database of research topics into a more digestible format. It is the role of the SSC to provide, prioritize, assess research needs for North Pacific fisheries and recommend priorities to the Council.

Fishery Ecosystem Plans

The Council has also adopted Fishery Ecosystem Plans (FEPs) for some of its ecosystem areas. These are Council documents that are not actionable, like a Fishery Management Plan, but rather are used to inform Council policy options and associated opportunities, risks, and tradeoffs affecting FMP species, communities, and the broader ecosystem in a systematic manner. Under the overarching guidance of the Council's Ecosystem Approach policy, the Council's [FEP](#) sets goals and objectives for the ecosystem that direct the process by which the Council should manage fisheries, monitor the ecosystem, and prioritize new research projects. The Council has established a Bering Sea FEP team to provide advice about how the Council should use the Bering Sea FEP framework to achieve objectives.

The SSC provides scientific review of the FEP documents and reports, the recommendations of the FEP team, and analytical methods for projects (action modules) proposed under the FEP framework.

Marine mammal, seabird, habitat status reports

Periodically, when agenda time is available, the SSC will request to hear status reports on marine mammals and seabirds that interact with the Council-managed fisheries, or habitat research. These reports may not always have a nexus to a specific Council decision, but are an important opportunity for the SSC to stay apprised of the status of populations and ongoing research that is relevant to the SSC's broad objective to provide scientific and technical advice to the Council. The SSC will also review methods

used to implement actions relevant to fisheries management which pertain to marine mammal and seabird species, or habitat conservation.

Exempted fishing permits

An exempted fishing permit is a permit issued by the NMFS Alaska Region to allow groundfish fishing activities that would otherwise be prohibited under regulations for groundfish fishing. These permits are issued for limited experimental purposes to support projects that could benefit the groundfish fisheries and the environment. Examples of past projects supported by an EFP include the development of new gear types for an underutilized fishery and development of devices that reduce prohibited species bycatch.

The Regional Administrator is required to consult with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council before issuing an EFP. ~~As such~~ When requested by the Council, the SSC ~~has the primary responsibility to~~ will review the EFP application, and provide comments to the Council about the utility of the proposed experiment. Depending on the project, and time available on the agenda, the SSC may request that the applicant report back to the SSC on the success, or otherwise, of the experiment once it has been completed.

Plan Team Nominations

The SSC reviews all proposed candidates for the Council's various Plan Teams. The SSC reviews the candidates with respect to their qualifications and how their expertise relates to the requirements of the Plan Team's terms of reference or any other intent for candidacy (for example, if the Council has specifically solicited for a particular expertise to add to the team). The SSC will review these nominations in Executive Session and provide recommendations to the Council in the SSC report.

Most of the Council's Plan Teams have very broad language on membership in their Terms of Reference, but in practice Plan Team members are generally scientists and management staff from state and federal agencies, the IPHC, and university-affiliated scientists. Council staff that coordinate the different Plan Teams are also members of the teams, but the SSC does not typically review Council staff candidates.

Specifically, for the Social Science Planning Team (SSPT), the SSC has articulated additional criteria for evaluating candidacy. The SSC has sought to identify candidates whose affiliations allow independence (i.e., generally speaking are employed by state, federal, or tribal agencies, are academics, or are independent experts), who have had experience and a broad understanding of social systems and issues throughout the North Pacific region, and who have had experience with marine fisheries under federal jurisdiction. The SSC has examined nominees' record of advancing the frontiers of their field, and experience applying qualitative metrics, or local knowledge and traditional knowledge within regulatory processes, as this experience is critical for the nominee to support the SSPT in providing guidance to the SSC and the Council.

6.5 Primary Council staff administrative contacts

Council Staff	Person to talk to about...	Contact info
David Witherell, Executive Director 	Council administration Issues of concern Approval of alternate travel procedures in extenuating circumstances	David.witherell@noaa.gov (907) 271-2809
Diana Evans, Deputy Director 	SSC agenda, schedule Release of documents for review before the meeting Coordination of the SSC report presentation to the Council	Diana.evans@noaa.gov (907) 271-2815
Shannon Cochran Danielle Mercurief, Administrative Assistant 	Travel arrangements, including hotel and flight reservations and EasyBiz Financial disclosure forms Submitting the draft SSC report during the meeting, and the final report afterwards	Danielle.mercurief@noaa.gov (907) 271-2812
Nicole Schmidt, Finance Officer 	Travel arrangements, including hotel and flight reservations and EasyBiz SSC stipend compensation Travel reimbursements, claim forms Financial disclosure forms	Nicole.schmidt@noaa.gov (907) 271-2818
Maria Davis, Communications/ IT Specialist <i>Lead for administrative team</i> 	Council electronic agenda, accessing review documents Technical or communications issues	Maria.davis@noaa.gov (907) 271-2808
Sarah La Belle Serine Reeves, Administrative Assistant 	Council meeting email updates, newsletter Council electronic agenda Technical or logistical issues	Sarah.labelle@noaa.gov Serine.reeves@npfmc.org (907) 271-2505
Kaylah Hillary, contractor 	Technical and administrative support during the SSC meeting	

Attachment 1 NPFMC Policy on Addressing Allegations of Harassment of Process Participants other than Council Employees

SECTION 1. PURPOSE.

The purpose of this policy is to protect North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) process participants and provide guidance on taking action related to incidents or allegations of harassment **experienced by Council process participants. The Council will not tolerate harassment or retaliation against those who report harassment.** Preventing harassment⁷ is everyone's responsibility and individuals who experience or observe harassment are strongly encouraged to come forward to ensure a safe working environment for everyone involved in the Council process. Council members, including chairs and vice chairs, hold positions of trust and responsibility and it is incumbent upon them, together with the Council Executive Directors, to make every reasonable effort to establish an environment free of harassment and to implement this policy fully. This policy provides a framework for procedures to encourage Council process participants to come forward with harassment allegations without fear of retaliation and outlines a process for reporting and reviewing allegations of harassment and taking action as appropriate.

SECTION 2. BACKGROUND.

The Council process involves a complex and dynamic relationship among federal and state employees, Council professional staff, appointed Council members, and members of the public. These individuals frequently meet and interact at various worksites and temporary meeting locations for extended meetings amid challenging issues, which can sometimes lead to interpersonal conflict. The Council process should operate in an atmosphere of respect, collaboration, openness, safety, and equality and every individual who participates in the Council process should be treated with dignity and respect and should be free from abusive conduct and harassment.

SECTION 3. SCOPE.

The reporting and response provisions described in this policy apply to "Council Process Participants." In this document, that term includes all persons who participate in the Council process in any setting, with the exception of individuals employed by the Council, who are covered under a separate policy. Council Process Participants include all individuals present under the context of Council business regardless of location, whether in a Council office, at a Council meeting, or at offsite meetings, hearings and events sponsored by a Council. For example, Council Process Participants may include Council members, Advisory Panel or Scientific and Statistical Committee members, external consultants, etc.

SECTION 4. PROCEDURES.

Reporting

Council Process Participants who observe, experience, or receive a report of harassment, including but not limited to sexual harassment or assault, must report the matter as soon as possible to an appropriate official. Swift reporting allows appropriate law enforcement authorities, the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), or the Council, as appropriate, to take measures to ensure that offensive behavior stops, the harassee's needs are addressed, and action is taken against the offender.

⁷ For purposes of this policy covers a harassment includes unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, older age (beginning at age 40), disability, or genetic information (including family medical history). This policy does not cover allegations of incivility not based on a protected characteristic. However, this policy is not intended to limit in any way the Council's ability to address incivility, inappropriate behavior, or other issues in an appropriate manner for the context.

Council Process Participants who observe or are subject to harassment by any Council member, Council employee, or other Council Process Participants may report incidents in a variety of ways, including but not limited to:

- The Council Executive Director or Deputy Director;
- The Council chair or vice-chair;
- Appropriate law enforcement authorities, as needed.

Council Response to Reports

Unless the particular circumstances require otherwise, any Council Member, Council employee, or NOAA employee who receives a report of harassment of a Council process participant must communicate the details of that report, in writing, to the Council Executive Director for appropriate action under this policy. In the event of a reported incident, a response team should be convened consisting of, as appropriate depending upon the context, the Council Executive Director, other designated Council points of contact, and the Council Chair. The response team will determine appropriate follow-up, including whether to engage the NMFS Regional Administrator in the response to the incident, based on the allegations raised and the parties involved⁸. The Council shall maintain a record of each allegation received under this policy, which shall be made available to NMFS upon request.

NMFS Role

The Councils are primarily responsible for addressing issues that arise within the Council environment. NMFS will, in consultation with NOAA and the Department of Commerce, provide such support and advice to the Councils as may be appropriate under the circumstances. Any Council that receives a report of harassment against or by a Council member **must** inform the NMFS Regional Administrator of the nature of the incident and any steps taken to address the incident.

Related Processes

This policy does not apply to allegations of harassment experienced by employees of a Council. Instead, in the event an individual employed by the Council is alleged to have experienced harassment, the Council must follow the steps outlined in the *North Pacific Fishery Management Council Policy on Addressing Allegations of Harassment of Council Employees*, which is an attachment to the Council SOPP.

Individuals who are federal employees (including but not limited to NOAA employees) or employed by state agencies, academic institutions or other organizations should report any concerns and seek assistance or action through their supervisor and/or within their own organization, as appropriate, but are encouraged to also report incidents to a Council official described above so that prompt action can be taken by the Council, as needed.

Individuals who are employed by the Councils or the federal government, including but not limited to NOAA, also have the right to file an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaint with their employing federal agency's EEO office within 45 days of the matter alleged to be discriminatory.

⁸ If the person alleged to have experienced harassment is a current federal employee, including but not limited to a NMFS employee, the NMFS Regional Administrator must be notified.