



C4 Programmatic Evaluation

April 2025

Action Memo

Council Staff: Sara Cleaver

Action Required:

1. Review discussion document
2. Review and approve proposed changes to Purpose and Need Statement
3. Provide further guidance on Alternative 2 including a revised set of high level, cross-FMP goals and further direction on the range of management objectives to be included in the analysis

BACKGROUND

This agenda item is requesting further Council guidance that would enable staff to proceed with analysis in support of the Programmatic Evaluation. The action associated with the Programmatic Evaluation is to revise¹ the management policy, goals, and objectives for all federal fisheries managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Management and Conservation Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act or MSA) and the Northern Pacific Halibut Act (Halibut Act) under the authority of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in the Gulf of Alaska, the Bering Sea, and Aleutian Islands. The purpose of this action is to ensure that the Council's policy guidance is comprehensive, can meet current and forthcoming challenges in the federal fisheries, and improves the Council's ecosystem-based management approach.

The Council has expressed its preference to develop and analyze this revised, cross-FMP guidance through the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

In addition to a draft Purpose and Need Statement, the Council adopted the following alternatives for this action in June 2023:

Alternative 1: Maintain current ecosystem-based management policy and objectives for Council managed fisheries (status quo)

Alternative 2: Adopt a more adaptive ecosystem-based management policy and objectives for Council managed fisheries which would enable the Council to develop and implement climate-resiliency tools; new pathways to incorporate indigenous, local, and traditional knowledge; and new tools to assess and adapt to risk in the face of additional uncertainty in stock status and distribution due to climate driven marine ecosystem changes.

¹ While the Council's June 2023 motion used the term "clarify," any changes to the management policy, goals, and objectives stated in the FMP would result in an amendment to the FMP. As such, and to avoid ambiguity, the potential Federal action is identified as "revising" the management policy and objectives. This and other proposed changes are provided in the discussion document.

At the December 2024 Council meeting, staff proposed and the Council supported developing a draft set of cross-FMP goals and potential management objectives associated with Alternative 2 as a starting point for further discussion by the Council and public. Consistent with the Council's direction to staff, **the discussion document provided under this agenda item provides a draft set of goals and examples of corresponding management objectives to help elicit feedback and structure a discussion of next steps.** The revised goals and examples of management objectives provided in this document are largely based on the Council's ongoing climate resilience planning including the work of the Climate Change Task Force, discussions at the June 2024 Climate Scenarios Workshop, and the work of the Local Knowledge, Traditional Knowledge, and Subsistence Task Force.

The Council's action under this agenda item could include adopting a revised set of high level, cross-FMP goals as part of Alternative 2 that would enable staff to proceed with analysis. **Staff are also suggesting minor changes to the Council's Purpose and Need Statement for this action.**

In addition, the Council may want to consider and provide guidance on the content of management objectives that could accompany a set of revised goals. The Council does not need to develop detailed management objectives at this time. Management objectives could be informed by further Council discussion and public input. However, it would be helpful for the Council to provide some direction on the range of management objectives to be included in the analysis. Updating FMP policies, goals, and objectives would not result in immediate nor required changes to specific fisheries management measures. However, ways the Council could define Alternative 2 range from minor updates to more policy-forward changes that would provide stronger guidance to future Council actions. It is important for the Council and public to understand the potential scope of changes to FMP policies, goals, and objectives that could be considered through this action, and how the Council intends for revised policy guidance to shape future management actions. A clearly defined set of alternatives is also necessary for National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff to determine the appropriate level of NEPA analysis for this action.

In Section 4.2 of this document, staff provide examples of two approaches the Council could take to develop management objectives that are consistent with a revised set of goals and would support Alternative 2.

Approach 2a: Planned initiatives - under this approach, the Council could consider management objectives that would explicitly reflect risk-averse and adaptive work that is planned or ongoing, and reinforce the Council's intent to continue such initiatives.

Approach 2b: More risk averse - under this approach, the Council could consider management objectives that reflect a stronger, more risk-averse approach to implementing one or more of the revised goals and achieving outcomes such as biological sustainability, community resilience, flexible and responsive management, Tribal and community access and engagement, and/or other goals.