



New England Fishery Management Council

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John F. Quinn, J.D., Ph.D., *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

January 3, 2018

Dr. Cisco Werner  
Director of Scientific Programs  
& Chief Science Advisor  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1315 East-West Highway, Room 14659  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Werner:

The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the Councils to develop five-year research priority plans and submit them to the Secretary of Commerce. In New England, ideas for research topics have trickled up through technical teams, advisory panels, and committees prior to Council approval, resulting in a lengthy catalogue of needs. Our Scientific and Statistical Committee and Research Steering Committee have both advised that the Council and research community would benefit from efforts to create a more targeted, prioritized list. We are currently improving our process for identifying research priorities and data needs.

In developing ideas for process improvements, we learned that Councils appear to vary greatly in the effort dedicated to creating and updating research priorities. Some Councils have simple lists with no internal prioritization, while others have an on-line searchable database. No matter the degree of effort, a common theme is that there has been little feedback from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) about what happens with research priority documents once submitted. There does not seem to be a clear understanding of how the priorities are used to set the national and regional priorities of NMFS.

Clarification from NMFS about the end use of these priority lists will help determine the degree of effort that should be devoted to the task. Please also let me know if there are any suggestions for how the Council's priorities may be better articulated. Please contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Nies  
Executive Director

cc: RFMC Executive Directors  
Brian Fredieu



# Council Research Priorities NMFS Responses and Ways Forward

**Cisco Werner**

*Director of Scientific Programs and  
Chief Science Advisor*

**May 2018 CCC Meeting  
Sitka, AK**

# BOTTOM LINE(S) UP FRONT

- While there has not been a “systematic” process whereby Councils receive feedback from NMFS on the Councils’ priorities, we concur with the need and benefits of formalizing such a process including priorities’ definitions.
- We should build on the practice that NMFS staff already participate in the Councils’ discussion of priorities (through membership in MTs, PTs, SSCs, etc.), and hence are aware of Councils’ priorities.
- Given multiple regional priorities: Councils, Centers, Regional Offices, Commissions, NPRB, etc., increased discussion and coordination of priorities – across all bodies – would benefit all.

## RESPONSE/STATUS FROM NE, SE, NW & SWFSCs

- Have not been “formally” approached for comments on Councils’ 5-year priorities. (Caveat: several new SCDs.)
- Staff participate in the Councils’ bodies where priorities are defined and discussed. As such, NMFS staff are involved in the development of the priorities, and also help their implementation.
- Given multiple priorities associated with assessments, Councils, Centers, Regional Offices, Commissions, etc., better coordination would be welcome.

## RESPONSE/STATUS FROM PIFSC

- Prior to the WPFMC's current *"5-yr research priorities under MSRA"*, unclear whether the Council formally reached out to PIFSC.
- During the current plan's drafting, Council and PIFSC reps from all programs met to align the Council's proposed priorities with PIFSC activities and clarify expectations, including what PIFSC could help deliver.
- There is a regular check-in on the status of activities.

## RESPONSE/STATUS FROM AFSC

- At the Feb NPFMC meeting each year, the AFSC SCD presents a *State of the Center* update to the Council and the SSC. At the Feb 2018 Council meeting, AFSC SCD informed the SSC that the current list of 140-plus research activities was difficult to interpret, in terms of priorities.
- ASFC SCD requested a subset of priorities from the SSC along the lines of "*what should be the last few research projects funded before we turn out the lights*".
- The SSC has not had time to address the SCD's request.

# EXCERPTS FROM NPFMC's PROCESS

- NPFMC attempts to review annually research priorities at a single meeting. The priorities list has increased – currently (May 2018) there are 168 entries. In 2018, trying to pick a top 10 list of Urgent/Important projects.
- Recent discussions resulted in research priorities defined as (also see slide at the end of this PPT):
  - **Critical Ongoing Monitoring** (remain highest priority)
  - **Strategic** (next year 2019[?])
  - **Urgent** (to be reviewed in 2018)
  - **Important** (to be reviewed in 2018)
- Following the June meeting, the updated five-year research priorities are provided to the Secretary of Commerce, the AFSC, as well as research and funding entities.

## Possible steps to bridge current gaps in priorities' discussion

- Formalize discussion and definitions within [and across] Councils, taking advantage of participation of NMFS staff on SSCs, MTs and other Council bodies.
- Formalize the [yearly] request for NMFS Science Centers [jointly with ROs] to comment on Council priorities
- NMFS to provide:
  - a written response to the Councils' research priorities and possible actions.
  - a statement of NMFS research priorities, and how/where Council-NMFS research priorities are related.



# Thank you



# NPFSC's Research Priority Definitions

1. Priorities identified and prioritized by Council Plan Teams and then entered into database:
  - a. **CRITICAL ONGOING MONITORING:** Information provided by monitoring activities in this category (1) provide an essential management function; (2) cannot likely be acquired through other means; or (3) are required by regulation. This is monitoring essential to maintaining our compliance with federal requirements, including National Standards, or necessary for the ongoing management of the fishery. Postponement would have a significant and immediate impact on management.
  - b. **URGENT:** Research that is essential for compliance with federal requirements, including National Standards, or that has been identified by management as necessary to aid decision-making. It is expected that a one or two year project would meet the information need. Postponement would have a significant impact on management.
  - c. **IMPORTANT (Near Term):** Obtaining a new set of data or research result that is likely to aid in the evaluation of a near term or ongoing management goal. The research might involve a time-limited program or work that could continue indefinitely. Postponement will not have an immediate impact on fishery management; however, the information generated will likely inform near term (e.g., <5 year) Council actions.
2. **STRATEGIC (Future Needs):** Research that is valuable but is not associated with an immediate need or near-term (e.g., <5years) Council action.

SSC and Council make final list. Following the June meeting, the updated five-year research priorities are provided to the Secretary of Commerce, the AFSC, as well as research and funding entities including the U of Alaska, U of Washington, Oregon State University, NPRB, ADF&G and AOOS.

**In 2018, trying to pick a top 10 list of Urgent/Important projects.**



June 5, 2018

**CFMC**

Miguel Rolon  
Executive Director  
Carlos Farchette  
Chair

**GMFMC**

Dr. Carrie Simmons  
Executive Director  
Leann Bosarge  
Chair

**MAFMC**

Dr. Christopher Moore  
Executive Director  
Mike Luisi  
Chair

**NEFMC**

Thomas Nies  
Executive Director  
Dr. John Quinn  
Chair

**NPFMC**

David Witherell  
Executive Director  
Dan Hull  
Chair

**PFMC**

Chuck Tracy  
Executive Director  
Phil Anderson  
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**SAFMC**

Gregg Waugh  
Executive Director  
Charles Phillips  
Chair

**WPFMC**

Kitty Simonds  
Executive Director  
Edwin Ebisui  
Chair

Mr. Chris Oliver  
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3282  
Via email: CHRIS.OLIVER@NOAA.GOV

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Dear Mr. Oliver:

At the Council Coordination Committee meeting in May in Sitka, Alaska, we reviewed a report from the Fishing Data Innovation Taskforce entitled "Improving Net Gains: Data-Driven Innovation for America's Fishing Future." Ms. Dorothy Lowman and Ms. Kate Wing, both members of the Taskforce, gave a presentation on the report's findings. The CCC supports the intent of the report, to highlight and find solutions to improve data collection and management, and recommends NMFS invest in measures to address this important issue. Not only will such an investment support management of our Nation's fishery resources but will bring benefits to the U.S. industry dependent on these resources.

The Councils are responsible for developing data-driven management plans that meet complex conservation, economic and social objectives. The Council process also involves strong industry and public engagement in identifying the most critical management needs. In many ways, we are uniquely positioned to bring our expertise and external input to defining the data problems and choosing what to prioritize. The CCC members see a wide array of data collection and management challenges in our work around the U.S., such as the ability to compare data sets or use applications and technological systems that are interoperable across regions. For example, there was discussion at the meeting about developing a unique trip identifier or other approaches to efficiently integrate observer data, logbook data, and landings data.

We think investing in data modernization – improving the way NMFS and its partners collect, collate, analyze, store and provide access to data – is important to our ability to effectively manage fisheries. Data modernization initiatives can also work to minimize, streamline and avoid duplicative reporting requirements for fishermen. We encourage NOAA to invest not only in fixing short-term data problems but also in long-term processes and infrastructure that will ultimately expand our capacity to manage fisheries in an efficient and sustainable manner.

The Councils want to stay involved in the conversations around this work, including discussions to develop public-private partnerships and adopt internal programs, like the FIS grants, to support modernization efforts at the regions and states. We look forward to hearing reports in the future regarding how NMFS is making progress on data modernization efforts.

Sincerely,



Dan Hull  
NPFMC Chairman, on behalf of the Council Coordination Committee

cc: Regional Fishery Management Councils and Fishing Data Innovation Task Force

June 5, 2018

**Caribbean**  
Miguel Rolon  
Executive Director  
Carlos Farchette  
Chair

**Gulf of Mexico**  
Dr. Carrie Simmons  
Executive Director  
Leann Bosarge  
Chair

**Mid Atlantic**  
Dr. Christopher Moore  
Executive Director  
Mike Luisi  
Chair

**New England**  
Thomas Nies  
Executive Director  
Dr. John Quinn  
Chair

**North Pacific**  
David Witherell  
Executive Director  
Dan Hull  
Chair

**Pacific**  
Chuck Tracy  
Executive Director  
Phil Anderson  
Chair

**South Atlantic**  
Gregg Waugh  
Executive Director  
Charles Phillips  
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**Western Pacific**  
Kitty Simonds  
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Mr. Chris Oliver  
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Via email: CHRIS.OLIVER@NOAA.GOV

Dear Mr. Oliver,

At its recent meeting, the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) made several requests regarding the use of research priorities developed by the councils pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). Under MSA Section 302 (h), each Council shall develop, in conjunction with the scientific and statistical committee, multi-year research priorities for fisheries, fishery interactions, habitats, and other areas of research that are necessary for management purposes that shall – establish priorities for 5-year periods; be updated as necessary; and be submitted to the Secretary and the regional science centers of the National Marine Fisheries Service for their consideration in developing research priorities and budgets for the region of the Council.

The CCC recommends that Council research priorities be fully-integrated into research planning by NOAA Fisheries. In regions where this does not occur, Regional Offices, Science Centers, and Councils should improve this coordination.

The CCC also recommends that the review of applications to national-level grant programs administered by NOAA Fisheries should consider whether the proposal addresses a specific Council research priority. RFPs should encourage applicants to review Council's R&D needs documents for relevant topics and objectives for research proposals.

The CCC further requests that NOAA Fisheries clarify how the Council's five-year research priority reports are used. NOAA Fisheries is asked to provide an update on these recommendations at the next CCC meeting.

Thank you, and I look forward to continued communication on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Dan Hull  
NPFMC Chairman, on behalf of the Council Coordination Committee

cc: Regional Fishery Management Councils





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
THE DIRECTOR

JUN 29 2018

Mr. Dan Hull  
Chairman  
North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
Council Coordination Committee  
1007 W 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Suite 100  
Anchorage, AK 99501

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Dear Mr. ~~Hull~~: *Dan*

Thank you for your letter regarding council research priorities and integration of those priorities in the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) science planning.

As discussed during the most recent Council Coordination Committee (CCC) meeting, NMFS does recognize council research priorities, and they are integrated into and affect our planning processes in a variety of ways. In all regions, staff serve on council committees, such as the Scientific and Statistical Committees. In this capacity, staff discuss and review council priorities, which increases awareness of these research priorities in NMFS. Then, as part of our priority-based science planning process, one of the criteria we use to prioritize certain activities and investments is whether the activity/investment is a priority to the councils. In addition, despite these regional connections to council priorities, there may be opportunity for more explicit consolidation, synthesis, and use of council research priorities at the national level, to inform planning and funding decisions, including decisions regarding requests for proposals.

We will review this issue, both nationally and regionally, through discussion with the six science center directors, with an aim that these priorities can be more formally included in annual and long-term science planning for the centers, and also inform priorities in grant funding decisions. The discussion will also touch on the best methods for the science centers to respond to the documents after the councils submit them. The regional fishery management councils are important partners, and we recognize that producing science that is responsive to management needs is critical.

I appreciate your interest in this issue and look forward to further discussion at the next CCC meeting.

Sincerely,

Chris Oliver



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THE ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR  
FOR FISHERIES

