

**Administrative / Budget Committee Report
January 29, 2024
General Joe Spraggins – Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab G, No. 1**) and the minutes (**Tab G, No. 2**) of the October 2023 committee meeting were approved as written.

Discussion of Proposed Standing and Special Scientific & Statistical Committee Reorganization for June 2024 Appointments (Tab G, No. 4)

Staff provided an overview of the proposed re-organization of the Standing and Special Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). A Committee member asked if there was any concern with the ability to find enough qualified applicants for each category if the makeup of the SSC changes. Staff stated this was possible but seemed less likely after our most recent effort to fill the vacant Economist position on the SSC; as technical staff reached out to a number of colleagues and that resulted in a high number of qualified applicants for that position. Another member expressed concern about the change in the proportion of biologists compared with social scientists and economists. Staff clarified that the proposed changes are intended to integrate the existing Reef Fish, Ecosystem, and Socioeconomic committees into the main body of the SSC which will replace these three special SSCs. The overall goal is to improve the multi-disciplinary expertise available in the primary committee. The proposed verbiage in Section 2.5 was edited to change the phrase “at least” to “up to” in reference to the number of proposed economists and anthropologists/social scientists.

The Committee recommends, and I so move: **that the Council accept the proposed changes to the SOPPs in section 2.5 related to the SSC.**

Motion carried with no opposition.

Discussion continued on the remainder of the suggested SOPPs changes. A member asked if the mention of the SSC using the best scientific information available (BSIA) created an additional layer of decision making for the SSC that is the purview of NOAA Fisheries. Staff explained that this verbiage is intended to bring the SOPPs to be more in line with the current language in the Regional BSIA framework that was recently drafted by the Regional Office. The ultimate decision of what comprises BSIA rests with NOAA Fisheries. A committee member asked what would happen if the SSC disagreed with the Agency’s BSIA statement. NOAA Southeast Regional Office staff responded that this process is defined in the Regional BSIA framework. The draft of this document will be provided to the Council as background material prior to the full Council convening on Thursday. Staff also suggested that a link to the final document eventually be included in the SOPPs for reference.

In section 2.5.1 under Review of FMPs, Amendments, and Framework Procedure Actions, a member suggested the removal of the verbiage “as requested” over a concern that this might limit the feedback of the SSC. Staff clarified that this proposed edit was to inform SSC members and stakeholders that the Council may be working on items that the SSC may not be asked to weigh in upon. In section 2.5.2, a member questioned retaining the phrase “without cause” in

reference to the Council's right to remove members of the committee at any time. The member was concerned that retaining this phrase could have a negative effect on recruiting academics to the SSC. This concern was echoed by the Science Center representative. Staff agreed to consult with NOAA General Counsel on the origin of this clause in the SOPPs and provide additional information during Full Council.

A member questioned the inclusion of the parenthesis in section 2.5.3 and also if the SSC needed to meet concurrently with the Council. NOAA General Counsel clarified that this verbiage is in Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act thus the inclusion of this language in the SOPPs was recommended. In section 2.7.3, at the request of a member, the phrase "with economic, social, or biological/ecological expertise" was moved within the sentence. The revised statement is "Membership includes three staff from NMFS, one of which is from the **Atlantic** HMS division, **five members (with economic, social, or biological/ecological expertise) from the** SSC, and up to four other stakeholder representatives."

The Committee recommends, and I so move: **that the Council accept the proposed changes to the SOPPs.**

Motion carried with one opposition.

Review and Discuss Ad Hoc and Standing Advisory Panels (Tab G, No. 5)

The Committee reviewed the two currently appointed Ad Hoc committees. The Ad Hoc Charter For-hire Data Collection AP was recently appointed and has just started work, so no update was necessary. The proposed change to the charge of the Ad Hoc Red Snapper/Grouper Tilefish IFQ AP will be addressed by the Reef Fish Committee under other business. The Reef Fish and Shrimp APs are due for reappointment this year. With no objection from the Committee or Council, staff will proceed with advertising these panels for re-appointment.

Review and Discuss Proposed 2024 Activities (Tab G, No. 6a) and Budget (Tab G, No. 6b)

Staff provided a draft list of activities proposed for 2024. A Committee member asked if staff considered reducing the number of SSC meetings to three when planning the activities. Staff replied that the current reduction from five SSC meetings to four seemed to be the most likely course to balance the expected workload with the SSC resources and the anticipation of the reorganization of the SSC composition. The member then asked if SEDAR 97 proposed for red snapper is likely to proceed as planned. Staff reminded the committee that these activities and budget are not confirmed at this time. A member inquired if there were any indications of when the funding level would be confirmed or received for 2024. Staff stated that it will need to be before the end of March, and that each Council is facing challenges due to the federal system updates. Further information should be available in April and will be shared with the Council as it becomes known.

Review Update to 2020-2024 Administrative Award Anticipated Carryover (Tab G, No.7)

Staff provided an informational update on the current position of Council funding. As more details of funding and potential funding from the Inflation Reduction Act award become known, staff will continue to update the Council.

Review and Approve Proposal for Phase II Inflation Reduction Act Funding for the Regional Fishery Management Councils (Tab G, No. 8)

Staff presented the proposed activities, project plan, and budget for Phase II of the Inflation Reduction Act funding for the Regional Fishery Management Councils (RFMCs) in **Tab G, No. 8**. A member expressed that they felt the proposal matched well with the needs and were impressed with the proposal. Mr. Strelcheck stressed the fact that this phase of the project will be evaluated against the other Regional Fishery Management Councils proposals and awarded on a competitive basis. He emphasized the need for the project to highlight direct connections between actions and tangible outcomes based on the funding priorities. A member asked if the approval of this funding would affect the administrative award and if the Council would be charging for overhead. Staff confirmed that if the proposal is approved, activities cannot be charged to both awards simultaneously and might need to be moved from the existing award. Staff informed the Committee that the Council does not have an approved federally negotiated overhead rate; thus, all staff time is directly charged to each funding source to support the actual activity. The proposal must be submitted by January 31, 2024 so any feedback from the Council should be provided for incorporation into the proposal as quickly as possible.

The Committee recommends, and I so move: **that the Council approve the proposed activities for Phase II of the Inflation Reduction Act.**

Motion carried with no opposition.

Review and Finalize the Steering Committee Makeup for the Recreational Initiative

Staff presented a summary of the anticipated make-up, scope of work, schedule of meetings, and timeline for the Steering Committee component of the Council's Recreational Initiative. The Committee discussed the proposed make-up of the Steering Committee and expressed a desire to ensure proper representation from both private and for-hire components of the sector. A Committee member asked whether the addition of another Council member would propose budgetary issues and staff clarified that the proposed budget could be modified to include an additional member. However, staff did caution that an additional member may increase logistical challenges associated with scheduling.

The Committee recommends, and I so move: **that the Council approve the number of recreational Council members be increased from 2 to 3 (2-private recreational and 1-For-hire).**

Motion carried with no opposition.

Tab G

The Committee took volunteers for the Steering Committee and Council membership will be announced by the Council chair prior to conclusion of this Committee report.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.