

Considerations for Reconstituting the NPFMC Ecosystem Committee

Discussion Memo, 3/24/25

Introduction

At the upcoming April 2025 Council meeting, the Council intends to discuss reconstituting the standing Ecosystem Committee as a more broadly focused Ecosystem and Climate Committee (ECC), with new membership and terms of reference based on the Council's current work and emerging needs. This discussion is in response to the Council's December 2024 discussion of the final report of the Climate Change Task Force,¹ and subsequent motion² to adopt a climate resilience work plan. One of the recommendations in the CCTF's report was the development of a dedicated review body to help review and provide a policy-based perspective on climate-related information in the Council process.

As part of the April staff tasking discussion, the Council may discuss the role and membership of a reconstituted Ecosystem and Climate Committee, adopt TOR, and task staff with issuing a call for nominations. Ideally the reconstituted Committee would be established and convene its first meeting in late summer or fall of 2025.

Developing TOR for a reconstituted Ecosystem Committee

The Ecosystem Committee does not currently have Terms of Reference. Given the Council's interest in refocusing and restructuring the Committee, as well as the Council's interest in publishing TOR for all Council committees, it would be ideal to develop TOR that clearly communicate the Council's intended role for this body. The membership of a reconstituted EC should be informed by the TOR, and staff suggest the Council adopt draft TOR prior to issuing a call for nominations.

Draft TOR are provided as an appendix to this memo, and are modeled after the TOR provided for other Council committees. The Council could choose to expand on draft TOR as desired to reflect the intended role of this Committee.

Issues and tasking

A reconstituted Ecosystem Committee would be responsible for reviewing, discussing, and advising on ecosystem and climate-related issues as directed by the Council. Suggested priorities would include advising on the Council's work on the following:

- Inflation Reduction Act climate readiness planning and projects
- Ongoing implementation of the Council's Climate Resilience Work Plan
- Development of the Programmatic Evaluation

The Ecosystem Committee could also be tasked by the Council with providing review and advice on other topics and emerging issues as needed, such as 5-year Essential Fish Habitat reviews, the Arctic FMP and related issues, and NMFS policy guidance.

Other responsibilities that were previously undertaken by the Ecosystem Committee would likely no longer be Council priorities for a reconstituted Climate and Ecosystem Committee (though agendas will be set at the Council's discretion). For example, Committee agendas would likely not include annual northern fur seal updates, which are now presented directly to the Council. Another role previously filled by the Ecosystem Committee was to track and build awareness of emerging ecosystem-related issues that

¹ D1b Final CCTF [Report](#), December 2024

² D1b [Motion](#), December 2024

the Council is not actively engaged with. This would be a lower priority given the high volume of climate and ecosystem-related work currently in progress.

Operations

Staff suggest limiting Committee meetings to once or twice per year. In the past, Ecosystem Committee meetings have varied in frequency from annually to three times per year. The Council may wish to consider structuring Climate and Ecosystem Committee meetings around key points in Council meeting cycles such as plan team meetings and the annual cycle of groundfish harvest specifications and related products including Ecosystem Status Reports.

Membership

Staff suggest the Council consider a group of approximately 7-10 individuals, including 1-2 National Marine Fisheries Service representatives, who are interested and knowledgeable about the ecosystem regions within the Council's jurisdiction, the impacts of climate change on Alaska fisheries and communities, and environmental issues of importance to industry, Tribes, and communities. In considering applicants the Council would aim to achieve balanced representation of experiences and perspectives.

Background and Ecosystem Committee role

The Ecosystem Committee is a longstanding committee that was first convened in 1996 and reconstituted with new membership in 2004. Ecosystem Committee membership was intended to reflect the group's role in providing science-informed policy advice for the Council, rather than purely scientific advice on ecosystem issues, which comes through the SSC.³ A 2022 [summary](#) of the Ecosystem Committee's history describes the Committee's role, Council tasking, and topics of interest.

Past tasking and agenda items addressed by the Ecosystem Committee have included the following.

- Support development and provide recommendations on individual Council actions and projects (e.g., Programmatic Evaluation, development of Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Fishery Ecosystem Plans and Ecosystem Approach Statement)
- Provide review of recurring responsibilities (e.g., Essential Fish Habitat 5-year reviews)
- Receive updates on ongoing Council work (e.g. CCTF workplan and progress, LKTK Protocol, northern fur seal co-management updates)
- Monitor and request updates emerging issues and new information (e.g. marine debris, forage) and consider whether the Council should be briefed or otherwise engage on topics
- Occasional review of cross-regional efforts (e.g., CCC subgroup report on area-based management)

³ Ecosystem Committee meeting [report](#), January 2022

NPFMC Climate and Ecosystem Committee

Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures

DRAFT for discussion, April 2025

1. **Establishment and Statement of Purpose:** The North Pacific Fishery Management Council may establish and maintain a Climate and Ecosystem Committee to advise the Council on matters related to ecosystem-based fisheries management and climate resilience planning.
2. **Membership:** Committee members will be appointed by the Council chair via nomination from members of the public. When necessary, the Council will announce a call for nominations for the committee that identifies the requirements of the committee vacancy. Interested members of the public should submit a letter of interest and brief resume to the Council chair and Executive Director. Council staff for the committee will be designated by the Council Executive Director.
3. **Operations**
 - a. Chair: The Committee chair will be a sitting member of the Council.
 - b. Rules of order: In general, rules of order will be informal. Committee advice will be reached by consensus, whenever possible. Committee reports will reflect the recommendations of the Committee as well as the range of perspectives of all members.
 - c. Agenda: A draft agenda will be prepared in advance of each meeting by the Council staff in consultation with the Committee Chair. To the extent possible, the agenda will be reviewed by the Council during staff tasking at the Council meeting preceding the Committee.
 - d. Meeting record and distribution: A report of each committee meeting will be prepared by Council staff. The committee chair will maintain final approval of the committee report.
4. **Role and responsibility of members**
 - a. Committee members are highly encouraged to attend all Committee meetings. Repeated absences from Committee meetings are cause for dismissal and replacement.
 - b. Committee members are expected to read and review all meeting materials prior to the Committee meeting.
 - c. Committee members are encouraged to solicit feedback from other members of the public and bring this feedback to the Committee meeting.
 - d. Members are expected to be collaborative and respectful of each other and public participants during Committee discussions.
 - e. If a Committee member cannot attend a meeting, substitute or proxy participation is not allowed.
5. **Public comment:** Written public comment can be submitted to the meeting agenda prior to the meeting. Opportunity for oral public comment during the meeting will be provided as time allows. The Committee chair will announce, oversee and maintain control over oral public comment opportunities.