NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
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Ecosystem Committee

REPORT

October 5, 2026, 1:00-5:00 pm | October 6, 2026, 8:30 am-12:00 pm
Egan Center, Anchorage AK and Zoom

Committee members in attendance: Linda Behnken, Shannon Carroll, Cathy Coon (NMFS AKR), Jennifer Ferdinand (NMFS AFSC), David Fluharty (via Zoom), Nicole Kimball (Co-chair), Nate Pamplin (Co-chair), Ernie Weiss, Caitlin Yeager (via Zoom), Katie Latanich (Council staff coordinator)

Members absent: Craig Chythlook, Krystal Lapp

Council and NMFS staff in attendance: Angela Abolhassani, Kerim Aydin, Meaghan Bryan, Sara Cleaver, Bia Dias, Anne Marie Eich, Adam Eno, Diana Evans, Anna Henry, Isaac Kaplan, Sarah Marrinan, Diana Stram, Stephani Zador

Others in attendance: Daniel Auerbach, Loretta Brown, Angel Drobnica, Austin Estabrooks, Kirstin Holsman, Nicholas Jacuk, Eliana Hockman, Heather Mann, Maggie Mooney-Seuss, Heidi Olson, Ivonne Ortiz, Emily Scott, Terese Vicente, Sarah Webster, Megan Williams

The agenda included 1) review of Council communications related to harvest specifications and the Council's consideration of modifications to harvest control rules to improve resilience, and 2) recommendations for revisions to update the Groundfish Management Policy.

Harvest Control rule (HCR) project update & communication

The EC discussed multiple topics related to Council communications and engagement, with a focus on the Council's direction[1] to continue developing plain-language materials related to the Council's climate resilience work, including the current system to set overfishing and catch limits and the new harvest control rule work.

Dr. Diana Stram provided a brief update on work exploring modifications to the harvest control rules for some groundfish stocks to improve climate resilience. Staff are currently focusing on communicating how and where the Council's existing process is robust to environmental changes, and where adjustments are already available (including through risk tables and assessment changes) to accommodate changing conditions. Communications products in progress include an initial "introduction to harvest specifications" evening session (held on Oct. 7th, 2026 at the Egan Center) and development of draft fact sheets on the harvest specifications process.

[1] E2 Motion,Climate Resiliency Work Plan - Harvest Control Rules, June 2026

Katie Latanich introduced a series of draft two-page fact sheets designed to help the public better understand the roles, responsibilities, and public process for setting harvest specifications. Ms. Latanich also provided an update on revisions to the Council website to help support public engagement.
The EC supported the fact sheet format and continued development of these materials. The group recommended further simplifying fact sheets to improve their accessibility to a general audience, and to highlight when and what public input is relevant to each step of setting catch limits. The EC recognized that the more detailed information in the draft fact sheets can be provided on the Council website. Members provided additional suggestions including using stock-specific examples, providing definitions of key terms, including more infographics and visuals, and including more information on the process for setting Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and the concept of optimum yield.

Groundfish Management Policy Revisions

The EC continued its discussion of potential revisions to the Groundfish Management Policy contained within the BSAI and GOA Fishery Management Plans (FMPs). This discussion built on recommendations from the EC's May 2026 meeting[2], and the Council's direction[3] to the EC to further review the current management policy and make recommendations to the Council prior to the Council initiating an FMP amendment.

The EC reviewed the entire Groundfish Management Policy and recommends further revisions to to modernize and update the language in the management approach, goals, and objectives. In particular, the group's discussion focused on Goal 3, related to ecosystems; Goal 5, related to seabirds and marine mammals, Goal 6, related to habitat, and Goal 8, related to Alaska Native participation in the Council process. **The EC notes additional discussion and public input opportunities will be available during the Council agenda item on this topic in December.**

The EC's detailed suggestions are provided as Appendix 1 to this document, which includes redline edits to the Groundfish Management Policy along with a summary of the group's discussion and rationale for suggested changes. Appendix 1 is based on a working draft of the Management Policy edited by the EC during its meeting, with additional cleanup and edits made by staff based on meeting discussions.

Appendix 1 combines suggested edits from the EC's May 2026 discussion with the additional edits proposed at this October meeting. Deleted language is shown in ~~strikeout~~ and additions are underlined in blue text. Text highlighted in yellow indicates where the EC identified issues for the Council's potential consideration though did not suggest specific wording changes. Where the EC suggested adding or removing an objective, the existing numbering of goals and objectives is maintained for ease of reference. Additional context from the group's discussion appears in the discussion section following each goal and associated objectives.

The EC also discussed the following themes relevant to multiple goals and/or objectives.

- Biodiversity: One EC member raised the topic of biodiversity, noting that globally it is an aspect of evaluating ecosystem condition, but is not explicit in the MSA or in the Groundfish Management Policy goals and objectives. Biodiversity could be relevant under Goal 9, in terms of monitoring changes in biodiversity, or under Goal 3, related to ecosystems. The group did not suggest edits to the Management Policy at this time.

[2] E1-E2 Ecosystem Committee Report, June 2026
[3] E1 Council Motion, Groundfish Management Policy Goals and Objectives, June 2026

- National Standards: The EC noted at multiple points in the discussion that some though not all of the National Standards have a corresponding goal or objective. A comment was to consider a more consistent approach; if so it may be better to reference all of the NS than to remove any references.[4]
- Research-focused objectives (16, 24, 29, 42): At its May 2026 meeting the EC suggested consolidating these research-focused objectives into a single objectives, but at this meeting took the approach of retaining most of them with minor revisions.
- Qualifying language: The EC suggested revisiting qualifying language (e.g. as necessary, as practicable), and considering where it is necessary to include. The EC commented on some though not all instances where qualifying language appears.
- "Continue": The word "continue" and synonyms such as "maintain" are frequently used, and could be removed or reworded in some cases to streamline or further clarify the intent of goals and objectives. The EC commented on some though not all instances.

Public Testimony

Four members of the public provided testimony (Sarah Webster, Alaska Seafood Cooperative; Loretta Brown, Salmon State; Megan Williams, Ocean Conservancy; and Eliana Hockman). Four written comments were received.

Next meeting

The group did not discuss future meeting dates, which will depend on Council tasking.

[4] Alignment between Groundfish FMP Management Approach, goals, objectives, and the MSA National Standards is addressed in Table 2 of the E1 Groundfish Management Policy Review Report, June 2026

Appendix 1: Groundfish Management Policy Redline Version - Ecosystem Committee Edits and Additional Discussion

Management Approach
The Council's policy is to apply judicious and responsible fisheries management practices, based on sound scientific research~~, and~~ analysis, and advice, proactively rather than reactively, to ensure the sustainability of fishery resources and associated ecosystems for the benefit of future, as well as current generations. The productivity of the North Pacific ecosystem is acknowledged to be among the highest in the world. ~~For the past 25 years~~, ~~t~~The Council management approach ~~has~~ incorporate~~d~~s forward looking conservation measures that address differing levels of uncertainty. This management approach ~~has in recent years been labeled~~ is known as the precautionary approach. Recognizing that potential changes in productivity may be caused by fluctuations in natural oceanographic conditions, fisheries, and other, non-fishing activities, the Council intends to continue to take appropriate measures to ~~i~~ensure the continued sustainability of the managed species. It will carry out this objective by considering reasonable, adaptive management measures, as described in the Magnuson-Stevens Act and in conformance with the National Standards, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and other applicable law. This management approach takes into account the National Academy of Science's recommendations on Sustainable Fisheries Policy.

As part of its policy, the Council intends to consider and adopt, as appropriate, measures that accelerate the Council's precautionary, adaptive management approach through community-based or rights-based management, ecosystem-based management principles that protect managed species from overfishing, and where appropriate and practicable, increase habitat protection and bycatch constraints. All management measures will be based on the best scientific information available, which includes local knowledge and traditional knowledge. Given this intent, the fishery management goal is to provide sound conservation of the living marine resources; provide socially and economically viable fisheries for the well-being of fishing communities; minimize human-caused threats to protected species; maintain a healthy marine resource habitat; and incorporate ecosystem-based considerations into management decisions. Ecosystem based considerations include the impacts of ecosystem changes to managed species and the impacts of managed fisheries on ecosystems.

This management approach recognizes the need to ~~balance~~ consider many competing uses of marine resources and different social and economic goals for sustainable fishery management, including protection of the long-term health of the resource and the optimization of yield. This policy will use and improve upon the Council's existing open and transparent process of public involvement in decision-making.

Discussion

May 2026 discussion
Here and throughout Appendix 1, summaries from the EC's May 2026 discussion are directly excerpted from the May 2026 EC Report to provide a complete record of the group's suggested revisions.

The EC felt the Management Approach statement, including the reference to the precautionary approach, is generally durable over time and continues to be relevant to the Council's work. The group recommended adding local and traditional knowledge as a component where the policy refers to best scientific information available. Another suggestion was to add the word "advice" to the phrase "scientific

research and analysis" to account for standalone products including risk tables that inform the Council's management recommendations.

October 2026 discussion

In the first paragraph, the EC questioned whether the reference to the National Academy of Science's 1999 recommendations on Sustaining Marine Fisheries should continue to be included.[5] The NAS recommendations were foundational to the Groundfish Management Policy at the time it was adopted by the Council, and some EC members felt this guidance continues to be relevant. Another suggestion was to add language that complements the reference to Best Scientific Information Available and reflects that the Council stays up to date and considers evolving science and best practices. The timeliness and relevance of the NAS recommendations and/or the approach of adding updated language could be a topic for further analysis if the Council proceeds with making revisions to the Policy.

The second paragraph of the Management Approach states the Council's intent to consider ecosystem-based fishery management principles. EC members noted comments from the public that ecosystem-based management should include both the impacts of managed fisheries to ecosystems, and the impacts of ecosystem change on managed species. The EC supported including this language to support further discussion and Council direction, though some members felt this interpretation of EBFM is implicit. For example, the Council considers the impacts of fisheries to ecosystems through its work on Essential Fish Habitat, bycatch management, and interactions with seabirds and marine mammals.

In the final paragraph, the EC discussed replacing the word "balance" with "consider" ("...competing uses of marine resources") to reflect that the Council's role is limited to managing marine fisheries, and not all uses of marine resources. A counterpoint was this qualification of limits on Council authorities can be assumed, and isn't clarified throughout the Management Policy, though the management approach statement precedes and encompasses the goals and objectives so may be an appropriate place to make this clarification.

The EC also questioned whether the word "resource" is synonymous with "ecosystem." One perspective was that substituting the term "ecosystem" would be consistent with the Policy's support for ecosystem-based fisheries management. A different perspective was that the existing term "resource" is appropriate because this paragraph is focused on the Council's fishery conservation and management authorities. The EC did not recommend edits. One EC member questioned whether this language is focused on commercial harvest or includes all user groups.

[5] Report available at https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/6032

Goal 1: Prevent Overfishing[6]

1. Adopt conservative harvest levels for multi-species and single species fisheries and specify optimum yield.
2. Continue to use the existing optimum yield cap for the GOA/BSAI groundfish fisheries.[7]
3. Provide for adaptive management by continuing to specify optimum yield as a range.
4. Provide for periodic reviews of the adequacy of F40 and adopt improvements, as appropriate.
5. ~~Continue to improve the management of species through species categories.~~ Differentiate between stocks in the fishery that require conservation and management, and ecosystem component species.

Discussion

The EC did not suggest any revisions to Goal 1 or associated objectives at its May 2026 meeting**.**

October 2026 discussion

EC members asked about the meaning of "species categories" in Objective 5. Executive Director Diana Evans clarified that when the Council developed this objective, species categories were structured differently and included target species, non-target species, prohibited species, and forage species. Revisions to the National Standard 1 Guidelines in 2009 established and defined the term Ecosystem Component Species, defined as stocks that a Council or the Secretary has determined do not require conservation and management, but desire to list in an FMP in order to achieve ecosystem management objectives. (50 CFR 600.305(d)(13)). The term Ecosystem Component Species was adopted in the Groundfish FMPs through amendments (BSAI Amendment 96 and GOA Amendment 87) to bring them into compliance with the 2006 reauthorization of the MSA. These amendments updated the use of species categories to include stocks "in the fishery" and Ecosystem Component Species. Ecosystem Component species currently include prohibited species, forage fish species, grenadiers, squids, and sculpins.

The concept of differentiating between actively managed species for which ABC and TAC are set and other species encountered by the groundfish fisheries continues to be relevant. This objective could be modernized to use more contemporary language.

[6] Goal 1 was incorrectly written as "Avoid" Overfishing in the working draft of the Groundfish Management Policy reviewed by the EC. It is correctly worded as "prevent" in the Groundfish FMPs, consistent with the wording of National Standard 1. No changes are needed.

[7] This objective is worded differently as "BSAI" or "GOA" to align with the respective FMP.

Goal 2: Promote Sustainable Fisheries and Communities

★ Add objective: Provide for the sustained participation of fishing communities.

6. Promote conservation while providing for optimum yield in terms of the greatest overall benefit to the nation with particular reference to food production, and sustainable opportunities for recreational, subsistence, and commercial fishing participants and fishing communities.
7. Promote management measures that, while meeting conservation objectives, are also designed to avoid significant disruption of existing social and economic structures.
8. Promote fair and equitable allocation of identified available resources in a manner such that no particular sector, group or entity acquires an excessive share of the privileges.
9. Promote increased safety at sea.

Discussion
The EC did not suggest any revisions to Goal 2 or associated objectives at its May 2026 meeting**.**

October 2026 discussion
An EC member suggested adding an objective based on National Standard 8 language providing for the sustained participation of communities. This EC member felt adding an objective based on NS8 is appropriate and relevant to the focus of Goal 2 on promoting sustainable fisheries and communities. It was also noted that Objective 9, Promote increased safety at sea, corresponds to National Standard 10. Some but not all of the National Standards have a corresponding objective within the Groundfish Management Policy.

Goal 3: ~~Preserve Food Web~~ Promote ecosystem health, resilience, and productivity.

10. Develop indices of ecosystem health to inform fishery ~~as targets for~~ management.
11. Continue to improve the ~~procedure~~ annual harvest specifications process ~~to adjust acceptable biological catch levels as necessary~~ to account for risk, uncertainty, and ecosystem factors.
12. ~~Continue to p~~Protect the integrity of the food web through monitoring of and limits on harvest of forage fish species.
13. Incorporate ecosystem-based considerations into fishery management decisions, as appropriate.

Discussion

May 2026 discussion
The EC recommended updating and revising Goal 3 to focus on ecosystems, and potentially to capture the Council's objectives relative to the Climate Resilience Work Plan. The group considered that climate resilience objectives could be embedded within multiple goals, but generally felt a revised version of Goal 3 would provide the best fit. EC members suggested focusing this goal and objectives to also tie in healthy fisheries and communities as a part of EBFM and climate resilience. The Council's Ecosystem Policy could provide ideas for rewording this goal, and it would also be important to ensure the Ecosystem Policy and Groundfish Management Policy are complementary.

A revised Goal 3 could also include a revised version of Objective 42 (see further discussion under Goal 9) that would emphasize the role of applied science for supporting Council management recommendations. Some EC members commented that an updated research objective could capture the importance of research and monitoring to maintaining and promoting biodiversity.

With regard to Objective 12, the EC felt the term "fish" should be added, in keeping with the Council's current practices of maintaining a forage fish species category, a forage fish assessment, and limits.

October 2026 discussion
The EC proposed rewording Goal 3 as "Promote ecosystem health, resilience, and productivity."

Objective 10: The EC suggested clarifying that indices of ecosystem health are used to inform stock-specific fishery management, rather than as targets for management.

Objective 11: The EC suggested broadening the wording of this objective to include the annual harvest specifications process, which includes specifying acceptable biological catch (ABC) and total allowable catch (TAC), rather than focusing only on ABC. The group suggested adding the word "risk" to Objective 11 and agreed that a key point captured in this objective and the Council's harvest control rule work is improving the transparency and accessibility of considering risk, uncertainty, and ecosystem factors in the harvest specifications process. Another suggestion was to add the word "continue" ("...continue to improve") to recognize this is an area where the Council has already made progress.

Objective 12: The EC suggested adding "monitoring" to reflect the Council's current approach of setting limits for and monitoring the status of forage fish species through biennial reports.

Goal 4: Manage Incidental Catch and Reduce Bycatch and Waste

14. Continue and improve current incidental catch and bycatch management program.
15. Develop incentive programs for bycatch reduction including the development of mechanisms to facilitate the formation of bycatch pools, vessel bycatch allowances, or other bycatch incentive systems.
16. Encourage research programs to evaluate current population estimates for non-target species with a view to setting appropriate bycatch limits, as information becomes available.
17. Continue program to reduce discards by developing management measures that encourage the use of gear and fishing techniques that reduce bycatch which includes economic discards.
18. Continue to manage incidental catch and bycatch through seasonal distribution of total allowable catch and geographical gear restrictions.
19. Continue to account for bycatch mortality in total allowable catch accounting and improve the accuracy of mortality assessments for target, prohibited species catch, and non-commercial species.
20. Control the bycatch of prohibited species through prohibited species catch limits or other appropriate measures.
21. ~~Reduce waste to biologically and socially acceptable levels.~~

Note: The BSAI Groundfish FMP includes an additional objective: Objective 22: Continue to improve the retention of groundfish where practicable, through establishment of minimum groundfish retention standards. The Council recommended adding this objective in 2005 through BSAI Amendment 79. Consistent numbering of objectives between the two FMPs is used in this document for ease of reference. The EC did not discuss this objective.

Discussion

May 2026 discussion
The EC did not suggest any revisions to Goal 4 or associated objectives at its May 2026 meeting**.**

Discussion
The EC commented that Goal 4 and/or Objective 9 could be revised to more directly refer to National Standard 9.

Objective 14: The EC discussed whether to keep "continue" or use another word and felt it was appropriate here

Objective 21: The EC suggested striking this objective. The meaning of “socially acceptable” is difficult to define and measure.

Goal 5: Avoid Impacts to Seabirds and Marine Mammals

22. ~~Continue to cooperate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to protect ESA-listed species, and if appropriate and practicable, other seabird species.~~ Cooperate with NMFS and USFWS to review fishery interactions and impacts with seabirds and marine mammals and develop fishery management measures, as appropriate, to protect species and meet statutory obligations.
23. ~~Maintain or adjust current protection measures as appropriate to avoid jeopardy of extinction or adverse modification of critical habitat for ESA-listed Steller sea lions.~~
24. ~~Encourage programs to review status of endangered or threatened marine mammal stocks and fishing interactions and develop fishery management measures as appropriate.~~
25. ~~Continue to cooperate with NMFS and USFWS to protect ESA-listed marine mammal species, and if appropriate and practicable, other marine mammal species.~~

Discussion

May 2026 Discussion
As part of the EC's discussion of research-oriented objectives, the group recommended retaining Objective 24 as worded to recognize the connection between marine mammal research and MSA authorities.

October 2026 Discussion
The EC proposed replacing Objectives 22-25 with a more concise, consolidated objective that recognizes the Council's responsibilities to meet statutory obligations and coordinate with other agencies. As written, Objectives 22-25 focus primarily on species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The EC stated that this proposed wording is intended to be inclusive of the Council's role in limiting impacts to all seabirds and marine mammals, including and not limited to those that are ESA listed. The group recognized further review and edits may be appropriate to ensure the consolidated objective fully captures the intent of the four current objectives.

The EC suggested including the phrase "as appropriate" in a revised objective given the complexity and multiple agencies involved in managing seabirds and marine mammals, and to reflect that the Council's responsibilities relative to these species are different than with regard to fishery management.

Goal 6: Reduce and Avoid ~~Long-Term~~ Adverse Impacts to Benthic Habitat

Note: The EC suggested substantial revisions to the content and order of objectives 26-30 and provided Council staff discretion to revise and reorder the objectives based on discussion. Both a redline version and clean version are provided here for clarity. The reordering of objectives is intended to better reflect the order in which the Council would implement them.

Redline version

26. Review and evaluate efficacy of and need for adjusting existing habitat protection measures ~~for managed species~~.
27. Identify and designate essential fish habitat and habitat areas of particular concern pursuant to Magnuson-Stevens Act rules, and mitigate fishery impacts ~~as necessary and practicable to continue the sustainability of managed species.~~
28. ~~Develop a Marine Protected Area policy in coordination with national and state policies.~~
29. Encourage development of a research program to identify regional baseline habitat information and mapping, subject to funding and staff availability.
30. Develop goals, objectives and criteria for new or proposed habitat areas and evaluate the efficacy and suitable design of existing ~~marine protected areas and no-take marine reserves~~ area-based management, including static and dynamic closures, as a tool~~s~~ to maintain abundance, diversity, and productivity of habitat. ~~Implement marine protected areas if and where appropriate.~~

Clean version (objectives would be renumbered at a later time)

A. Identify and designate essential fish habitat and habitat areas of particular concern pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and mitigate fishery impacts.
B. Develop goals, objectives, and criteria for new or proposed area-based habitat protection measures.
C. Review the efficacy and design of, and the need for adjusting, static and dynamic area-based management measures.

Discussion

May 2026 Discussion

The EC suggested removing the phrase “for managed species” from Objective 26 to reflect that the Council and NMFS have implemented habitat protection measures for non-target species including corals.

The group agreed the term “Marine Protected Area” in Objectives 28 and 30, and the reference to no-take marine reserves in Objective 30, are outdated and not often used in the Council process. The more appropriate and broader term is Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measure (OCEM), a term defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity, or Area-Based Management. The EC recommended removing Objective 28 and updating or modernizing the wording of Objective 30. Updating this language in the Groundfish Management Policy would be consistent with the Council’s use of a wide array of area-based management tools including static closures as well as more dynamic area closures or restrictions, and reflect that the use of area-based management can involve strategies other than closing areas to fishing.

October 2026 Discussion

Goal 6: The EC suggested removing the phrase "long term." EC members commented that while this phrase reflects EFH language,[8] short-term habitat impacts can also be meaningful. The group also proposed adding the word "benthic" and discussed what this would include (for example, kelp) and whether it should exclude the water column. The group discussed whether and how Goal 6 and the associated objectives relate to the increasing use of dynamic spatial management, and whether dynamic approaches should be included here or under Goal 4 related to bycatch management.

Objective 26: The EC proposed modifying this objective to "Review and evaluate efficacy of **and need for adjusting** existing habitat protection measures."

Objective 27: The EC suggested removing the phrase "as necessary and practicable to continue the sustainability of managed species." The group felt this standard is implicit in the EFH implementing regulations, and noted that similar qualifying language is not included in other goals and objectives.

Objective 28: The EC recommended removing this objective in May and there was no further discussion at this meeting.

Objective 29: While the EC previously suggested combining 29 and similar research-focused objectives, the group did not suggest any changes at this meeting.

Objective 30: The EC supported further revising this objective–which was originally focused on Marine Protected Areas–to refocus the concepts of 1) developing goals, objectives, and criteria and 2) reviewing effectiveness to area-based management measures. The group suggested including the phrase "static and dynamic" to reflect that there are place-based closures as well as dynamic closures primarily for bycatch species.

<u>Additional staff notes</u>
The group provided staff discretion to reorder and further revise the objectives under Goal 6 to reflect EC discussions. Staff edits are based on the following considerations.

- The EC recognized that area-based management can be a tool for both habitat protection and bycatch management, and that some spatial protections (particularly for crab) serve both purposes. The term "area based habitat protection measures" is used in Objective B to clarify this objective relates to avoiding adverse habitat impacts. The broader term "area-based management" is used for Objective C.
- The clean version establishes separate objectives related to establishing goals, objectives, and criteria; and evaluating the effectiveness of area-based management measures. Previously Objective 30 included both of these process steps.
- The word "review" rather than "evaluate" is used in Objective C. Evaluation may imply a quantitative approach.
- Objective C is treated as a new objective rather than a revision of the original Objective 30, which was focused on implementation and design of MPAs. In keeping with this approach the phrase "as tools to maintain abundance, diversity, and productivity" is no longer included, as this wording was focused on the design and monitoring of MPAs rather than as objectives for habitat protection.

[8] This references the "more than minimal and not temporary" standard for addressing adverse impacts from fishing. "Councils must act to prevent, mitigate, or minimize any adverse effects from fishing, to the extent practicable, if there is evidence that a fishing activity adversely affects EFH in a manner that is more than minimal and not temporary in nature." 50 CFR 600.815(a)(2)(ii)

Goal 7: Promote Equitable and Efficient Use of Fishery Resources

31. Provide economic and community stability to harvesting and processing sectors through fair allocation of fishery resources.
32. Maintain the license limitation program, modified as necessary, and further decrease excess fishing capacity and overcapitalization by eliminating latent licensees and extending programs such as community or rights-based management to some or all groundfish fisheries.
33. Provide for adaptive management by periodically evaluating the effectiveness of rationalization programs and the allocation of access rights based on performance.
34. Develop management measures that, when practicable, consider the efficient use of fishery resources taking into account the interest of harvesters, processors, and communities.

Discussion

May 2026 Discussion

EC members shared different perspectives on the wording of Objective 32, focusing on the phrase "further decrease excess fishing capacity." Some members felt managing overcapacity is no longer a driver of the Council's work to the extent it was when the Management Policy was first adopted, and that this should no longer be included. Another perspective was that this language is dated and may not be an objective the Council is actively working toward, but provides a benchmark for the Council's past work and can be interpreted in the context of current conditions. EC members also commented that inclusion of the term "excess" capacity in this objective (rather than simply "decrease capacity") allows for flexibility in interpretation. The definition of excess can change over time, and EC members questioned whether this could allow, for example, increasing capacity to support stable fishing communities and processing sectors.

October 2026 Discussion

The EC noted previous comments on Objective 32; otherwise, the group otherwise felt these objectives are appropriately broad and did not have further suggestions.

Goal 8: Increase Alaska Native ~~Consultation~~ Engagement

35. Continue to incorporate local and traditional knowledge by implementing clear pathways and protocols for LKTKS systems to inform fishery management.
36. Consider ways to enhance ~~collection~~ sharing and use of local and traditional knowledge from communities, and incorporate such knowledge in fishery management ~~where appropriate.~~
37. Increase Alaska Native participation and consultation in fishery management.

Discussion

May 2026 Discussion

Goal 8 and Objectives 35-37 were a substantial focus of the EC's discussion, and driver of the Committee's recommendation that the Council not finalize changes to the goals and objectives in June, to allow more time for EC input on revisions. This would also provide more opportunity to review the LKTKS Protocol and draw on the work of that Taskforce to develop revised language.

The group recommended changing the term "consultation" in Goal 8 to "engagement" or a similar term, to differentiate between formal government-to-government consultations between the Federal government (NOAA) and Federally recognized Tribes, which the Council is not a formal party to because it is not a government, and Council outreach and engagement. The EC also recommended removing the phrase "where appropriate" in Objective 36 because LKTK is already recognized as part of best available scientific information. EC members felt the phrase is exclusionary and implies a subjective opinion of what is deemed valid and appropriate.

Additional considerations raised by the Committee included the following.

- In addition to increasing engagement, it's important to emphasize and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of that engagement.
- Revisions could balance the focus of these objectives on Alaska Native participation while also being inclusive of groups (e.g., CDQ) that are not Tribes, and also account for participation of other groups (e.g., rural communities).
- Revisions could reflect that engagement is a two-way process, which also relates to the EC's discussion of helping the public understand when, how, and what information can be contributed.
- Revised language could reflect that while the Council does not engage in consultations, it is important for information related to consultations to be available to the Council at an appropriate and effective point in the process.

October 2026 Discussion

The EC noted that two members who had previously expressed particular interest in this goal and objectives were unable to attend the meeting, and there will be further opportunity for discussion and public input when the EC report is presented at the December 2026 Council meeting.

Objective 35: The EC added language to recognize that the Council has identified pathways and protocols for LKTKS systems to inform fishery management through the adoption of the LKTKS Policy Statement and Protocol[9], and can focus on their implementation. EC members also noted important considerations related to sharing and use of LKTKS that are addressed in the Policy and Protocol, including respectful engagement and ownership of information.

[9] Both available at https://www.npfmc.org/how-we-work/management-policies/lktks/

Objective 36: The EC suggested changing the word “collection” to “sharing and use” (“...of local and traditional knowledge”). This wording is more consistent with the Council’s LKTKS Policy Statement and Protocol and the principle of respectful engagement.

Objective 37: The EC did not propose any changes though considered whether the term “consultation” should continue to be included in this objective, since it was removed from the wording of Goal 8. The group felt it is appropriate to leave this objective as is. While the Council is not a consulting entity, the Council can support this objective by participating when invited and supporting the timely availability of information resulting from consultations.

Goal 9: Improve Data Quality, Monitoring and Enforcement

★ Add objective: Maintain ongoing ecosystem and fishery independent survey capability to inform fisheries management in the North Pacific.

38. Increase the utility of groundfish fishery observer and electronic monitoring data for the conservation and management of living marine resources.
39. Develop funding mechanisms that achieve equitable costs to the industry for implementation of the North Pacific ~~Groundfish~~ Observer Program.
40. Improve data inputs for evaluation of community and regional economic impact costs and benefits ~~through increased data reporting requirements~~.
41. Increase the quality of monitoring and enforcement data through improved technology.
42. Encourage ~~a~~ coordinated, long-term ecosystem monitoring programs to collect ~~baseline information~~ and compile ~~existing~~ information from a variety of ongoing research initiatives, subject to funding and staff availability.
43. Cooperate with research institutions such as the North Pacific Research Board in identifying research needs to address pressing fishery issues.
44. Promote enhanced enforceability.
45. ~~Continue to~~ cooperate and coordinate management and enforcement programs with the Alaska Board of Fish, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers ~~Fish and Wildlife Protection~~, the U.S. Coast Guard, NMFS Enforcement, International Pacific Halibut Commission, Federal agencies, and other organizations to meet conservation requirements; promote economically healthy and sustainable fisheries and fishing communities; and maximize efficiencies in management and enforcement programs through continued consultation, coordination, and cooperation.

Discussion

May 2026 Discussion
An EC member suggested clarifying that in Objective 38 the term observer information includes electronic monitoring information. However, electronic monitoring information is already defined as observer information under the MSA (16 USC 1802(32)).

The EC suggested revisions to Objective 40. As discussed in the review document, the wording of this objective focuses on increasing economic data reporting requirements, while recent Council actions have focused on balancing data utility with burden and decreasing economic data reporting requirements. EC members felt this objective continues to be relevant; there is a longstanding need for socioeconomic data in the Council process, and that this objective supports National Standard 8. The group felt this objective could be reworded with a similar intent of improving data inputs to support evaluation of costs and benefits, which can include considering costs/benefits and burden. Revising this objective could also be consistent with a shift from program-specific Economic Data Reporting programs toward reliance on other meaningful and cost effective data sources and products (e.g. Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profiles, the Alaska Seafood Snapshot).

The EC discussed Objective 42 along with other research-focused objectives (Objectives 16, 24, 29, and 42), which are primarily supported through the Council's process of setting long-term research priorities. The EC felt it is important to retain the substance of Objective 42 but possibly move it under Goal 3, to connect NMFS science with Council conservation and management needs, and to state this in a durable,

impactful way that is complementary to the Council's research priorities. Some members felt the objective is appropriate as written; other suggestions were to rewording this to include developing applied, actionable science and connecting science with management decisions.

The group suggested consolidating multiple research objectives (Objectives 16, 29, and 42)) but retaining objective 24 under Goal 5. They considered which approach would communicate a stronger statement to the Council's research partners, and discussed whether it is necessary to retain research objectives in the management policy given the Council conducts a formal and public process to identify research priorities every 5 years, to balance immediate data needs with long-term strategic goals. One idea would be to place a revised research objective based on the language of Objective 42 under a revised Goal 3 focusing on ecosystems and climate resilience (see discussion under Goal 3).

October 2026 Discussion

Objective 38: The EC suggested including both groundfish fishery observer and electronic monitoring data. The group recognized that EM data is included in the MSA definition of observer information but felt it is important to include both since they are sometimes differentiated in Council discussions and because this objective pre-dates electronic monitoring technology.

Objective 42: The EC suggested striking the terms "baseline" and "existing." Many programs have been in place for a long time and these terms could be interpreted as limiting when monitoring is an ongoing need. Discussion of this objective raised the question of where survey data should fit into Goal 9. The group suggested adding a new objective focused on maintaining survey capability as the foundation for fisheries management in the North Pacific.