

Summary Record
Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee
Public Meeting
November 14 - 16, 2023
Washington, D.C.
Proceedings

Overview

The November 2023 Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) meeting took place in Washington, D.C., from November 14 through 16. NOAA Fisheries was represented by Janet Coit, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, Sam Rauch, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, Emily Menashes, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations, Cisco Werner, Director, Scientific Programs and Chief Science Advisor, Jenni Wallace, Director, Office of Policy, and Heidi Lovett, Supervisory Policy Analyst, Office of Policy, and Acting MAFAC Designated Federal Official.

Megan Davis served as Chair of the MAFAC. The meeting opened by welcoming the 18 members: Hugh Cowperthwaite, Tom Fote, Jennifer Hagen, Sara McDonald, Meredith Moore, Stefanie Moreland, Linda O'Dierno, Ryan Prewitt, Kellie Ralston, Jocelyn Runnebaum, Ervin "Joe" Schumacker, Sarah Schumann, Patrick Sullivan, Clayward Tam, Matthew Upton, Brett Veerhusen, and Richard Yamada.

Over the course of the meeting, the following priorities and activities pertinent to NOAA Fisheries were discussed in detail:

- Report of the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
- Science Update
 - IRA update on Climate-Ready Fisheries and high level funding overview
 - Science-to-management considerations
- Climate and Ecosystems Subcommittee draft recommendations for a climate-ready fisheries policy
- Update from the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Affairs
 - Advanced Notice of Public Rulemaking
 - EEJ Strategy update
- NOAA Recreational Fisheries Update
 - Fishing Effort Survey overview
 - General recreational fisheries update
- Reports from the state directors meeting and fisheries commissions
- Budget update and remarks from the new Deputy Assistant Administrator of Operations
- Strategic Planning and Budget Subcommittee's draft letter to the Secretary of Commerce

- Overview of the Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce
- Endangered Species Act (ESA) at 50: past, present, and future
- NOAA National Sea Grant FY 23 seafood industry workforce development projects
- NOAA tribal engagement update

This report summarizes the major actions items, recommendations, and meeting discussion for the three day meeting.

Day 1 (11/14/2023)

Opening Comments

Heidi Lovett, Acting Designated Federal Officer, read the Privacy Act statement regarding the expectations of participants in public proceedings. Megan Davis, MAFAC Chair, called for introductions, and reviewed the meeting agenda.

Report of the Assistant Administrator

Janet Coit, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, welcomed new the new members and provided updates on her activities since the previous MAFAC meeting in May. Recent staffing changes within NMFS include Emily Menashes becoming the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations, Jenni Wallace becoming the Director of the Office of Policy, and Charles Littnan becoming the Director of the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center. Ms. Coit described some of her visits to the various regions around the country and the valuable input she has heard from local stakeholders. Additionally, she has testified multiple times before Congress on a variety of issues. With the number of members departing after this meeting, MAFAC has an opportunity to bring in new perspectives and voices, and she encouraged members to help recruit strong candidates for consideration. NMFS' leadership council will be meeting in the near future to examine their budget and think carefully about their priority areas in an environment in which budgets are not likely to grow. NMFS appreciates MAFAC's advice on this and their help in communicating the need for funding the work. NOAA Fisheries received a historic investment under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and has worked hard to determine the priority areas for investing these funds. NMFS has invested \$480 million in over 100 projects across the country for on-the-ground restoration projects, including one for underserved communities and set-asides for tribes. The decision not to have a match requirement provided an opportunity for many projects to go forward that would not have been possible otherwise. They recently announced \$20 million in grants going to the Fishery Management Councils (FMCs) to help them with their Climate-Ready Fisheries work. The Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiatives (CEFI) is something NMFS is working on with the National Ocean Service (NOS) and NOAA Research, and which received an infusion of funds to improve and use science to inform management in ways that will demonstrate CEFI's usefulness. The National Seafood Strategy is an in which MAFAC might help the agency find ways to improve on issues around traceability and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. This is one pillar of the National Seafood Strategy NMFS has rolled out since the last MAFAC meeting. They are also excited about the opportunity to talk to people about the importance of fisheries for food, sustenance, commerce, and jobs, which may resonate more with the public than

other critical focus areas. NMFS is currently developing implementation plans for their Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) Strategy, which will include getting more representation on Councils, funding going to underserved communities, looking at individual fishing quota (IFQ) programs, and improving access to fisheries. The Recreational Fishing Policy has been developed with significant stakeholder input and they have been extensively discussing how climate change impacts recreational fishing and how management of rec fishing needs to be addressed more thoroughly by the Councils. Ms. Coit concluded by highlighting an event at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum celebrating the 50th anniversary of the passage of the ESA and its conservation successes. Endangered species work is getting more difficult, but she believes that the U.S. cares about these species and wants to conserve them and their ecosystems. This is one of the most consequential duties of Fisheries and an area where NMFS seeks and appreciates MAFAC's advice.

Meredith Moore said she appreciates the approach NMFS is taking with leveraging the IRA funds to advance Climate-Ready Fisheries. She expressed her concern about the cliff that is facing the programs once that funding dries up and requested that Ms. Coit help MAFAC think about ways to help communicate the benefits of the work and ways to maintain it. Ms. Coit agreed and NMFS welcomes help and amplification on communicating around IRA. She believes that if they invest in useful technologies it will get NMFS into a better position to demonstrate the value of these investments for future budget considerations.

Joe Schumacker commented on the concern from the tribal perspective around capacity for creating proposals. He urged NMFS to consider underserved communities that need large infrastructure projects when creating the timelines for competitions. Ms. Coit said they are in the second round of three for the large grants for capacity building and habitat restoration, including one with a set-aside for tribes. She will make sure that information on the competition gets out to MAFAC members. She is also concerned about the impacts of the eventual financial cliff in the area of capacity building.

Brett Veerhusen said that dockside prices are currently low, so the capacity for commercial fishing organizations is very constrained and the resources to fund staff are limited. He suggested that short term funding may help get fishermen through this period before markets improve. He asked if there is any way to provide capacity to organizations that depend on markets or available resources. Ms. Coit said they have heard this repeatedly from various stakeholders and have discussed the dynamics of the economic ecosystem for the fishing industry. She did not have an answer but NMFS is thinking hard about what levers the U.S. government has available. It may require new authorities or innovation around NMFS' existing authorities.

Science Update

Cisco Werner, Ph.D., Director, Scientific Programs, and Chief Science Advisor, National Marine Fisheries Service, provided an update on Climate-Ready Fisheries and a high level funding overview, as well as scientific management considerations. In FY 23, Fisheries survey vessels completed about 75% of their days at sea, with the NOAA-wide workforce challenges being the primary restriction, along with repair and maintenance issues. The FY 24 President's budget requested over 1,200 days at sea, but that will likely translate to something closer to 800 days at sea after congressional marks. Given the uncertainty of what

the budget will be, NMFS is trying to plan for possibilities under different levels of funding. They are in the process now of revisiting the Fleet Allocation Plan to prioritize for FY 24 in addition to trying to use some of the IRA funding to accomplish core surveys. The NOAA ship Rainier had a nontrivial fire and has been taken out of commission for FY 24 and there are assessments underway to determine the future of the ship. NOAA has contracts out for two Class B vessels, which are mainly charting vessels, and are in the process of an analysis of alternatives for Class C vessels for fisheries and coastal science. The midlife repair period (MRP) for NMFS' five fishery survey vessels (FSVs) will affect what Fisheries is able to do for the next ten years. MRP is a bow-to-stern evaluation of the condition of each vessel and presents an opportunity to upgrade the fleet. They are costly in terms of money and time, requiring about \$85 million per vessel and 12-18 months to complete. Currently only one has the funding identified for MRP. NMFS has been discussing the expected cadence of the repairs and how it will impact their operations.

Approximately \$350 million in IRA funds have been allocated to support Climate-Ready Fisheries initiatives, including data acquisition (~\$105 million), data modernization and management (~\$40 million), and the CEFI (~\$40 million). Dr. Werner discussed Fisheries' vision for each of these areas over the next three years. Their vision for data acquisition is to sustain their core strengths while building additional capacity, looking to modernize their observing capabilities, data collection, and workforce. They will also help with the establishment of a National Survey Program that they hope to roll out in early 2024. They will be using IRA funds to help minimize impacts to surveys as FSVs go offline in the coming years. They are working on integrated surveys on the West Coast and have invested in new nets that will allow them to do both surface and deeper waters in a single deployment, as well as setting aside funds for charters and other ways to minimize impact on their survey mission. They are also investing in exploring how quickly they can deploy advanced technologies in operations and where.

Evan Howell discussed the build out of a new NMFS National Survey Program, which is being led by the Office of Science and Technology and will enable them to look nationally to help with contingency planning and mitigation. This should help maximize available resources to get the necessary information for national priorities. They are looking at a soft launch in January of 2024 in time for the fleet allocation planning. There is also a need for NMFS to modernize their fishery-dependent data and they are looking to transport this data into a modern agile system in partnership with coastal states and the Commissions. They expect to see a lot of this work happen in the next three to six months with FY 25 and 26 execution, after which they can continue the programs using IRA funds as long as they are already obligated. NMFS is currently in the process of hiring three or four new employees at each Science Center to work on CEFI projects.

Pat Sullivan asked what is needed to accomplish the core data collection, given the difference between requested and anticipated days at sea. He also asked if there is any room for NOAA to negotiate on these allocations and if MAFAC could be any help on that. Dr. Werner said the cost estimates for the last two years are being revised and expected to be rolled out in the next couple months. With everything included, it costs about \$100 million a year to do surveys. How NMFS calculates all their costs in the coming years is an important question they are discussing. He welcomed the conversation on how to communicate what their needs are. Dr. Howell added that the number reflects only what they have spent, and

there have been things they deprioritized in order to meet that spend number, including not gathering some data. By the end of the IRA funding, they will have a more complete view of what their annual budget will be.

Joe Schumacker asked how NMFS plans to assess the success of the new integrated survey pilot, particularly with pelagic species. Dr. Werner said the quantitative testing of the new nets will start in the summer of 2024 and they hope to conduct a side-by-side comparison with the current nets. Following that will be two years of calibration testing. These nets have been used in a similar way in Norway for near-surface and midwater fisheries and NMFS will draw on their experience to ensure what they are measuring is calibrated to the way they currently conduct surveys. For coastal pelagics, NMFS partners with industry on their nearshore purse seining and they are looking into deploying uncrewed systems for this area as well.

Brett Veerhusen asked how much additional money the agency needs to reach 100% of its days at sea. Dr. Werner said that in order to meet 100% of the surveys currently on their plates for the next 2-3 years, the delta is roughly around \$30 million. They are talking to Congress about this, but the figure is not yet published.

Stefanie Moreland said there are many parallel workstreams happening and they are not being presented as interdependent, despite the trade-offs due to budget allocations. How to highlight this is something the subcommittee should think about. She asked what communications materials are available on the impact of the 400 sea days missing from the President's Budget. Dr. Werner said that until the budget is finalized, they will not know what the allocation will be so they are planning for multiple scenarios. They will likely be communicating with Councils and others at the beginning of the year about the possible shortfalls and what they can do about it. Ms. Moreland said the subcommittee is interested in finding ways to help the public and Congress better understand the impacts of the decisions being made. Dr. Werner said they have a couple years to work through this and make sure the integrated survey will happen, along with other ways to help mitigate the impact. Ms. Moreland said that if they wait much longer they will be out of the budget cycle process, which is very stressful for stakeholders that rely on strong NOAA core data acquisition.

Richard Yamada said the International Pacific Halibut Commission is facing many of the same issues with their surveys. Given their budget cuts, they are exploring whether they can reduce their survey coverage by 20% and still be able to provide statistical data for directing the fisheries. He asked if NMFS has looked at doing less than 100% coverage for their Alaska surveys while still providing statistically significant information. Dr. Werner said this is something the Alaska Center is working on currently and presented on at the last Council meeting.

Barry Thom asked for clarification on what the true gap is for the days at sea, using completed days at sea in FY 23 as a baseline. Dr. Werner said there were approximately 850 days at sea in FY 23, so the 800 they are planning for in FY 24 is a 50-60 day reduction from the previous year, though it is only 70% of what they wanted to do. The full requirement is closer to 1,200.

Jocelyn Runnebaum asked if there was a plan for how cooperative research and cooperative approaches to surveys would get incorporated to maintain time series. This will be essential for figuring out once offshore wind is deployed. Any path forward for reimagining the nation's survey fleet would seem to include the fishing industry themselves. Dr. Werner pointed to the cooperative approach with the purse seine industry to capture nearshore assessments and looking to how their Norwegian counterparts are working with industry to collect samples.

Sam Rauch discussed how the management side uses all this information and some of the tools they utilize to respond to the issue they face. Habitats are changing because of temperature, leading to cascading food web changes and distribution shifts. All of these changes to environmental parameters are creating a number of management issues. One of the tools they use to address this is the DisMAP tool, a national online portal that allows users to visualize and analyze all of the various factors. Mr. Rauch presented the black sea bass's changing distribution as an example of the tool's utility. It is easy to assess the ecosystem implications of shifting species, but there are also profound social, economic, and governance issues that come with the changing of the landing ports. This tool displays the changing trends and can be paired with the Social Indicator Working Group's work to look at social dynamics. Mr. Rauch also presented NMFS' Climate Vulnerability Assessments to analyze the impacts of climate change on stocks and which stocks need to be prioritize given their vulnerability. Much of this information gets incorporated into Ecosystem Status Reports that help with management decision making. The Ecosystem Socioeconomic Profile is a different way to take some of this data and present various indicators in a single place to help elucidate what the trends are. Ultimately all this information goes into stock assessments which inform catch levels. When the data is not clear or environmental parameters are not available, NMFS uses risk tables to determine the likely tolerance for being wrong. One example of this being used was for sablefish. NMFS has also been working to increase their scenario planning capacity and Mr. Rauch discussed three examples of this work with the Councils. NMFS' Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management policy and roadmap have been out for about a decade and they are looking to update that to more directly include climate impacts. They expect to finalize the update revisions in 2024 and they will ensure that it integrates with CEFI and other initiatives. The Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) specifies that the Secretary of Commerce is responsible for designating the boundaries of councils, which was mostly done in the '70s. As the Councils' stocks change, they need an objective and transparent way to evaluate what changes are needed. NMFS released a statement about what criteria they would use and how they would involve the councils. They released out a draft of the proposed policy for comment and expect to finalize and roll out the policy next summer.

Pat Sullivan said a transdisciplinary approach to dealing with this is difficult, but there are real challenges underway that require it.

Clay Tam commented on the need for flexibility in leveraging empirical knowledge from native populations. Dr. Werner agreed and noted that the Alaska Council has formally included Traditional and Local Ecological Knowledge in their decision making.

Meredith Moore recommended setting a goal for having risk tables for all of the nation's fisheries. She asked if there is a baseline assessment of the amount of risk in fisheries to

better understand if they are being effectively managed. Mr. Rauch said that every council looks at risk when they are setting quota. They do not all have risk tables and some of it is more fishery-specific, but they are all required to take that uncertainty into account. Some set the risk to zero, but they are required to have a rational basis for how they are handling uncertainty, which is generally that the predictive capability of the models continues to hold up. Not all of the parameters are falling apart, some are still quite predictive and they constantly look at it. There is not a national baseline, as each fishery is different.

Richard Yamada discussed his study of squid as a potential commercial fishery in Alaska. There has not been a squid fishery in Alaska for 50 years and no data on the squid population has been collected. Recent eDNA research has found these squid are eating herring, cod, and salmon as part of their diet, but no one is looking at what role these squid are playing in their ecosystem. He would like to see more attention given to this. Dr. Werner said there is a need to look at the shifts in ecosystems and they need to be measuring shifts in other aspects of trophic levels. In their surveys, when NMFS has to sacrifice something due to resource constraints, it is ecosystem measurements. They are focused on the target species that they need to measure, but they are not looking at the supporting food web.

Kellie Ralston said she appreciates the agency's more holistic approach to addressing fishery management, including habitat. Collecting all that information is a challenge but is key to properly managing fisheries into the future. She also encouraged NMFS to look more at juvenile species so scientists can be more predictive of where problems might be and take proactive steps.

Barry Thom said the agency tends to focus mostly on the internal resources going into surveys and assessments, but the fishery-dependent data is just as important when it comes to management of the stocks, socioeconomic data, and other information.

Tom Fote said the approach to managing fisheries by spawning stock biomass has been shown to be inadequate due to factors such as declining recruitment. Mr. Rauch said NMFS is still figuring out the variances and inputs needed to manage stocks most effectively. They are working through these issues, but it is a long slow process. They are committed to working through these issues and CEFI presents a new way to invest in it but it's still a challenge.

Climate and Ecosystems Subcommittee - Recommendations for a Climate-Ready Fisheries Policy

Meredith Moore and Jocelyn Runnebaum presented the subcommittee's proposed recommendations on the Climate-Ready Fisheries Policy. The subcommittee tasked themselves with trying to figure out how to improve the uptake and implementation of climate information in fisheries management. They have been tackling the questions of what climate-ready fisheries management is and how it should work. They considered how climate-ready fisheries differs from traditional approaches, what should be valued as decisions are made around management under a changing climate, as well as what direction management should be aimed in for long-term success. NMFS needs to clearly and broadly convey their perspectives on these topics for those involved in the management system. The subcommittee has heard from a variety of stakeholders on what they see as major

challenges to climate-ready fisheries and have built on that along with their own expertise to develop a call to action for the agency. Their initial recommendation is that there is not currently a Climate-Ready Fisheries Policy and NMFS should develop one. In its letter, the subcommittee did not attempt to create a policy for NMFS, but if the agency does develop one, they recommended providing clarity on their thinking on the concepts of climate-ready fisheries, climate-ready fisheries management, and climate-ready fishing-dependent communities. There is overlap between the three, but focusing on them separately would provide better clarity. The letter offers recommendations for each of them, recognizing the basic distinctions between the concepts.

Richard Yamada asked for the subcommittee's definition of "climate-ready fisheries" or an example of a fishery that is climate-ready. Ms. Moore said getting NMFS to clarify this is one of the reasons for drafting the letter. In the subcommittee's view, climate-ready fisheries prioritize the ability of stocks to provide and to support businesses, recreations, and cultures that depend upon them for the long term, taking into account the protection of marine ecosystems based on the conservation and management principles and requirements outlined in the MSA. A one-sentence definition is not sufficient to capture what climate-ready fisheries are and NMFS needs to address that there is no shared understanding of what the point of it is and what the outcome/output of it would be. Mr. Yamada said the main issue he has with "climate-ready" is the ability to predict what the future is going to be like and the impacts of climate change. Resiliency to climate change is something he would appreciate more information on in order to help prepare.

Tom Fote said he did not expect to see concrete answers emerge from this, since they are trying to manage for things that are out of their control.

Megan Davis asked if the letter addresses the CEFI. Ms. Moore said it is included, but they largely focused on the need to define the full system. CEFI is something they acknowledge and recognize that in order to achieve climate-ready fisheries they will need the full science enterprise to be supporting that decision making. Chair Davis also asked where the subcommittee members were aligned and where there was some conflict in the drafting of the letter. Ms. Moore said the tension between the how versus the where was an area they spent a lot of time on. Dr. Sullivan agreed that a policy is needed before they can fully dive in. Ms. McDonald commented on the differences in how different interests are experiencing climate change impacts, but it was important to them to try to characterize all the opinions and perspectives in the best way possible. Mr. Upton said the responses need to be nuanced because of the variety of perspectives contributing, as well as the need for responsive management to deal with the different kinds and degrees of impacts.

Pat Sullivan suggested including language that says the subcommittee is willing to help NMFS with this effort. Ms. Moore agreed and added that they wanted to acknowledge that there will be a phase two to this and they will help the agency in development and implementation.

Megan Davis asked the subcommittee to summarize the calls to action that are included in the letter. Dr. Runnebaum said they are asking for a definition and for clear principles to be outlined. Their primary call to action is for the agency to work with stakeholders to determine what this means for everyone. It is also a call to action to work with MAFAC and

the subcommittee. Ms. Moore said she did not consider the bullet points in the letter calls to action, but principles for the different terms. She explained her intentions behind the structure of the letter and emphasized that they have taken the community piece very seriously, highlighting the socioeconomic and cultural impacts, which will need to be an integral component of every aspect of the system. Chair Davis suggested clarifying this in the beginning of the document.

Brett Veerhusen wanted to see included reasons why this is important to the public, as well as impacts to the seafood supply chain and other stakeholders. Dr. Runnebaum thought that needed to be added to draw a clear linkage between the climate and ecosystem work and the budget subcommittee conversation. Vice Chair Ralston added that broadening the language would be a good idea, because it includes access, tourism, and much more. Mr. Yamada cautioned against trying to make it all-inclusive at the risk of diluting the message. There are already policies in place that take some of these considerations into account. He added that international economic considerations and the broader market are issues that could be included in future iterations. Dr. Runnebaum said they could cite the policies in the letter to explain why they are not directly addressing them.

The subcommittee went into its work session to incorporate the suggestions of the MAFAC. Upon resuming, Ms. Moore read the revisions and took additional input from MAFAC members for minor edits.

Update from the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Affairs

Sam Rauch provided an update on NMFS' Advanced Notice of Public Rulemaking for National Standards 4, 8, and 9 and an overview of some of the work they have recently accomplished. NMFS continues to perform well in relation to its Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) measurement of success for performance-based management. On the Protected Resources side, they have over 1,000 consultations a year under ESA and Essential Fish Habitats (EFH), and issue permits under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). In addition to conserving endangered species, one of the main focuses in this area is working with industry to make sure that they can develop in a way that minimizes impact. NMFS has been working hard on improving permitting efficiency in a way that still allows them to achieve their conservation outcomes without creating unnecessary delays. They have made a 40% improvement in the amount of time it takes to do an informal consultation and 95% of EFH consultations are now on time. They have been working on a Department-wide permitting action plan that was issued in April and the detailee that helped work on it is now a permanent employee working at NMFS as the Senior Leader for Promoting Efficiency. NMFS has also worked with the Councils to explore available tools for area-based management that could help them achieve the goals of the America the Beautiful Initiative. NMFS has also been supporting another goal of the Administration to deliver 30 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030, which is an ambitious goal requiring coordinated efforts among multiple federal agencies, state partners, the science community, and more. In the long run, offshore wind is a key part of the country's climate change response, but in the near term they could have very disruptive effects and working through that has been a challenge. NMFS has been working with partners on habitat restoration projects, and last year (mostly without BIL or IRA funds) they were able to restore 5,400 acres of EFH and 1,000 stream miles. Mr. Rauch's office is charged with managing for the ten national standards under

MSA, some of which have not been updated in a long time. NMFS has issued an ANPR seeking comments on whether to amend three of the standards (4, 8, and 9) and Mr. Rauch provided a brief overview of these standards and the comments they received. The comment period closed September 12 and they received 392 unique comments. Many of the Councils and others indicated that change was not needed from their perspective and they posited that the current guidelines do not hinder responses to climate or EEJ issues. A number of fishery participants, communities, and environmental groups do support changes to the guidelines, especially to 4 and 9. One item NMFS requested feedback on was whether to change the definition of "communities" to de-emphasize the place-based requirement and focus on a more social definition of the term. Most commenters were against that. NMFS is reviewing the comments they received and considering whether to proceed with the proposed rule. If they do move forward, they are likely to issue it in the spring of 2024.

Katie Zanowicz, EEJ Committee Representative, provided an update on NMFS' EEJ Strategy. The National Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy was finalized and shared publicly in May. EEJ engagement is currently wrapping up and implementation plans are being developed, though they may extend the timeline beyond the end of 2023 in order to allow more meaningful engagement from the regions. While engagement is still ongoing, a number of the regions and program offices have developed implementation plans tailored to the needs of their underserved communities. She highlighted a few of the ongoing activities, including holding eight internal capacity-building workshops in the Pacific Islands and holding 29 focus groups across the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean regions. Program offices have also developed engagement plans that are tailored to their specific focus areas. Mr. Rauch added that a lot of the habitat work will be addressed with underserved communities grant money. Ms. Coit added the example of working with the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (WPFMC) on how best to handle the President's request to expand the Pacific Remote Islands Sanctuary. She also noted that the Secretary of Commerce has been pushing Governors to provide more diversity on the Councils and NMFS has been working with the states to encourage more representation. Mr. Rauch said the implementation plans will include more detail once they are released. He cited a few more examples of things they are working on, including providing more translation services, looking at the potentially inequitable effects of catch share programs, and exploring ways to tease out the different aspects that fall under recreational fishing.

Meredith Moore highlighted what she sees as an unintended consequence of the greater focus on equity and environmental justice in fisheries. In giving the participants of the fishery management system, language around equity and environmental justice to highlight the issues that they are experiencing, there may be an unintentional leveling effect between the experiences of native peoples and other fishing communities that are experiencing socioeconomic impacts. She was also concerned about the potential for increased burden that could be placed on these communities. Mr. Rauch agreed that there are important distinctions. EEJ focuses on underserved communities and has a socioeconomic premise for how that is defined. Appropriately engaging with tribal communities is different and many tribes do not consider themselves to be underserved communities. Tribes are sovereign entities and need to be addressed as such. Some efforts may benefit both groups, but they need to remember that they are distinct. Ms. Coit added that the system itself can be an obstacle to effective participation. Dr. Runnebaum said that it may be worth considering

working with tribal communities to include a definition on lifeways and how that feeds in to the EEJ Strategy. She pointed to a report from the Wabanaki Tribe that expounds upon their views of lifeways, which might be a helpful resource for a starting point.

Tom Fote commented on bluefish regulations that set up a different and inequitable category for charter boats. NMFS should take a look at these along with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) because it is an EEJ issue negatively impacting those that cannot afford to charter a boat. The regulation effectively eliminates beach fishermen from the fishery by raising the size limit to where the fish they can catch are not legal size.

Clay Tam commented on the issue of maintaining access for native populations, noting that large numbers of Native Hawaiians have moved off-island and may lose access to their fishing grounds and in other places Marine Protected Areas have been established in fishing villages and the locals were banned from taking fish. Losing access is a major problem for people in the Pacific.

NOAA Recreational Fisheries Update

Russ Dunn, National Policy Advisor for Recreational Fisheries, shared that with the help of MAFAC and through other public comments, the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy and regional implementation plans are now final. The policy guides NMFS on developing and maintaining sustainable saltwater recreational fisheries by identifying goals and guiding principles for consideration in planning and decision making by the agency. The update to the policy included adding new goals on climate and EEJ, in addition to strengthening aspects of sustainability, including offshore wind development and depredation issues. They have also expanded reference to the increasing importance of cooperative/collaborative engagement and data collection. At the strong behest of MAFAC and others, NMFS committed to track and measure implementation of the policy itself. Mr. Dunn discussed Recreational Fisheries activities since the last MAFAC meeting. They continued to work over this summer with the Northeast Fishery Science Center in their efforts to establish the Recreational Biological Sampling Project, a cooperative sampling program with for-hire boats to sample groundfish in New England, and they were able to provide some additional support for the West Coast Cooperative Rockfish Sampling Project. They have been working across the agency to re-envision the state-federal recreational data partnerships, as well as finalizing the outputs from an economic workshop with recreational fishermen in April. The Recreational Fisheries program has spent a lot of time recently working on issues related to the Rice's whale, the petition on vessel speed restrictions, and working to better accommodate the constituents in the North Atlantic Right Whale Tech Workshop. They also worked with Alex McOwen's team on a solicitation for proposals for cooperative habitat conservation projects with the recreational community. Going forward, one of their priority focuses is implementing the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy. Additionally, they have many engagements and events planned for FY 24, including five events with the National Parks Trust to take out kids and families associated with Title I schools. They hope to be able to continue their focus supporting both the Pacific and the Northeast cooperative research projects and have begun discussions with the Southeast on some similar work. Their habitat work has proven to be effective in engaging the recreational fishing community directly on NOAA priorities. They are looking at several approaches to addressing EEJ issues through a variety of engagements and up-weighting proposals that

address needs in underserved communities.

Pat Sullivan relayed a comment from Donna Kalez concerning the issue of fishermen avoiding a species which then creates landing data that seems to reflect a stock collapse. If there was a way for the stock assessment scientists to run a sensitivity analysis, it would perform some good faith sort of understanding what is happening. Mr. Dunn said he would pass on the question to Melissa Monk.

Kellie Ralston thanked Mr. Dunn and the Office of Habitat Conservation for participating in the ICAST panel over the summer. She asked what next steps NMFS had in mind for the Recreational Socioeconomic Workshop and Report and if there is a role for MAFAC to weigh in on it. Mr. Dunn said that the report has been issued as a NOAA Technical Memorandum and a number of people involved in the workshop want to discuss what NOAA is going to do with it. Where it goes beyond that is subject to priorities and budget. Vice Chair Ralston also asked about the expectations for the North Atlantic Right Whale Workshop and the anticipated timing for issuing the final rule. Ms. Coit said they had hoped to have the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Speed Rule update finalized by the end of CY 23, but they are now aiming for early 2024.

Evan Howell, Director, Office of Science and Technology, provided updates on the results of the Fishing Effort Survey (FES) pilot study. The FES is one of two major surveys NMFS does to get final catch estimates for the Recreational Fisheries Program. It has been viewed as a survey with credibility in the past, with many people believing the estimates were too high, which led to launching the pilot study in order to evaluate it. Adjusting the order of questions led to qualitatively better answers, and the resulting estimates were far lower for the shore and private boats than the current format (up to 30-40% reduction). There were some limitations to the study and the team decided they wanted to extend the testing with an FES follow-up study. The follow-up study will last one year and will seek to get increased precision, lowering the percent standard error of the sample estimates. The new study design is informed by results of two previous pilot studies and will change the question order and move to monthly sampling waves. The study will determine combined effects, which allows for a more efficient transition/calibration process. Calibration update work has started and will continue as needed into 2024 and 2025, pending the results from the follow-up study. Full implementation of an improved FES design would occur no earlier than 2026. They have begun working with Regional NMFS offices, Councils, and Commissions to identify potential implications and actions. They have been charged with working across NOAA to develop a plan to collaboratively re-envision state-federal recreational data partnerships. The full potential impacts are unknown until the completion of the follow-up study. Effort data from FES remains the best available science for tracking relative year-to-year and long-term fishing effort activity trends. While the magnitude of the effort estimates may change from a revised survey design, fishing activity patterns over time are expected to remain similar. They will continue to focus on conversations with partners and make programmatic improvements to further mitigate disruption to assessments and managements.

Kellie Ralston appreciated the candor with which the agency has approached this. She strongly encouraged them to engage with states in developing something to narrow their estimates on offshore species in a way that continues to allow access to all. There is also an opportunity to take the lessons learned from the Gulf and what happened with MRIP to

develop a model for the nation. Additionally, she suggested considering prioritizing fisheries that are either mixed use or heavy on the recreational side and being very proactive on the front end thinking about how to expedite management decision moving forward.

Pat Sullivan applauded the effort NMFS is undertaking in this and commented that if one of these estimates is way off it is difficult trying to justify using it at all. He suggested doing a thought experiment to explore the implications of the survey going one way or the other, which would help them anticipate some guidance they could provide to Councils on how to handle this. He relayed a question from Ms. Kalez about how this is going to affect communities and if there is anything that would be worth getting in place as this moves forward. Dr. Howell stressed that the community and the people are the main reason for all of this work. There were social scientists involved in the re-design of the survey and he will verify how much social science interaction they have in the implications and the ongoing work.

Meredith Moore commented that this work is laudable and important for improving recreational data. As far as she was aware, there is no replacement for the data that MRIP can provide. It plays a critical role in ensuring the necessary data is available for managing fisheries. She emphasized how critical the federal-state partnership will be and encouraged an intentional process that provides transparency to the thinking and building out of the new system in order to foster trust that it is generating better data and incorporating all the available sources.

Day 2 (11/15/2023)

Megan Davis welcomed attendees to the second day of the meeting and reviewed the day's agenda.

Reports from the State Directors Meeting and Fisheries Commissions

Bob Beal, Executive Director, Atlantic States, reported on ASFMC's recent activities. East coast activities are still being driven by climate change, offshore wind development, and marine mammals. These impact everything ASFMC does and Mr. Beal discussed projects underway for each. One of their projects has been the characterization of the erosion of fundamental data collection along the East Coast. They are characterizing where data collection has eroded, characterize what that translates to in real world terms, and then what should be done about it. They are working to support the development of Climate-Ready Fisheries, but in the context of climate change more data is needed not less. Related to this is the FES survey, many of the stocks ASFMC manages have a significant recreational component and not understanding that or having the estimates move by 30-40% would have a major impacts on stock assessments and allocations along the East Coast. They are not making changes to stock assessment schedules or reopening allocation discussions until the FES is sorted out. ASFMC is doing their best to keep all the states on the same page to avoid fracturing. If states start doing their own recreational data collection, it could lead to real problems. They need a standardized data collection program along the east coast and to work with federal partners to figure out what this program will look like in the long term. Activities related to North Atlantic Right Whales and lobster fishery interactions are getting a lot of investment this year from the state and federal levels, and they are working to help

coordinate all the programs to ensure the funds are being spent as efficiently as possible and that the data they are producing is accessible. ASFMC took emergency actions earlier this year to narrow the slot limit for retaining striped bass and they are going through an addendum process to their Fishery Management Plan (FMP), which is out for public comment now. The goal is to rebuild the stock by 2029, though it seems to be a stock that has been significantly impacted by climate change.

Jocelyn Runnebaum asked about lobster and the decision to delay changing the gauge because of declines in recruitment. She asked if Mr. Beal had any insight into how Commissions can be ready sooner to make management decisions in the face of climate change. Mr. Beal provided some of the background on the gauge issue and its many facets. This has been one of the ASFMC's first effort to set up triggers in FMPs and since it happened a lot faster than they anticipated, they decided to slow down the process.

Kellie Ralston asked for more information on striped bass, given the number of management actions they have taken and little evidence of rebound in the stock. She asked what the Commission's thinking was for next steps or remedies for this situation. Mr. Beal said it is a challenging stock right now, due to the low recruitment. They are trying to husband the stronger year classes through the population. 50% of the mortality in striped bass comes from hook and release fishing on the recreational side and enforcing rules against the targeting of striped bass is very challenging. They do have a document out for public comment that could potentially lead to additional reductions.

Linda O'Dierno asked if there was a better way to get the data in a standardized format from states or other sources. Mr. Beal said they have made a lot of progress on the east coast for fishery-dependent standardized reporting, but there is a lot of room for improvement in the fishery-independent work on surveys and port sampling. There have been requests by some of the Councils for the Northeast Science Center to see what surveys would look like on industry platforms rather than NOAA ships. They continue to urge NOAA to continue their fundamental data collection programs, but they also need to look forward. Using industry platforms may be part of that equation. They can do some kinds of data collection on uncrewed systems, but not everything they need for management.

Meredith Moore asked what format the assessment of data gap characterization will be released in and what it will include. Mr. Beal said they are still trying to figure out how this will work and what it will include.

Brett Veerhusen asked what the risk is of not being able to fund surveys and data collection to stakeholders dependent upon the management of that resource. Mr. Beal said there's potentially a \$40 million reduction in next year's budget, but even a flat budget will continue to erode their ability to get basic scientific information. The Northeast biological sampling is potentially down to 80% by 2025 if the budget does not change.

Barry Thom, Executive Director, Pacific States, provided the update on their recent activities. They are doing a lot of work on the issue of Dungeness crab and whale entanglements, coordinating with the states on permitting activities and helping the industry with gear. In the near term, they will be working through electronic monitoring video review for the groundfish fishery on the West Coast, which starts in regulation January 1. They are still

working through the NOAA grants transition over the next several months. PSFMC had their annual meeting in October and offshore wind continues to be a high priority. They are doing a lot of work internally to help NMFS and BOEM with some of the analytical pieces on fishing effort and visualizing data. PSFMC is currently handling over \$400 million to distribute for disasters, over half of which is for Alaska crab fisheries. Hawaii has formally requested to join the PSFMC and they are helping the state with the legislative components. PSFMC has weighed in on the House version of the proposed NOAA Organic Act that would pull NOAA out of the Department of Commerce, as well as the Fishes Act that aims to reduce timelines for OMB review of disaster funding. The PSFMC does a lot of work on aquatic invasive species. Earlier this fall, a quagga mussel was found in the Snake River, the first instance of a confirmed mussel in the river. The State of Idaho did extensive eradication in that section of the river, which led to high mortalities for sturgeon and other fish in that area. There is follow up testing underway to see if it was successful. As with the ASFMC, priorities for the PSFMC also include maintaining surveys and basic data collection on independent data, as well as fishery-dependent data and data modernization.

Janet Coit commented on the role of NOAA Fisheries on invasive species versus other parts of NOAA and other federal agencies. While spending time with the Lummi Nation where European green crabs had been introduced, she had to stress that it was not possible to do what Idaho did and decimate a whole ecosystem. She was interested to hear where the Commissions can help with efficiencies, given that they have fewer constraints on their work than NOAA. Mr. Thom said that PSFMC has been very supportive on NMFS playing a larger role on green crab work and to bring back the NOAA Invasive Species Coordinator position. As much as PSFMC can help coordinate efforts around addressing green crab work across federal agencies, they are willing to help. In terms of the strengths of the Commission, one area of strength where they could help is on the data programming and data management side of things.

Brett Veerhusen commented that he was very impressed with the invasive species measures being taken in Idaho. He also asked how Mr. Thom would rank PSFMC on stock assessments and data collection. Mr. Thom said they seemed to be doing poorly, with everyone trying to make things work but capacity dwindling further as resources dry up.

Joe Schumacker asked how the "VMS-lite" systems are collecting data. He also asked what facilitations PSFMC is doing for offshore wind beyond providing anonymized fishery effort data. Mr. Thom said that when the VMS system gets near enough to shore that there is a cell signal, it uploads its data into a database that is then transferred to the states. For offshore wind, PSFMC's charge is to ensure any available fishery data gets into the analysis. They have contracts with BOEM and the Northwest Fishery Science Center. Much of this is done in the marine spatial planning context so that it is useful for purposes beyond offshore wind. They are not involved in facilitating meetings or stakeholder input.

David Donaldson, Executive Director, Gulf States, reported on the GSFMC's recent activities. He addressed Mr. Veerhusen's question about GSFMC's data collection, stating that it is not good right now and the outlook for future years is even worse. They have done preliminary estimates and they anticipate a greater than 50% deficit, which will have significant impacts on collection of baseline data. GSFMC has sent a letter to the Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) expressing their concerns about losing days at sea and the impact to

long-term surveys. The Commission will be handling about \$6.5 million in IRA funds for red snapper work in the Gulf. With this money they will be improving the Commission's and states' recreational management data systems, developing better methods for quality control, and establishing the Commission as the central warehouse for recreational data, along with other efforts. At the Gulf Council meeting this summer, they met with Evan Howell to discuss the recreational FES validation. The Commission is funding a pilot for this utilizing the LA Creel survey that they aim to start on January 1. The State of Louisiana has provided the GSFMC with funding for a menhaden bycatch study, which will begin in April. This will enable them to better manage the menhaden fishery. At their October meeting, GSFMC discussed the future of the seafood industry and decided to work with Mike Rubino and Sea Grant to hopefully develop paths forward that will ensure its longevity. They expect to leverage the National Seafood Strategy and focus heavily on the shrimp industry.

Ryan Prewitt asked what reforms, if any, are under consideration to the IFQ program in the Gulf of Mexico. Mr. Donaldson said that is not something the Commission is directly involved in; the Gulf Council issue has an ad hoc group discussing the issue and they are currently in the early phase of reviewing the program to assess what is working or not and how to move forward.

Kellie Ralston said the FES pilot studies underway are the crux of the data issue in the Gulf. Getting a good handle on that is going to be key, not only for the Gulf but for other regions devising their next steps. She also commended the agency for additional funding for red snapper opportunities for EFPs in the South Atlantic. She encouraged NMFS to work with the State of Florida on their proposals to help them get across the finish line.

Linda O'Dierno said the Commerce Subcommittee is looking for any input on the future of the seafood industry as they craft their recommendations on the National Seafood Strategy. They are also willing to share what they have been working on with anyone that is interested.

NOAA Fisheries Budget Outlook and Remarks from the New Deputy Assistant Administrator of Operations

Emily Menashes, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations, introduced herself and described the NMFS programs that she is responsible for. Her background includes 24 years of service at NOAA, mostly in NMFS but spending the last five years at NOS as the Chief of Staff. She also had the opportunity to spend a year at the Council on Environmental Quality helping to establish the America the Beautiful effort and rejuvenating the Ocean Policy Committee. She looks forward to hearing about MAFAC's interests and priorities and working with them over the coming years.

Brian Pawlak, Director, NOAA Fisheries Office of Management and Budget, discussed the FY 2024 budget outlook. Currently, NMFS is still executing FY 23 funds and operating under a continuing resolution at FY 23 levels. They anticipate having an FY 24 budget through February, likely at level funding. OMB is reviewing their FY 25 budget now and having planning discussions for FY 26. Now through the spring of 2024 is the time for providing stakeholder input to NMFS for the FY 26 budget; between now and the next Senate or House mark in the summer is the time to be engaging Congress on the FY 25 budget. NMFS' FY 23 enacted budget was approximately \$1.1 billion, not including supplemental funding. For FY

24, they received Administration support for increases in addition to considerations for inflationary adjustments. The Senate mark proposed level funding, while the House mark was ~\$200 million below FY 23 enacted levels. Mr. Pawlak discussed what each of these scenarios would translate to programmatically. NMFS is preparing to operate with flat budgets as the best case scenario given that Fisheries has rarely gotten reductions in the budget even when NOAA and other regulatory agencies have seen cuts. He emphasized that messaging priorities is especially critical in the current budget environment.

A National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) Report recommended Fisheries look at how they focus and communicate their priorities, as well ensuring those priorities are supported from headquarters down to the FMCs and have been communicated back to constituents. To achieve this, NMFS will need clear and strategic planning, while addressing other issues that can take away from mission priorities, such as facilities, safety, training. NMFS felt that it was important to respond that being clear in their priorities and being able to communicate the impacts of the different budget environments is critical. They are following up on one of the recommendations by building program plans, likely covering a five-year timeframe looking at portfolio options under different budget scenarios. Areas that the initial program plans will cover include the survey enterprise, consultations, North Atlantic Right Whale recovery, countering IUU fishing, and aquaculture. Another effort to align priorities is having the leadership council discuss the prioritization within the organization, including the core mission requirements and management responsibilities. Mr. Pawlak presented a table breaking down NMFS' \$1.2 billion in supplemental funding from IRA and briefly discussed two of the currently open habitat restoration funding opportunities.

Pat Sullivan asked if the budget was developed based on what NMFS is surviving on or if it reflect the full amount needed. Mr. Pawlak said they get a base budget figure from OMB, which is generally the previous year's enacted budget, and then build up from there based on what it will take to fulfill administration priorities and bridge gaps identified by stakeholders. As they work through their requested increases, it is balanced against all of NOAA and the Department of Commerce. There are some underlying assumptions that the base budget is either covering the core work or else NMFS will figure out how to get by without it.

Jocelyn Runnebaum suggested being more explicit in the program plan on consultations referring to offshore wind development, since it is taking up so much staff time and has had such an impact on their work, especially at the local level. Mr. Pawlak said the consultations section of the program plan would address what NMFS would need to do in order to meet all their consultation requirements, including offshore wind.

Meredith Moore noted that not included in the five priority areas is fisheries management, which would be illuminating to understand what the agency, Councils, Commissions, etc., would need in order to fulfill their management responsibilities.

Barry Thom expressed his appreciation for the time that the regions, Centers, and headquarters leadership have taken this year to listen to the states and Commissions on their priorities. This is a good process and responsive to the NAPA report.

Pat Sullivan said that it would be helpful for MAFAC to know in some way what NOAA's budget proposal is before it goes to Congress so they can be supportive of it. He added that it is important to clearly communicate the consequences of not adequately funding their programs.

Brett Veerhusen asked Ms. Menashes about her experience with NOAA data being used across the federal government. Ms. Menashes said a lot of the data that NOS and others generate is mission agnostic and they put it out for people to use how they choose. It is a different dynamic than Fisheries, which largely produces data for regulatory purposes. NMFS is oftentimes the recipient of other useful data streams within NOAA. Ms. Coit added that there are some examples of Fisheries science being used more broadly, but predominantly they are doing the science specifically for the states and fishing community. Its broader value and applicability is something worth thinking about and NMFS could do a better job of demonstrating that their science underpins a large national seafood effort. Dr. Runnebaum added that communicating the value of NMFS data is a real opportunity. The value of their information on habitats, water temperature, ocean currents, and more, to local stakeholders and the nation outside of the FMC structure is something they should incorporate into their budget strategy and program plans.

Strategic Planning and Budget Subcommittee - Draft Letter to the Secretary of Commerce

Stefanie Moreland, Chair, Strategic Planning and Budget Subcommittee, provided a brief update on the activities of the subcommittee since the last MAFAC meeting. Their vision initially with the subcommittee work was to improve public understanding through agency communications of the value proposition for NOAA Fisheries mission critical work related to data acquisition and the funding needs to support data management and modernization. They particularly focused on what can be done to support these communications' function and capabilities around budget planning and the needs for supporting continuity in these data programs. Recognizing that there will be a tightening fiscal environment and downward pressures at a time when inflation and aging infrastructure are significant threats, the subcommittee pivoted their work to the need for fiscally-informed scenario planning and getting more transparency around that work. The NAPA report provided a lot of good advice and tools towards this end. The subcommittee's draft letter to the Secretary of Commerce echoes much of what Mr. Pawlak discussed during his presentation. Mr. Veerhusen presented the subcommittee's latest version of its letter, which includes a top line focus on those work streams that are under way and emphasizes the need for the planning work previously discussed. They assert that this needs to be done on a 10-year basis and fiscally-informed scenario planning needs to be projected out beyond five years looking at end-of-life and aging vessel challenges. They sent out the letter for MAFAC members to review and discussed changes made from the previous iteration.

Pat Sullivan commented that the theme of communication comes through in the letter, and acknowledges the need for communication at several levels. One level being the community that uses this kind of information and want to know what is in the budget; the other is the public, who may not be aware of all the important work NMFS does. Mr. Tam agreed with this and added that data is a two-way street and data sharing is very important.

Meredith Moore suggested renumbering the recommendations to align with those in the

NAPA report. She also noted that they skipped two of the NAPA recommendations and asked why that was, since they seem to have some relevance to the contents of the letter. Ms. Moreland said that at the time they drafted the letter, they did not have visibility on what was happening with the strategic planning. Now that they have seen the progress on the strategic plan, the subcommittee was not integrating or referencing it. Ms. Moore offered to draft a sentence encouraging NMFS to keep doing planning for their data collection needs but highlight that it should also recognize the mandates and responsibilities that they need to attend to.

Joe Schumacker asked about Recommendation 5.3 to incorporate external stakeholder input into the building of the annual fish surveys and whether there was any deliberation about stakeholder participation. Ms. Moreland said the subcommittee discussed this and in the general text of the letter it is a recommendation to focus on charter and cooperative research.

Members further discussed points of the letter, its intent, and proposed clarifying edits. Chair Davis wanted to ensure that the subcommittee members got credit for drafting this letter, at least in the cover letter. The subcommittee would incorporate the feedback they heard and bring it back to the MAFAC later in the meeting.

MAFAC Administrative Session: MAFAC Team Commitments

Megan Davis introduced the topic and led the open discussion. With the number of new members coming on MAFAC, it was a good opportunity to establish team commitments for how the advisory committee functions as a group so that everyone is on the same page. They reviewed team commitments that are in use by other similar groups as a starting point. Some of these included: practicing active listening, embracing difficult conversations, and owning our intentions and impacts. Some members struggled with understanding the intention of some of these and made suggestions to rephrase them. Members sought ways to make the commitments more proactive instead of reactive and expressed concern that taken to an extreme, some of these could lead to members silencing themselves and depriving the agency of the full array of perspectives it wants. Members said that having constructive or healthy conflict as opposed to avoiding conflict is important. Members commented that there are other formulations of these ideas they could consider and MAFAC did not need to perfect the versions presented. Members said that anyone who feels harmed or disrespected in any way should feel that it is acceptable to bring that up to the group. MAFAC will continue this discussion either later in this meeting or at future meetings.

Overview of the Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce (IATC)

Alexa Cole, Director, Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce, discussed the activities of the office and the recent announcement on plans for their Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP). IATC reorganized a couple years ago in order to better reflect the greater attention and focus they wanted to be able to provide on trade and commerce issues and not just the international fisheries side. Ms. Cole provided an overview of the responsibilities of each of the Office's four divisions: International Affairs, Seafood Inspection Program, Operations and Administration, and Trade and Commerce. They were pleased to spearhead and draft the chapter on seafood in the new export strategy that came

out of the Department of Commerce. This is the first time there has been a seafood chapter and it is a good step towards making sure these issues are getting the kind of attention they need. IATC recently announced that they made the decision to withdraw its proposed rule issued in late December and, instead, focus time and energy on a more comprehensive review of the SIMP. There is broad agreement that SIMP is not living up to the expectations of the program, so they will be looking at what improvements to make to strengthen it and, perhaps, even think about it differently. The program was created with some initial constraints and ideas that are worth revisiting after five years. Additional authorities or tweaks to authorities may be needed, as well as consideration of what other agencies can join NOAA in this effort. Ms. Cole posed several questions that she asked MAFAC members to consider and provide any feedback they may have. These included: (1) What are the most important elements of an effective traceability program? (2) What are the risk factors that should be considered in determining the scope of any traceability program? and (3) How can NMFS identify success for this kind of program? NMFS seeks broad stakeholder engagement over the next six to nine months before developing proposals for what happens next. They will be having their first public webinar on this later in the week.

Janet Coit encouraged MAFAC to think about what role they could play in this effort, whether convening stakeholders, outreach, evaluating other systems used around the world, or other ways. Additionally, she asked them to consider the topic in the context of the National Seafood Strategy pillars on preventing IUU fishing and on trade issues. This may be an area to explore how dealing with these issues could be more consistent with what the industry is confronting in other countries.

Sara McDonald said NMFS needs to utilize their private and public sector partners. There are many new tools available, such as IUU risk tools. Engaging the public will also be critical. She wondered about standing up a FACA for this issue, since it is not something that can be resolved in one set of comments and revisions. It will have to be an ongoing conversation for a long period of time. She also asked if NMFS has looked into the EU's card system. Ms. Cole said that MAFAC is her go-to FACA and one of its benefits is that they can come to MAFAC for the kind of advice and recommendations that they cannot get in the same form from other stakeholders. They plan to explore the EU's system but she has heard that they experienced a slightly different version of exactly the same challenges that NMFS has. They want to work with other big markets that have similar systems and ensure they are able to share information and are asking the same questions in the same way. Dr. McDonald added that a key issue in this is transparency.

Stefanie Moreland encouraged IATC to characterize SIMP more broadly than as a traceability program. It includes aspects of due diligence, transparency, evidence of good governance, and much more. A focus solely on traceability causes concern that the focus is on documentation down to the unit, when the unit might not be a factor with respect to evaluating risk.

Linda O'Dierno asked if there are any plans on reprising the seafood export taskforce and possibly expanding that to be international trade so it would be both import and export-oriented. Ms. Cole said they have not considered reviving that task force. They are convening an interagency team to begin working on this and can have some internal conversations about whether it makes sense to have some sort of standing organization.

Brett Veerhusen said that SIMP is very confusing to people. A large amount of the engagement has been with businesses and organizations who are importers, exporters, distributors, processors, etc., and he would like to see more educational information to harvesters themselves. NMFS may find some creative solutions and information they had not considered.

Jocelyn Runnebaum asked how SIMP impacts the everyday lives of folks that are fishing in international markets that are actually very localized, such as the Grey Zone around the Hague Line. Ms. Cole said that the goal would be that SIMP would have a positive impact on domestic fishers by stating that other countries who are fishing for the same transboundary fisheries and stocks are going to be held to the same level.

Stefanie Moreland said it was her understanding that species fraud was out of scope of the SIMP program, just since it was more document-based. She asked what the thinking was in terms of fraud and whether that is going to be within scope as this is re-envisioned. Ms. Cole said seafood fraud is currently in-scope for SIMP, so it will be part of the conversation going forward. She added that everything is on the table in terms of what makes sense to be a part of SIMP and what is the true problem that NMFS is seeking to address.

Clay Tam expressed concern that in addition to IUU fishing, it is not a level playing field in the sense that some of those nations that might be technically compliant are not in terms of their data. Managing the fishery without the global input of those fisheries tends to be a tricky matter. Ms. Cole said that this is not an issue that SIMP will be able to solve, but it is certainly a component, because it is about trying to collect more information and more data about the products being importing into the U.S. market.

Brett Veerhusen asked how NMFS envisions the implementation of the program aligning with the food traceability final rule from the FDA. Ms. Cole did not know the answer to that yet, beyond that FDA will be part of the interagency team and they will attempt to align their efforts. This is part of the discussions they have been having.

Heidi Lovett asked the MAFAC to consider if they were interested in taking up Ms. Cole's questions and, if so, should the Commerce Subcommittee be charged with responding. They will report back on this later in the meeting. Dr. Runnebaum wanted to find out how members that are rotating off of MAFAC in March can provide their input before departing. Chair Davis said they would follow up on this.

ESA at 50: Past, Present, and Future

Dori Dick, Biologist/Climate Specialist, Office of Protected Resources, provided an overview of the ESA, its successes, challenges, and priorities. ESA is a powerful and effective legal framework to conserve and recover threatened and endangered species and their ecosystems, both domestically and abroad. NOAA Fisheries shares the responsibility of the act with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. NMFS protects more than 160 species under the act, as well as millions of acres of habitat designated as critical habitat for listed species. Fewer than one percent of species have been lost or gone extinct after they have received protection under the ESA. Dr. Dick provided background on how the act came into being in 1973.

Its key purpose is to provide a means whereby ecosystems upon which endangered species and threatened species depend may be conserved. The law created a policy in which all federal departments and agencies shall conserve endangered and threatened species and shall utilize their authorities in furtherance of the purpose of the act. NOAA's goals for implementing the ESA are threefold: (1) Working to conserve threatened and endangered species and their ecosystems; (2) Aiming to reduce threats so species can recover to the point at which they no longer need the protections under the ESA; and (3) Evaluating and authorizing necessary activities that may affect listed species.

Once a species is listed, NOAA Fisheries is required to determine whether there are areas that meet the definition of critical habitat and then designate that critical habitat based on best available scientific data. Once a species has been added to the ESA list, NOAA then needs to consider what needs to be done to recover it and their ecosystems to the point where they no longer require protection. Some milestones of the ESA include the delisting of eastern North Pacific stock of gray whales in 1984, the delisting of the eastern distinct population segment of Steller sea lions in 2013, and changing the global status of humpback whales in 2016. The ESA has done a great deal of good over the last 50 years, but there are still challenges, including time, funding, legal challenges, habitat disturbance, maintaining public support and cultivating champions, and climate change.

NOAA's Species in the Spotlight was an initiative launched in 2015 to bring greater attention and resources to save nine highly at-risk species. There are many at-risk species that have not been included in this, so they are using the 50th anniversary of ESA to highlight them, raise awareness about their status, threats, and efforts to recover them. There are a number of events happening across the country to celebrate the 50th. A new initiative they are launching called Advanced Sampling and Technology for Extinction Risk, Reduction, and Recovery (ASTER3) is focused on reducing extinction risk and supporting recovery of protected species through technological innovation. Partnerships are critical to the work of the ESA, domestic and international, and they are always looking for new ones.

Climate change is an existential threat and the ESA is an important tool to help ensure the protection of species and increase their resilience into the future. To tackle the challenges of climate change, there are a number of things that need to happen, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, manage based on sound science, consider the impacts of human response to climate change, and additional resources and partnerships are needed. There are a number of tools available that can be used to help better prepare, identify, and meet these challenges, including climate-smart conservation, climate vulnerability assessments, and scenario planning, among others. By combining all of the available tools we can achieve the goal of adaptable and resilient protected species.

Sara McDonald asked if the ASTER3 is being applied for just the nine species in the spotlight or all species. Dr. Dick said they are using it as broadly as they can across species. It is an effort to move the needle forward on innovative, transformational technology that can be used to better address the needs for recovery, whether a species is spotlighted or not.

Stefanie Moreland commented on what NOAA can do with respect to greenhouse gas emission and mitigation. The Department of Energy has had a lot of opportunity to direct Build Back Better funds. One area that could be high impact that is relevant to NOAA is in

the largest fishing port and largest fishing region in the Aleutian Islands where geothermal energy is an option. They have been repeatedly denied support from DOE, even though it would be an incredible opportunity to decarbonize a major part of seafood production while also supporting U.S. competitiveness. This kind of comprehensive strategy might also offer an opportunity for interagency input on opportunities like this. Dr. Dick said she will take this idea back to her office, since it is not something she works with directly. Ms. Coit said this has been discussed and is worth considering as part of the National Seafood Strategy or Climate Change Strategy and how NMFS can support it. Since climate change mitigation efforts at NOAA are in a different area of the agency, she agreed to take this idea on.

Clay Tam commented on the issue of the green sea turtle, a protected species that has overgrazed seaweed and impacted herbivores around Hawaii. Erosion has negatively impacted some of the islands the turtles nest on and the technology exists to replenish those areas but nothing is being done to help the species. As a result, the community suffers at the hands of policies. The ESA listing and CITES agreement has been problematic for reestablishing limited take. The population has largely recovered and it is an issue near and dear to many of the people in region. Mr. Rauch expressed his sympathy for the cultural importance of sea turtles and the difficulties involved. He believes there is a way under ESA to begin limited take, but it is still prohibited under the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles. We recently talked to the State Department about whether or not there is an opportunity to change that and there is not.

Sara McDonald asked if NOAA has identified how they plan to measure success when it comes to the climate smart management. Dr. Dick said they are still working on this and while they are developing climate-informed recovery plans, they need to ensure that the criteria and actions have a measurable metric that they can look at.

Pat Sullivan asked how well understood the specific threats to various species are and if the appropriate thresholds for achieving recovery are known or if they are just applying the things they hope will help. Dr. Dick described the evaluation process when a species is listed and a recovery plan is developed. The criteria and actions to address the threats can be very specific or not, depending on the species and information available. Mr. Rauch commented that NMFS is often asked why they do not delist more species and if that is an indication that ESA is not working. His response is that many of these species are on the list because of a century of adverse effects and many of them will take a century or more to get off the list. The fact that they are not extinct today is an indication that the act is working. Ms. Coit added that another thing that is difficult to measure is how the work they do under ESA benefit habitats that protect many other species. Dr. Sullivan suggested exploring ways to communicate the progress made and ancillary benefits of ESA work.

Megan Davis asked how many species are currently in a proposed rule that are being considered to be listed. Mr. Rauch said there are less than five under consideration at any given time for NMFS; Fish & Wildlife Service has many more.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Day 3 (11/16/2023)

NOAA National Sea Grant FY 23 Seafood Industry Workforce Development Projects

Chuck Weirich, Ph.D., Aquaculture Manager, NOAA Sea Grant, presented an overview of the activities of the National Sea Grant Office have funded towards workforce development projects involving fisheries and aquaculture over the preceding fiscal year. In FY 2023, ten projects were awarded through two competitions (the Young Fishermen's Career Development Project and the Aquaculture Workforce Development Support Project) aimed at bolstering workforce development efforts in both the wild-caught fisheries and aquaculture sectors. These projects had a total investment of \$3.3 million and will last for two years. Dr. Weirich discussed each of the ten projects in detail. Under the Young Fishermen's Career Development competition, the three projects selected out of the 14 proposals included (1) Alaska On-Board: Young Fishermen Training and Apprentice Program, (2) From the Dock to the Deck to the Wheelhouse: Developing Skilled Fishermen in New England through Three Early Career Stages, and (3) A Next-Gen Seafood Industry: Implementing Career-Development Programming in the Southeast Region through Public-Private Partnerships, totaling \$976,215 of investment.

Under the Aquaculture Workforce Development competition, the seven projects selected out of the 12 proposals received included: (1) Designing and launching a community college aquaculture workforce development program to help ready Southern California for a growing aquaculture industry, (2) Connecticut Aquaculture Workforce Development Strategy, (3) Enhancing and Promoting Aquaculture Workforce Development in Hawaii and the Pacific, (4) Extending and Integrating Aquaculture Workforce Development Between Communities in Massachusetts, (5) Expanding the New Jersey Apprenticeship in Shellfish Aquaculture Program, (6) Developing a Commercial Seafood Workforce Training Program in South Carolina, and (7) Tide's Out: Shellfish Crew and Manager Training, totaling \$2.4 million of investment.

The National Sea Grant Office has developed a predictable funding plan for Sea Grant focused on aquaculture stretching out through the next five fiscal years to offer recurring opportunities that are predictable to allow prospective applicants to know it is coming. There is still room in this scheme for workforce development efforts. Sea Grant will be announcing three NOFOs soon, including: (1) the National Aquaculture Initiative, which will focus on aquaculture production; (2) the Aquaculture Supplemental, which invests based on the aquaculture-related projects funded through the biennial Sea Grant Program Omnibus competition; and (3) Technology and Education Travel Grants, which is an annual competition intended to expose folks to different aquaculture programs and facilities domestic and international. The Aquaculture Internships Program is in development and should start in FY 24. They hope to establish this as an annual effort to sustain these programs that will focus on workforce development. They also anticipate having miscellaneous funds remaining to address opportunities as needed. In odd years, they will have the National Aquaculture Initiative focused on business support, including workforce development. The Advanced Aquaculture Collaborative Programs started in 2019 established 11 aquaculture hubs, some of which focus on workforce development, the hubs have been extended two years and will expire at the end of FY 24 but there will be opportunities to carry these topics forward through competitions every other year. They

hope to establish 3-5 aquaculture collaboratives. Every other year they will also have a competition to address legal issues involving aquaculture. As the National Sea Grant Office moves forward on its workforce development efforts, they will continue to incorporate the work of MAFAC in this area.

Joe Schumacker asked if they have gotten any reports from the awarded projects yet. He also noted that the North Carolina project under the Young Fishermen's competition specifically calls out financial literacy, marketing, and business and he asked if this is a piece of the other Young Fishermen's Projects as well. Dr. Weirich said that he believed that is a component on the other two, but was not sure if it was as in-depth as on the North Carolina project.

Brett Veerhusen asked about tracking progress with the various programs and whether they will be tracking the metrics of the grants and success rates for the different programs' objectives. Dr. Weirich said they have in place reporting guidelines for Sea Grant projects and they can bolster those further by working with the programs involved in these to ensure they are getting key metrics into their system. They have a feedback mechanism in which they review the reports coming in to ensure they are sufficiently detailed. They would be happy to summarize the metrics and report back to the MAFAC in a year. Mr. Veerhusen appreciated this and said that he would also like to hear about why some programs were successful and why others were not, which the MAFAC could then think about and offer advice. Dr. Weirich appreciated the offer and said that they are still working out the specifics on how the Aquaculture Internships Programs will be administered.

Sarah Schumann asked what strategies are in place to keep these programs self-sustaining into the future, including if there is a cost-share with any of the awardees or people receiving the education. She also asked what mechanisms there are to ensure those people receiving the education are able to sustain their careers in these fields, such as a strategy to pair this training with access to permits. Dr. Weirich said that plans are in place for the 10 awardees to be trained in the workforce to have it sustained. As far as sustaining the projects themselves, this is something they will have to look at. He hopes there will be workforce development opportunities through other projects, such as the internship program or NAI. They do require a 50% match on all Sea Grants awards, much of which is matched from industry through either actual or in-kind funds. Ms. Schumann said that access to permits and quota can be difficult in commercial fishing and without programs to support that from the permitting and financial side, there is a danger that this training could lead to careers that can only go so far. She asked if they have given any thought to ensuring that pathways are open to the graduates of these programs to go all the way in their fishing careers to become owner-operators. Dr. Weirich said they have been in discussion with some of the other Sea Grant programs about this issue. The biennial Legal Issues competition would be a good vehicle to bolster this topic.

Tribal Engagement Update

Zach Penney, Ph.D., NOAA Senior Advisor with a focus on fisheries and tribal engagement, discussed some of his activities over the last fiscal year. In honor of Native American Heritage Month, he recently gave a presentation with several NOAA employees with themes of sovereignty and identity. Dr. Penney has developed a lot of respect and sympathy for NMFS

over the last year in areas where he may not have had it before getting a behind the scenes perspective. Many tribes may only be familiar with a certain part of NOAA and it may not be the best parts. As an appointee, there are areas in the time he has available in which he feels he can move the needle. NOAA relies heavily on scientific integrity and that is very important to the whole, but when it comes to tribes and listening, there is a fine line in regards to tokenism. Some of the successes he saw in FY 23 included: the tribal set-asides for aging infrastructure in certain parts of Indian country through the BIL and IRA funding have been unprecedented, the draft Tribal Strategy he helped create to give the agency something to build on, and getting the Department of Commerce to sign on to a Joint Secretarial Order on co-stewardship of land and water.

NOAA has taken the lead on how they can help better facilitate and create co-stewardship opportunities with tribes and Indigenous nations. They recently held a series of consultations to hear from tribes and are currently working to ensure that as they develop these co-stewardship initiatives, everyone is working from common definitions and it is clear what the authorities are. NOAA has updated its consultation policy and developed indigenous knowledge guidance on how to acquire it and to provide some fundamental awareness about indigenous knowledge before using it, though there is still a lot of work to be done on how to appropriately apply it to federal decision making. Recently, NOAA was part of a large intergovernmental work group on Columbia River issues and a decision was made to invest \$300 million in putting fish into the Upper Columbia River. In adapting NOAA approaches, one of the good things that came out of the IRA consultations was that tribes were upfront with NOAA about what was working for them and what was not. There is a wide variety among tribes and it can be challenging to treat each as unique, with their own concerns and needs. Tribes have asked NOAA to look at the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Section 638 contracting processes that puts more money directly into the tribes' hands and could present a better way of working with tribes.

Challenges that remain include Yukon and Kuskokwim salmon and other fishery management and appropriately incorporating Indigenous knowledge into decision making on things like conservation and development. There is still a lot that has to be reconciled around fishery management with tribes and tribal engagement. Co-stewardship is a way to provide tribes more control over their own backyard, but this does not necessarily mean that all of the resources are given to one user over others. Co-management is more about self-determination and holding governments accountable for agreements made. It can also be about development of resources, when conservation discussions are happening it is important for tribes to have representation.

The Biden-Harris administration has made the Columbia River Basin a priority and has been using the phrase "healthy and abundant" returns of salmon, which has its origins in a MAFAC product. Dr. Penney described the development of the Columbia River Basin Partnership and his involvement with it. It took a lot of work to decide what the quantitative goals were going to be for the fish and it was not clear how those goals were really going to change anything in the basin. But it did provide a rallying point that through time, as they got that buy-in among stakeholders and different sovereigns, it started to grow on its own. Barry Thom added some of his thoughts on the process and why it was successful, including the gravitas that MAFAC's endorsement lent to its final product. While it took a long time, it has proven to be a useful product that people will continue to use.

Pat Sullivan said that scientists are often blind to any other ways of knowing beyond the scientific method. This is a crucial role for Dr. Penney to help convey that, rather than battling each other, scientists and tribes should be working in unison. Dr. Penney said that tribes have always been climate-ready but there have been some interesting questions raised around climate-ready fisheries and being place-based, since fisheries can shift.

Joe Schumacker commended NOAA for finally recognizing the need for the Senior Advisor position and getting Dr. Penney in to get things going. The treaty tribes on the West Coast see a looming threat in floating offshore wind, which many have equated to the Columbia River dams. The Makah Tribe has sent letters to BOEM asking them to halt the leasing process on the West Coast and to NOAA Fisheries to help them assess potential impacts to treaty fisheries on the West Coast from offshore wind installations. Other tribes will be following the Makah with their own letters in the near future. The tribes do not believe there is adequate mitigation for lost treaty resources. They are calling on NOAA to support them with the science that is necessary to determine if and what treaty impacts may be. The tribes are for green energy, they want something to help with climate change, they are against this process. Dr. Penney said he has been watching this issue and some of his opinions have been that the rush for offshore wind but they don't want it to be dams 2.0. Energy policy has often rolled over tribes for at least the last 200 years. A lot of the fishing industry also does not want to see dams 2.0, so it is important to know the impacts before they do that.

Brett Veerhusen said that he has heard that in the course of decision making processes that the decision makers do not respond to emotion, they respond to science. This is when science can feel weaponizing, and including lawyers can be intimidating. He asked about Dr. Penney's role and tribes' roles in the implementation of the EEJ Strategy to ensure their voices are heard. Dr. Penney said the EEJ Strategy has been good for tribes and it is an important relationship, especially for any group that has been disenfranchised. One of the dangers for Indian country with EEJ is that it can dilute what sovereignty and treaty rights are by putting it on the same level as equity, even if it is well-intentioned. It's an area where NOAA has to be very careful not to overgeneralize. The EEJ strategy is important, but there are areas where NOAA needs to step carefully.

Jocelyn Runnebaum asked what role MAFAC can play in providing any policy guidance of how best to think about incorporating indigenous knowledge moving forward. Dr. Penney said to bring them to the table. Indigenous knowledge is not something that can be extracted and put into NOAA's models. Indigenous knowledge and co-stewardship go hand-in-hand, co-production of knowledge is the best way to work indigenous knowledge into decision making. Getting the right people to the table is key.

Clay Tam said Dr. Penney's comments about indigenous knowledge has many parallels with traditional Hawaiian knowledge. Their ancestors were resilient and paying attention to that is really important. A lot of it has been forgotten due to the way history has been taught. If MAFAC can help incorporate that into the future vision of NMFS, that would be a good step forward. Dr. Penney said that NOAA is doing good things with respect to tribal engagement, but they are not set up the same way as the Department of the Interior, which houses BIA. MAFAC could help by encouraging more tribal representation throughout the agency.

Barry Thom recognized that there is only one person doing what Dr. Penney is doing and he

has a limited time engagement. He asked if there were efforts underway in terms of education, training, how to spread his approach to other employees throughout the agency. Dr. Penney said there are some efforts happening. There were already policies in place, but they tended to be used as an instruction booklet that is taken out only when there is a problem. Consultation is not the only way to engage with tribes; sometimes they just want to have a conversation and want to build trust. One thing that frustrates tribes is that every time there is a new crop of appointees they need to be re-taught all the context. Dr. Penny is trying to put in place means to develop employees' understanding within every line office and to have a community of practice rather than reaching for the consultation policy every time there is a problem. NMFS seems to be ahead of the curve on consultation policy, but every line office needs to understand what its impact is and what equities are involved in their work.

Meredith Moore said that the MAFAC subcommittee that worked on the EEJ comment letter has not convened since they issued that letter and there is a lot in this conversation for them to think about. That subcommittee should find time to make sure everyone that wants to participate in that discussion can join the group and then look for ways to re-establish that subcommittee's regular meetings.

Approval of Draft Recommendations

Megan Davis led the discussion on the Proposed Climate-Ready Fisheries Policy and the draft letter to the Secretary of Commerce.

Meredith Moore presented the draft letter and reviewed the minor changes made over the course of the meeting, which included incorporating recreational fishing throughout and adding language about managing resilience. One suggestion concerning "who decides what is equitable?" was deemed to be outside the scope of the letter, but an issue MAFAC should take up. The need to better understand baseline ecosystem states and monitoring for changes was added, even though it was not the primary focus of the letter but was a good comment.

Joe Schumacker made a motion to accept the letter expressing the need for a Climate-Ready Fisheries Policy with the changes noted and any additional final edits needed. Sarah Schumann seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Brett Veerhusen presented the letter to the Secretary of Commerce and reviewed the changes made, which included emphasizing urgency and impact of inadequate funding and implementation of efficient survey systems and data collection, as well as wordsmithing and other minor edits. The subcommittee had received comments concerning who the letter is being addressed to and they clarified that how they framed it and which offices are named was intentional. Chair Davis noted that the letter includes cc's to other parts of NOAA Fisheries. Mr. Veerhusen said the letter is meant to be helpful for stakeholders once it becomes public to be informative, useful, educational, and as a way for MAFAC to work with agency staff for continuous updates on the information contained within.

Cisco Werner thanked MAFAC for the letter and said it captures a lot of the challenges NMFS is facing, as well as the aspirations in front of them. NMFS needs to come up with a detailed

10-year plan, anticipated costs, thresholds, and objectives. He asked if there was an implied prioritization in the numbered items of what should be part of the ten-year planning and noted that some of it may fall into other line offices' purviews. Ms. Moreland said that the numbered items were not meant to be prioritized, they are parallel and interconnected; Ms. Moore suggested changing the numbering to bullets and this friendly amendment was accepted. Chair Davis suggested highlighting the need for a 10-year plan in the memo that will accompany the letter. Dr. Sullivan said the plan serves several purposes, including aiding planning for those outside of the agency. Vice Chair Ralston said that NMFS should prepare a document that lays out the things they want to do, the timeline over which they need to do it, the funding they have had, and the funding they need. This number is the most powerful thing they can use going into a congressional office. Dr. Runnebaum said it is important for Fisheries and OMAO to be able to communicate the need for these research vessels and their continued maintenance. They need to coordinate better to make this work.

Sara McDonald made a motion to approve the letter to the Secretary of Commerce recommending strategy for the budgeting process for NMFS data collection, with the friendly amendment concerning changing numbered items to bullets. Jocelyn Runnebaum seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Other Business

Pat Sullivan reported on the Recreational Fishing Subcommittee's work time earlier in the day. The subcommittee has not met earlier in the year but a number of things have come up that are worth considering, including the FES relative to the MRIP report and considering information gathering through alternative data streams. Kellie Ralston spoke to the group's discussion about socioeconomics. There is a broader conversation within the agency about socioeconomics, but specifically looking at recreational fisheries was a high priority in 2018 and was highlighted as a real need within the agency. Earlier this year, NOAA convened a Recreational Socioeconomic panel of experts to get additional input and a final report was issued. The subcommittee feels that additional steps could be taken by NOAA and requested the approval of MAFAC to move forward in that regard. Two other items that came up for conversation included requesting regular status updates on implementing the state-federal partnership on recreational fishing data collection and the potential for overlap with the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council and areas where MAFAC could work with them. The subcommittee would appreciate an information exchange once that group is up and running. Chair Davis asked the subcommittee to formalize the charge they were seeking approval for. Kellie Ralston said that the charges they were seeking were the direct request for an agency response to the Economic Workshop Report and looking to the agency to develop a formal strategy to guide, improve, and streamline the collection and investment in recreational and noncommercial socioeconomic data and seeking MAFAC approval for the subcommittee to explore what facets they would like to highlight in that strategic plan. MAFAC members were in agreement with this direction forward.

Linda O'Dierno reported on the work time of the Commerce Subcommittee. The group is reviewing all four goals of the National Seafood Strategy and implementation mechanisms for those goals. They focused on the issue of fair and reciprocal trade, which is a major issue because of disparities in tariff rates. Better ways to communicate that to the officials setting trade policy are needed. They looked at the possibility of asking Fisheries to have an office

focused on trade because seafood is such a confusing commodity. They discussed the possibility of asking the NMFS Office of Policy to present on what they view as their role in facilitating trade. The group thought NMFS should provide input to the U.S. Trade Representative and International Trade Administration about fisheries-specific issues. They considered the model USDA follows, who has a chief negotiator at USTR that deals with all agricultural products and advisory committees for different commodities that inform that negotiator. They are still looking at these issues, along with the idea of an electronic export certificate, which NOAA is working on.

The group also looked at the idea of a proposed council, the Seafood Nutrition Partnership is looking at a broader outreach program, but they are primarily focused on nutrition. A model similar to the Regional Fishery Development Foundations could be useful - a regional council that can respond to regional problems. Ms. Moreland added that there is more opportunity in the area of NOAA's communications work to inform consumers that U.S. seafood is a good choice. Mr. Veerhusen said they also discussed the work that NOAA did on the National Seafood Council and others making sure the subcommittee's work is not duplicative, but enhances that work. The group's next steps on trade issues will be requesting a meeting with Alexa Cole to gain a better understanding of the inner workings and subsequent meetings with other federal agencies to see how they can support cooperation. Another step will be how to bring more people into the tent around trade and consumption. Matt Upton urged members to keep a continued focus on this given how dynamic the situation is in these markets. Dr. Runnebaum asked what role MAFAC can play in these conversations and if this is responsive of Ms. Cole's request to think about SIMP. Ms. O'Dierno said there are two issues here: one is responding to the National Seafood Strategy and providing recommendations into mechanisms for implementation and the other is responding to the questions from Ms. Cole. Ms. Moreland commented on MAFAC's role: one of the ways they are suffering is lack of clear roles and responsibilities, specific trade expertise is not necessary to figure out who has the ball on understanding U.S. interests in seafood and how government works to incorporate that knowledge unto trade policy.

Meredith Moore reported on the Climate and Ecosystems Subcommittee work time. Following their work on the letter on the proposed policy, their next steps will be to scope out and provide recommendations for the science-to-management gap issue. Other topics they would like to take up include NOAA's EBFM policy and roadmap updates, OCAP, and CEFI. There is a lot of progress happening at NMFS in regards to Climate-Ready Fisheries and the subcommittee extended an open invitation for the agency to reach out to them on any topics of things they are doing to ensure their recommendations are as targeted and helpful as they can be. Another topic the subcommittee should take on in the future is what will happen when the agency hits the IRA funds gap in 2026; MAFAC should have an active role in communicating some of those issues and it might be a joint project with the Budget Subcommittee.

Megan Davis said other things MAFAC should be thinking about in the coming months included: the recommendation to request that Sea Grant report out to the committee; that commissioners have more time for discussion in future meetings; continued discussion of the team commitments, which may be done virtually; and continued work on the EEJ given the comments made by Dr. Penney, as well as his encouragement for including more

indigenous/tribal participation on the committee. Ms. Zanowicz added that MAFAC wanted to receive regular updates from Dr. Penney on his work and Chair Davis asked her to share a quote he read during his presentation with the members.

Close Out

Janet Coit recognized the work of the departing members of MAFAC and gave them each an opportunity to give parting comments. She also asked them to spread the word and help recruit future members for the committee. She announced new MAFAC leadership roles, including: Pat Sullivan will chair the Recreational Fisheries Subcommittee; Brett Veerhusen will chair the Strategic Planning and Budgets Subcommittee; Kellie Ralston will continue as MAFAC Vice Chair; and Jocelyn Runnebaum will serve as chair of MAFAC.

The next MAFAC meeting is tentatively scheduled the week of May 13-17, 2024. She asked members to let her or Ms. Zanowicz know about potential conflicts. The location is yet to be determined, but they are focusing on Alaska or the Gulf of Mexico region.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.