

MEETING REPORT COUNCIL COORDINATION COMMITTEE

May 13-15, 2025
New Bedford, MA

The Council Coordination Committee (CCC) met May 13-15, 2025, in New Bedford, Massachusetts. The meeting was chaired and hosted by the New England Fishery Management Council at the New Bedford Whaling Museum. The following is a summary of presentations, discussions, and outcomes from the meeting. Briefing materials and presentations are available at <https://www.fisherycouncils.org/ccc-meetings/may-2025>.

MAY 13, 2025

I. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Rick Bellavance, Chair of the NEFMC, welcomed all Council members, staff, and public to New Bedford. Mr. Bellavance noted the group was meeting in one of the nation's oldest fishing ports, settled in 1760. Mr. Bellavance explained that the Port of New Bedford is among the largest and most lucrative commercial fishing ports in the United States. It has been the top fishing port in the country by value since 2001. The port's social and economic impact is significant, generating billions in economic activity and supporting nearly 7,000 jobs. The New England region's commercial and recreational fishing industries, represented by this port, support over 260,000 jobs and contribute over \$11 billion to the nation.

Mr. Bellavance recognized the many other important fishing ports in New England including Boston, Gloucester and Cape Cod in Massachusetts; Portland, Rockland, and Port Clyde in Maine; Stonington in Connecticut; Portsmouth, Hampton and Rye, in New Hampshire; and Newport and Point Judith in Rhode Island.

Mr. Bellavance thanked the NEFMC staff for their work organizing and hosting the meeting. In his remarks, Mr. Bellavance reflected on the vital role the councils play in natural resource management, noting that the Council process ensures public engagement and transparency, allowing fishermen and stakeholders to contribute through meetings, Advisory Panels, and Working Groups.

II. Council Round-Robin Updates

The Executive Directors of each of the Councils gave a brief presentation focusing on highlights, successes, and challenges in their regions. Across the eight presentations, some common themes arose including:

- **Funding and Staffing Shortfalls:** Many voiced concerns about the reduction in NOAA staffing and budgets, and the consequences this has already had on core science functions like stock assessments, surveys, and permitting.

- **Need for Process Efficiency and Regulatory Reform:** Councils are prioritizing streamlining management actions, regulatory clarity, and reducing burdens, while navigating new statutory demands and national policy shifts.
- **Data Gaps and Scientific Uncertainty:** Many reported challenges with insufficient or outdated stock assessments, data limitations, or scientific uncertainty, especially for recreational stocks and ecosystem-based management.
- **Environmental Change:** All Councils are experiencing changing ocean conditions or changes in species distribution, complicating management and catch setting.
- **Constituent Engagement and Trust:** Many Councils reported declining trust from stakeholders, especially due to data conflicts, delayed decisions, or perceived disconnects from lived fishing experiences.

New England (NEFMC)

Dr. Cate O’Keefe, NEFMC Executive Director, discussed the important role fisheries play in the region and highlighted that most of the 40 managed stocks are no longer overfished. She noted that the Council is engaged in a holistic strategic planning process and that the Council recently adopted a new risk policy. The New England Council has recently started work on a management flexibility action that will consider extended specification cycles, rollover provisions, and in-season adjustments.

Mid-Atlantic (MAFMC)

Dr. Chirs Moore, MAFMC Executive Director, recounted progress made in rebuilding stocks, supported by a 5-year strategic plan emphasizing communication, governance, ecosystems, management, and science. However, environmental change and reduced funding are hampering data collection and effective management.

South Atlantic (SAFMC)

Mr. John Carmichael, SAFMC Executive Director, noted that 75% of their managed stocks support recreational fisheries. SAFMC has achieved success in habitat protection and outreach but faces acute issues with inadequate survey data, permit access, and trust among constituents. Environmental variability and loss of scientific staff are compounding the difficulties in providing accurate assessments and timely management.

Gulf (GFMFC)

Dr. Carrie Simmons, GFMFC Executive Director, highlighted an array of species with notable economic impact and success in IFQ management but noted outdated stock assessments and significant staff reductions. The Council is striving to increase assessment efficiency and data throughput under increasing statutory pressure.

Caribbean (CFMC)

Dr. Graciela García-Moliner, CFMC staff, reported the Caribbean Council is transitioning to island-based management and improving stakeholder engagement, though it struggles with limited data, as well as uncertain funding. Progress in international collaboration and ecosystem-based planning is undermined by operational and resource constraints.

Western Pacific (WPFMC)

Ms. Kitty Simonds, WPFMC Executive Director, spoke about how the Council manages major pelagic fisheries and is seeking to reduce regulatory burdens while adapting to political and scientific obstacles, including lack of regional and international support, ESA/MMPA constraints, and funding to transition observers and electronic monitoring. The Chair and vice-Chairs further explained challenges with unfair trade practices with seafood imports and vast fishing area closures.

Pacific (PFMC)

Mr. Merrick Burden, PFMC Executive Director, gave perspective on the large and complex ecosystem encompassed in this region, which includes 199 species. Mr. Burden emphasized ecosystem variability and the need for regulatory streamlining. Despite innovative programs like trawl rationalization, the economic and infrastructural challenges, along with limited data hinder full fishery realization.

North Pacific (NPFMC)

Mr. Dave Witherell, NPFMC Executive Director, spoke to the highly structured limited-entry fisheries and community-focused programs like CDQ, sighting major concerns including marine heatwaves and salmon declines. The Council is investing in public engagement and digital transparency while contending with funding shortages and ecosystem instability.

III. NOAA Fisheries Update and FY 25/26 Priorities

Mr. Eugenio Pineiro Soler, NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator, introduced himself to the CCC and described his background in fisheries and fisheries management. He spoke to the challenges of U.S. fishery management and the importance of responding to recent Executive Orders. He also spoke to the importance of the Councils and the Council process in ensuring the success of U.S. fisheries and indicated his personal commitment to support the Councils and the success of them.

Mr. Sam Rauch, NOAA Fisheries Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, indicated that NOAA's priorities are focused on addressing recent Executive Orders (EO).

IV. Executive Orders Update

Executive Order 14192: Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation

Mr. Rauch explained that this Executive Order (EO) requires each federal agency to repeal at least ten existing regulations or guidance documents for every new regulatory action. This order mirrors one issued during the first Trump administration, and the agency expects to follow a similar process. The EO also requires that agency actions have a neutral or negative regulatory budget, meaning the overall cost burden of regulations must decrease annually.

The majority of council actions are considered deregulatory or are classified as "routine fishery management measures", such as annual specifications, which are exempt from the 10-for-1 requirements. However, discretionary regulatory actions are subject to evaluation to determine whether they are regulatory or deregulatory. The Department of Commerce will compile a list of

such actions each fall to assess overall compliance with the deregulatory targets. While statutory or court-mandated regulatory actions, such as ending overfishing or responding to ESA listings, should still be pursued, they may still need to be offset by deregulatory actions elsewhere.

Mr. Rauch emphasized that agencies have been instructed to strictly adhere to statutory mandates and avoid creating new regulatory burdens. Given limited agency resources, any discretionary regulatory proposals will require prioritization and careful evaluation.

Executive Order 14276: Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness

Mr. Rauch outlined the administration's seafood-focused executive order, now a top agency priority, which provides a comprehensive framework addressing science, trade, and regulatory reforms aimed at revitalizing the U.S. seafood industry. The EO directs agencies to take broad deregulatory actions and enhance support for seafood production, with an emphasis on collaboration with the regional fishery management councils.

A key component of the EO is the mandate to suspend, revise, or rescind regulations that unduly burden the commercial fishing, aquaculture, and seafood processing sectors. Agencies are tasked with identifying the most overregulated fisheries, particularly those experiencing significant declines in landings or revenue. For context, U.S. seafood landings have dropped from a 30-year average of 9.5 billion pounds to approximately 8.5 billion pounds annually since 2020.

The councils have been asked to update the deregulatory recommendations they previously submitted under a similar process during the last Trump administration. These updates should include specific actions that stabilize markets, improve access, enhance profitability, and prevent fishery closures. In addition, the councils are expected to provide a work plan and implementation schedule for these actions. The Councils' recommendations are due by September 1st. Several CCC members commented that this deadline poses challenges for some councils due to council meeting timing. Mr. Rauch indicated that, while the presidential deadline of 180 days remains fixed, some flexibility may be possible to accommodate council schedules.

Several other aspects of EO 14276 were highlighted during the presentation:

- **Public Input:** The EO emphasizes broader public engagement, calling for input from stakeholders such as industry members, marine scientists, and technology experts. This will inform regulatory and science priorities to improve fisheries science and management and better support the seafood supply chain. A Federal Register notice initiating the public comment process is expected soon.
- **Scientific Innovation:** The EO directs NMFS to modernize fisheries science by adopting more cost-effective and reliable technologies, integrating research programs into stock assessments, improving real-time ocean condition monitoring, and expanding exempted fishing permit programs to support new opportunities.
- **Marine Monuments:** The Secretary of Commerce and Secretary of Interior are directed to review all existing marine national monuments and make recommendations on any that should be reopened to commercial fishing.
- **Seafood Strategy:** The Secretary of Commerce, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, is directed to develop an America First Seafood Strategy to promote production, marketing, sale, and export of U.S. fishery and aquaculture products and

strengthen domestic processing capacity. This strategy will build on the existing seafood strategy developed by NOAA in 2023.

- **Trade Policy:** The EO directs the Secretary of Commerce to work with the U.S. Trade Representative and the Interagency Seafood Trade Task Force to develop a comprehensive seafood trade strategy that improves access to foreign markets and addresses unfair trade practices. Additionally, the EO refocuses efforts on improving, rather than expanding, the Seafood Import Monitoring Program. The goal is to enhance port-level enforcement and prevent IUU and fraudulent products from entering the U.S.

Mr. Rauch emphasized that the administration is moving quickly to address the requirements of the EO and will continue working aggressively to realize the untapped potential of the U.S. seafood sector.

Other Relevant Executive Orders

Mr. Rauch highlighted a number of other industry-specific and generic executive orders. The President has identified several critical industries including energy, timber, and minerals for expedited regulatory action. In cases of declared emergencies (such as the energy emergency), agencies are expected to prioritize activities that support these sectors. As a result, initiatives not aligned with these priorities may face delays or receive less focus due to resource constraints. The President has also directed agencies to pursue actions that help lower the cost of living for U.S. citizens. In the fisheries context, efforts to reduce the cost of harvesting fish are a direct way to contribute to this objective. Additionally, agencies are expected to avoid or minimize anti-competitive practices, such as regulatory barriers to entry, in line with broader economic fairness goals. The agency is also moving forward with the necessary regulatory revisions to reflect the renaming of the “Gulf of Mexico” as the “Gulf of America,” as required by Executive Order 14172. Those changes are expected to be finalized soon.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2025

VI. NOAA Fisheries Science Updates

Dr. Evan Howell, NOAA Acting Chief Scientist and Director of Scientific Programs, provided the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) science update. Dr. Cisco Werner retired on April 30, 2025. In the presentation Dr. Howell addressed the specific requests of the CCC on several topics.

Council Research Priorities: Council research priorities are used to inform NMFS scientific priorities. There is variability across regions in how this has been approached in the past. For the future, there is a desire to improve consideration and application of Council priorities. Councils were advised to provide needs that are highly prioritized and focused, with an emphasis on “must do” activities related to statutory requirements, and to update recommendations as needed to reflect changing needs and priorities.

Cooperative Research: The agency recognizes the value of cooperative research and collaborating with the fishing industry to obtain needed information and research. There is a

desire to leverage cooperative research to meet future needs. Dr. Howell welcomed ideas from the Councils to identify cooperative research opportunities.

Changing Ecosystems and Fisheries Initiative (CEFI): The program is expected to continue, focusing on integration with and support of other products such as Regional Ocean Outlooks and Integrated Ecosystem Assessment activities. Regional Decision Teams are revising work plans to respond to changing priorities and direction.

Fisheries Integrated Modeling System (FIMS): This is the next generation assessment platform. It is intended to provide the main framework for assessment modeling, increasing consistency across regions and flexibility in model selection. Reducing reliance on custom or bespoke models will enable more efficient resource allocation and reduce complexity. Development continues, with a CIE review planned for November 2025.

Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP): The FES study is complete and data analysis underway. A final report is expected in July 2025. Plans remain on track for implementing a revised survey design for 2026. Efforts should be underway in regions to plan for implementation of revised values. Meeting future deadlines is contingent on staffing and funding. The 2026 transition to publishing monthly estimates will not occur due to staffing and funding issues. Work continues on re-envisioning the state-federal partnership.

Surveys for 2025: Survey progress was reviewed from October 2024 to March 2025. Overall, most surveys were conducted, with the exception of small boat surveys. Four surveys were cancelled, which is not unusual and often occurs due to shifting needs and vessel availability. The CCC asked for clarification on the survey outlook for the next six months. At this time, the agency is developing an updated fleet plan, and each region should be able to provide information on how its surveys may be impacted.

The presentation concluded with a discussion on aligning science and management. Change will be required moving forward, as the agency cannot plan for sustained current science and management of the many managed stocks. Change and simplification will be required in response to a smaller federal government. Simpler and more dynamic management approaches will be required. Science and management engagement with the Councils on the regional level will be critical to success going forward. Increased uncertainty may occur but should not always result in decreased harvest.

The CCC requested clarification on the connection between reduced harvest and increased uncertainty based on past guidance that indicates increasing uncertainty is usually expected to result in decreased harvest. Dr. Howell indicated that while that is often the case, the intent is to better understand the impacts of reduced data and determine thresholds of data availability that impact uncertainty and harvest levels. There is a need to understand the consequences of losing or reducing individual data sources.

There was additional discussion on the nature of “simpler approaches” that should be considered. Does this imply fewer managed stocks? Does it imply simpler assessments and data collection approaches? Is FIMS effort consistent with future simpler approaches? Dr. Howell indicated that

future discussion between the Councils and agency, at the regional level, will be necessary to identify appropriate simplifications. It was also clarified that the common framework of FIMS would support a range of assessment approaches and could include simpler models than used now for some stocks. Some regions, such as the Southeast, have been working toward simpler methods and have found it challenging to implement them. The agency recognizes there are challenges but nonetheless hopes to show progress within the next six months.

VII. Budget

Ms. Emily Menashes, NOAA Fisheries Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations, provided an overarching management and budget update. There are limits on travel and spending, reduced staff, and overall increased review of expenditures and grants. The grant approval progress has slowed as a result. Changes in staffing will continue and the agency is in the early stages of determining all the gaps to be filled. Over the short term some things may not happen as previously planned. Maintaining well-managed domestic fisheries is a priority and things will have to change to achieve that with a streamlined and smaller federal government.

Mr. Brian Pawlak, NOAA Fisheries Chief Financial Officer and Director of Office of Management and Budget, provided the budget overview. Uncertainty remains with detailed funding levels for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 because the continuing resolution only addressed an overall “top line” funding level for NOAA. No explanatory direction or specific spending levels were provided and the FY2025 congressional marks are null due to the continuation of the FY2024 budget. Currently, the FY2025 budget is being vetted through the NOAA spend plan process and further details cannot be provided until that is resolved. There is no information available on FY2026 or FY2027 budgets at this time. An additional funding disbursement for the Councils is under preparation. This will be another partial disbursement and its availability to the Councils is unknown.

The CCC asked whether delays in the FY2027 budget process may provide an opportunity for input on the budget. That is a possibility, and Councils were advised to work through their region and Regional Administrator, as well as Assistant Administrator Pinero Soler to provide input.

VIII. NEPA Update

Ms. Cristi Reid, NOAA’s NEPA Coordinator, provided updates on the National Environmental Policy Act that have occurred since the last CCC meeting in October 2024. She focused on two recent court cases that had questioned the Council on Environmental Quality’s (CEQ) rulemaking authority. The first case concluded that the CEQ regulations are acting beyond their legal power, and the second case vacated the phase two final rule of the regulations.

Executive Order 14154, “Unleashing American Energy” was issued in January 2025. It ordered CEQ to propose rescinding the CEQ regulations and to provide NEPA guidance to agencies. Accordingly, on February 19th, CEQ issued an interim final rule that rescinded their NEPA regulations effective April 11th. They also issued guidance to agencies to help develop new procedures. Ultimately, by determining that CEQ has no rulemaking authority, CEQ has passed the requirement to create agency-specific NEPA procedures directly to Federal agencies.

CEQ NEPA guidance is currently being used to create new procedures for NOAA Fisheries. NMFS is currently not pausing on any NEPA actions and is following their own internal procedures. These are in the Companion Manual with additional directions from the statute. The recommendation is that ongoing NEPA analyses should not be delayed.

As far as creating new procedures, the guidance from CEQ directed agencies to update their own NEPA procedures by February 2026. The NEPA procedures for NOAA are being revised but no timeline was provided. CEQ encouraged agencies to follow the 2020 CEQ regulations and also to add updates to reflect the Fiscal Responsibility Act amendments to NEPA, which occurred in June 2023. Ms. Reid expressed that once there is additional information on what the NOAA-level procedures are going to look like, they will be able to continue the revision of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA)-specific NEPA procedures.

Ms. Reid stated that they still plan to place the procedures into a policy directive with an associated procedural directive, similar to the draft that was shared with the CCC in October 2024. Upcoming drafts will be shared with the Councils with a request for input in revising the MSA procedures including developing guidance for documents that integrate different and related mandates. One of the challenges of addressing the integration of various mandates in one document is the page limits that have now been placed on NEPA documents. There will be guidance to explain such integration and perhaps the guidance to become policy.

Ms. Reid requested that the CCC provide staff contact information for outreach when the revision process restarts. The CCC approved an action item to reinitiate the CCC NEPA Working Group.

Discussion by the CCC centered on the time-consuming NEPA analyses and the need to align priorities and timelines. CCC members asked about the possibility of in-depth revision of how NEPA is applied in fisheries management under MSA. Another question was raised regarding the functional equivalency of the MSA requirement for fishery impact statements and NEPA, a topic that can be included in the current changes being considered.

Mr. Rauch addressed this issue by reminding the CCC that the regulatory framework under which NMFS had been operating is no longer in existence, and thus there is some flexibility to approach NEPA differently. Although the statute is still in place, and there is the requirement to comply with the statute, there is possibility to review different ways to deal with both the original NEPA statute and the more recent statutory update. However, there is still a need to address the legal perspective of these changes.

X. Discussion on Priorities and Future Planning

Dr. O'Keefe introduced the discussion to develop an approach to align Council and NOAA priorities for science and management under changing resources. The discussion focused on the growing challenges in fisheries science and management due to constrained budgets, staffing shortages, and increasing demands. The conversation emphasized the need for better alignment between NOAA and Council priorities, more efficient use of limited resources, and a strategic reassessment of current management practices.

Ms. Kelly Denit, NOAA Fisheries Director of the Office of Sustainable Fisheries, presented context around the impacts that recent status quo budgets have had on current work, noting that the agency had already taken some steps to address these challenges prior to the recent resource reductions. She discussed the need to better align NOAA and Council priorities, challenges of managing over 500 stocks, and the need to prioritize fisheries management given limited resources. Ms. Denit's presentation touched on the National Standard Guidelines and suggested the need to evaluate narrowing the scope of management in light of current resourcing and administration priorities.

A risk-value matrix was presented to the CCC as a way to help evaluate which stocks require the most intensive management. Underpinning this exercise is the reality that NOAA Fisheries cannot continue managing all current stocks and stock complexes that are currently in FMPs with existing and anticipated resources. Ms. Denit spoke about the need to strategically choose where to take increased management risks. The proposed matrix would categorize stocks based on "value" (commercial/recreational/social importance) and "risk" (ratio of catch to the ACL, stock status, ecosystem role, climate vulnerability). She suggested stocks in the high-risk, high-value quadrant may be strong candidates to receive the most detailed management, while low-risk, low-value stocks might be moved to ecosystem components or removed from management plans entirely. Ms. Denit emphasized this approach requires Council input and collaboration and stressed the need to explore more flexibility in management given current constraints. During the presentation, she asked the group to consider what policies and processes need to be changed, what tools would be needed to respond to the current funding situation, and what challenges would arise with this kind of approach.

Mr. Burden opened the discussion by explaining that Councils often consider the need for conservation and management as a binary question and wondered if this can be considered on a continuum. He asked if there is an opportunity in the framework that Ms. Denit presented to consolidate stocks into a complex or reduce management intensity.

Mr. Carmichael spoke to the number of stocks managed in the South Atlantic and how few are assessed. He stated that if science has been lacking for the last 20 years, there are no indications that it will improve in the short term and expressed support for the prioritization process using the Value/Risk matrix. Low risk/low value stocks could be considered for ecosystem component status, however, there needs to be work with NOAA General Counsel on the interpretation and guidance around stocks in need of conservation and management. Mr. Carmichael felt there needs to be more flexibility from a legal standpoint. He noted that regions operate differently with respect to ecosystem components, and Ms. Denit thought that the National Standard Guidelines may enable some middle-of-the-road approaches.

The group discussed the current guidelines for stocks in the fishery and the scientific support that is currently needed to make this decision. Dr. O'Keefe stated that with declining resources, it would be difficult to pursue options like ecosystem component status if getting there requires more scientific investment. She asked for guidance around flexibility in this process.

Ms. Simonds explained that the Western Pacific has been operating using archipelago ecosystem plans instead of the single species approach and needs more data on protected species like false killer whales. Mr. Tweit asked if Councils and NMFS would work together when considering decisions about the support that NMFS can provide for managed stocks. There was a suggestion that Councils could use the FMP amendment process to make any necessary changes. Mr. Tweit was supportive of a more flexible, risk-based approach to avoid unnecessary regulatory burdens. Mr. Rolon raised governance questions about the roles of states in management when considering ecosystem component species. Mr. Carmichael noted the role that the Council's SSCs play in catch setting, and the development of ABC control rules. SSCs often act conservatively, which can limit the Councils' ability to accept higher risk.

On the topic of data and economic considerations, Dr. Simmons and other CCC members emphasized the need to prioritize data collection and economic analysis. With regard to research priorities, Dr. O'Keefe proposed using the Council's mandated research priority lists more effectively and asked that NMFS commit to using these lists to guide scientific investments. As a next step, members of the CCC agreed to review stocks and complexes using the Value/Risk matrix that Ms. Denit presented. Several Councils committed to sharing the results of regional examples from the prioritization exercise.

The Councils expressed concern to NOAA about the delay in receiving FY2025 Cooperative Agreement Award funding. Mr. Dugas, Chair of the GPMC, explained that Council meetings have been impacted by the lack of ability to plan in the absence of approved funding. The CCC approved a motion to send a letter to the Secretary of Commerce requesting receipt of approved FY2025 funding as soon as possible.

XI. Legislative Outlook

Mr. Dave Whaley, CCC Legislative Liaison, provided a briefing on the legislative process. Mr. Whaley noted that MSA is a unique federal natural resource statute and was developed to ensure that the public is part of process, including sitting on the Councils. He reminded the CCC that less than two percent of bills introduced in the 118th Congress became law. Bills that did become law included the FISHES Act and several laws which included fish habitat provisions for freshwater species that may have some impact on marine fisheries management.

Mr. Whaley noted the changes in the House and Senate following the election in November 2024 with narrow Republican majorities in Congress. The party in charge holds the leaderships positions, and the chair has substantial power to set the agenda and determine which bills get hearings. The House Natural Resources Committee has a large number of members from western and inland states, and the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries has new leadership.

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee leadership includes Senator Cruz (R-Texas) as Chair and Senator Cantwell (D-Washington) as Ranking Democrat. The Subcommittee on Coast Guard, Maritime and Fisheries is chaired by Senator Sullivan (R-Alaska) with Senator Rochester (D-Delaware) as Ranking Democrat. Mr. Whaley also mentioned the importance of the Appropriations Committees and leadership of those committees.

Every standing committee in the House of Representatives is required to develop an authorization and oversight plan at the beginning of each Congress. MSA and MPA/monuments were specifically mentioned in the oversight plan language. The House Natural Resources Committee also mentioned delisting grizzly bears and grey wolves, indicating that they may not be receptive to moving protected resources functions from NOAA to FWS.

Mr. Whaley reviewed the schedule of known hearings this year and discussed actions related to appropriations. The continuing resolution signed on March 15th deleted earmarks from 2024 and specified no new earmarks for FY2025. The Continuing Resolution provided appropriations for NOAA through the end of September 2025. Mr. Whaley explained the difference between a bill, a report (that accompanies a bill), and where things can be found in the reports. Report language does not have the effect of law, but it provides direction to how an agency is expected to spend the money. Earmark tables are included at the end of every appropriations report. These tables provide information on where the money comes from, who it goes to, how it should be used, and who made the earmark. Earmarks may be limited to a minor percentage of the budget.

Congress has passed a budget resolution, which provides a framework for federal spending for next ten years. Included in that budget resolution was a reconciliation process that instructs committees to provide savings or generate new revenues. The bill also rescinded all unobligated funds from the Inflation Reduction Act and proposed changes to NEPA for oil and gas projects. Mr. Whaley noted a number of upcoming events including Capitol Hill Ocean Week (sponsored by the National Sanctuary Foundation), a Members' Day hearing at the House Natural Resources Committee, and a potential hearing on amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

XII. Draft Policy and Guidance: National Marine Sanctuaries Act Section 304(a)(5)

Ms. Denit provided a brief verbal update on NOAA's progress with the 304(a)(5) guidance, which began development last year in collaboration with the CCC. A draft guidance document was shared with the councils in January 2025, feedback from five Councils was received by the end of February, and NOAA has been reviewing the comments to inform the final version. Common themes in the feedback included the need for clearer timelines around the consultation process, earlier engagement in sanctuary-related decisions, access to NEPA documents before public release, requests for Councils to be recognized as cooperating agencies under NEPA, and clarity on regulatory authority distinctions between the National Marine Sanctuaries Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

In response to this feedback, NOAA plans to revise the guidance document and include a visual diagram to clarify the consultation process timeline. The revised version will be shared with the Councils at the fall CCC meeting, and NOAA will gather input before finalizing the document. During the discussion, one participant emphasized concern that Councils are currently being treated like the general public in the consultation process, particularly noting the lack of input opportunities before the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is published. NOAA acknowledged this concern and confirmed that the Councils would have another opportunity to comment on the revised guidance in the fall.

XIII. International Fisheries Issues

Ms. Simonds provided an overview of international fisheries issues that impact domestic fisheries and ongoing issues affecting the Pacific Council. She discussed the Ensuring Access to Pacific Fisheries Act, a 2016 law based on MSA philosophy for optimal U.S. catch. According to the Act, U.S. negotiations in relevant regional fishery management organizations need to be based on consultations with an advisory body (e.g., Permanent Advisory Committee to U.S. Commissioners to the WCPFC). The Council has a role in this advisory body; however, this law is not consistently followed. Ms. Simonds noted that she was blocked from joining the U.S. delegation in December 2023 at the WCPFC annual meeting. At the December 2024 meeting, the U.S. head of delegation pushed for a North Pacific striped marlin conservation and management measure that disproportionately affected the U.S.

Regarding the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) passed in 2023, Ms. Simonds noted this was pushed collectively by Pacific Island Nations and environmental NGOs to limit high seas fishing and move more fishing in Federal waters. The U.S. Hawaii longline fishery has to operate mostly on high seas due to domestic closures. The U.S. has not ratified BBNJ, which 21 nations have done so far, with 60 ratifications needed for implementation. The U.S. State Department has not developed a position, has not been participating in BBNJ meetings, and it is unclear if they will participate further.

The America First Policy and subsequent Executive Orders provide an opportunity for the U.S. to ‘level the playing field’ with competing foreign fishery products. The Council, advisors, and industry representatives previously met with the U.S. Trade Representative, U.S. International Trade Commission, and the Department of Commerce International Trade Administration. The Council is concerned about dumping of cheap foreign fish undercutting U.S. domestic fisheries, oftentimes labeled in a manner misleading to the consumer. Traceability with enforcement is also needed. The America First Policy also includes review of all foreign aid, which includes \$60 million per year contributions to Pacific Island nations which could be changed or ended. Ms. Simonds noted that half of that money should be going to the Pacific territories.

Ms. Simonds concluded stating that the Councils have a role in the EO “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness” which includes providing guidance on the implementation and removal of burdensome regulations. An example is acting on the MMPA Import Provisions, which have not been executed since 1972. These import provisions would limit competing foreign fisheries that lack management equivalencies.

Mr. Will Sword, WPFMC Chair, stated that the recent opening of Pacific Remote Island EEZs (50-200 nm seaward) can save U.S. fishermen money and help the economy of American Samoa. Pago Pago, American Samoa was the 3rd largest U.S. port at one point, and it has slipped in value due to domestic regulation and lack of support internationally.

Ms. Alexa Cole, NOAA Director of the Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce, gave a verbal overview on international issues on the horizon for NOAA. Ms. Cole corroborated Ms. Simonds’ report on BBNJ. She noted that MMPA Import Provisions include comparability findings for regulations in foreign fisheries, which could result in banning seafood imports from fisheries (and possibly nations) that result in incidental mortality or serious injury of mammals or

lack regulations and enforcement of bycatch reduction. Ms. Cole indicated the guidelines are developed, and there is a list of 2,500 fisheries to be evaluated. Final comparable findings are due by September this year and recommendations will be made in January 2026.

Ms. Cole reported on the Moratorium Protection Act, which seeks to improve international fisheries management with respect to IUU fishing, protected species, and catch of sharks. There is a new report coming that will add forced labor as an issue for determining violations. This report will also include nations with potential restrictions or port denials. In 2023, there were seven species identified with IUU fishing and nations having shark catch issues not comparable to the U.S. (including China, Taiwan, Vanuatu). The U.S. is working with those countries on determining what restrictions or port denials will be recommended to the President.

Ms. Cole leads the Seafood Import and Monitoring Program (SIMP), which underwent review and conducted stakeholder engagement meetings in November 2024 with an action plan. The new EO “Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness” references examination of ways to strengthen SIMP.

Updates about the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) were provided. The Caribbean Council assisted with flying fish and dolphinfish management and a spawning aggregations working group was developed. The next meeting is in Jamaica and NOAA has worked with the SAFMC and CFMC on these issues.

Mr. Rolon noted his Council’s participation in WECAFC will be limited over the next three years due to budgetary constraints. Mr. Rolon said the WECAFC countries want continuation of the bottom-up approach his Council brings. There has been significant contribution from Europe and the U.S., but Mr. Rolon asked if NOAA can help with CFMC moving forward in the work they have been engaged in. Ms. Cole responded that she and the agency need to follow up on this given their budget limits and recent staffing changes.

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2025

XV. Scientific Coordination Subcommittee

SCS8 Report

Dr. Lisa Kerr, NEFMC SSC Chair, provided an overview of the SCS8 final report highlights. The primary theme was “Applying ABC Control Rules in a Changing Environment”. She summarized the three sub-themes of the meeting including the challenges and recommendations. Dr. Kerr stated that one of the primary goals was to provide actionable guidance on how to best support Councils in the management of fisheries, specifically the application of ABC control rules, in a changing environment. The motivation of this theme was that the SSCs have been challenged in applying ABC control rules in a manner that reliably achieves management goals given the degree of ecosystem change and scientific uncertainty that Council regions are experiencing. She highlighted the following three sub-themes:

- Sub-theme 1: Advances in ecosystem science and assessment to inform ABC control rules in the dynamic environment

- Sub-theme 2: Application of social science to achieve management goals under dynamic conditions
- Sub-theme 3: Adaptation of reference points, control rules, and rebuilding plans in a changing environment

Dr. Kerr reported on each Council's implementation approaches and summarized the final takeaways for all regional SSCs. The SSCs nationwide face challenges such as data limitations, uncertainty, and systemic constraints that hinder effective adaptation and decision making. SCS8 highlighted the increasing use of environmental data in stock assessment and management and emphasized the need to further incorporate social science into our fisheries decision making. She concluded by noting that SCS meetings are vital for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and tackling urgent national scientific challenges. They accelerate learning and spread effective approaches across regions.

SCS9 Planning

Dr. Froeschke, GFMC Deputy Director, provided an overview presentation of SCS9 planning. The SCS9 meeting was delayed until 2027 due to budget uncertainties and federal partner participation. The proposed theme is "Strategies for Robust and Efficient Fisheries Science and Management" along with three potential sub-themes, including (1) prioritizing high-value data for analyses and advice, (2) bridging the gap between science and fisheries management, and (3) how to improve the use of social and economic data in fisheries science and management. A CCC member expressed support for the proposed theme and sub-themes and wished that it were held in 2026 instead of 2027. Another CCC member expressed support for these meetings and funding of and support for the SCS meeting in the future with NOAA Fisheries.

XVI. CMOD Workshop Recap

Ms. Emily Muehlstein, GFMC staff, presented an overview of the second Council Member Ongoing Development workshop that occurred in late April 2025, hosted by the NPFMC, which brought together 38 participants from across the Councils. Unfortunately, NMFS staff were not available to participate due to travel restrictions. Ms. Muehlstein explained that this year's workshop theme, "Understanding climate-related vulnerabilities, risk, and uncertainties," successfully tied to the topic of last year's SCS8 meeting. Even though the Council regions are in different phases of developing and applying risk and uncertainty tools, the workshop identified several commonalities among the regions. High-level discussion themes included the need for (1) science to keep pace with the rate of experienced change, (2) strategies to communicate needs and balance short- and long-term actions, and (3) simpler approaches where appropriate. The workshop also included a skills training focused on science communication, in which participants broke down approaches for communicating risk, uncertainty, and other topics.

Discussion at the CCC highlighted the value of the CMOD opportunity for Council members and staff to learn from other regions in a policy-neutral environment and to apply those insights with their home Council. The CCC will receive a full report on the workshop in October, and the CCC website will be updated with all the presentation materials from the workshop. The Pacific Council is planning to host the next CMOD, at the earliest in 2027, however planning is currently on pause pending resolution of budget uncertainties.

XVII. CCC Workgroups/Subcommittees

Habitat Working Group

Ms. Michelle Bachman, NEFMC staff and Chair of the CCC Habitat Work Group, provided an update on the group's recent activities and future direction. The work group meets virtually 4-5 times annually to share updates on habitat initiatives, occasional in-depth presentations, and to facilitate cross-council learning and information sharing. The group also holds periodic in-person workshops, most recently in January 2024, which focused on essential fish habitat in a changing climate. A subgroup meets as needed to discuss offshore wind and other marine use issues. The work group considered an in-person workshop in 2026 to look at Inflation Reduction Act funded habitat-related projects. However, this workshop may not be feasible due to current funding constraints and other challenges. Instead, the group plans to expand some of its regular webinar meetings to include IRA project updates, with the possibility of a longer webinar in early to mid-2026 to share initial results.

CCC members voiced support for the group's continued efforts and suggested the work group could potentially help assess the impacts of federal funding shifts on habitat programs in the future.

Communications Group

Ms. Muehlstein presented the CCC Communication Group's revised proposal for celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) in 2026. The updated plan aims to reduce costs and staff burden while still honoring this important milestone and providing flexibility for individual councils to tailor their own 50th anniversary communications.

The revised proposal includes five components:

- (1) **Comprehensive communications plan** to coordinate timing and messaging across regions
- (2) **Commemorative 50th anniversary logo**, which may be a simple update of the existing CCC logo, or a new design developed in-house or through a broader design contest
- (3) **50th anniversary webpage** hosted on the joint regional council website, featuring an interactive timeline, national statistics, and links to regional resources
- (4) **Council-specific webpages** hosted by each Council with tailored content such as infographics, oral histories, or videos
- (5) **One-page print product** summarizing key accomplishments and future challenges

Ms. Muehlstein emphasized that public engagement plays an integral role in the regional council system, and the 50th anniversary provides an opportunity to educate stakeholders and the public about the transparent and participatory nature of the council process while highlighting the diversity and value of U.S. fisheries.

During the discussion, several CCC members suggested engaging Council staff or industry stakeholders in a logo design contest to increase engagement and capture the spirit of the

constituent-driven process. Additionally, several participants expressed support for hosting an in-person event to mark the anniversary, either at a CCC meeting or another appropriate venue, such as Capitol Hill Ocean Week. Members also highlighted the need to finalize a rollout timeline for various communications products and continue refining national messages to ensure a unified, impactful campaign. The Communications Group will develop a comprehensive 50th Anniversary Communications Plan, including a timeline and key messages, for review at the October CCC meeting.

XVIII. 2026 CCC Meetings

Mr. Witherell provided information on planning for the 2026 annual CCC meeting, which will be held May 19-21, 2026 at the Land's End hotel in Homer, Alaska. Homer is a vibrant fishing community and self-proclaimed "halibut fishing capitol of the world". Mr. Witherell noted travel logistics to get to Homer.

XIX. Other Business

The CCC considered revisions to the CCC Terms of Reference and approved a motion including:

- 1) Clarified that it is the responsibility of the CCC host Council Executive Director to coordinate CCC activities
- 2) Councils should strive to hold annual meetings in or near a fishing community when practicable
- 3) Allow for interim meetings to be held remotely
- 4) Provide the host Council with the primary responsibility to draft CCC agendas
- 5) Add audio/visual recordings as an option to meeting minutes or a written transcript
- 6) Provide flexibility for accepting written and oral comments
- 7) Describe the membership and functions of the CCC standing Subcommittees and Work Groups

Ms. Denit will ask the NOAA General Counsel to review these changes for consistency with MSA provisions.

The CCC considered reaffirming their previous resolution on Marine National Monuments and approved a motion to send a letter to President Trump stating their continued support for Council and NOAA management of fisheries.

The CCC considered development of a working group comprised of the Executive Directors to develop a process to identify national and regional management and science priorities and approved a motion to initiate the working group immediately and follow-up with a report at the October 2025 CCC meeting.

The CCC reviewed approved motions and action items at the end of the meeting. Details are provided in Appendix 1.

The CCC recognized and thanked Mr. Wes Townsend, MAFMC Chair, and Mr. Rick Bellavance, NEFMC Chair, for their nine years of service on the Councils, their respective

service as Council Chairs, and their participation at the CCC. Mr. Brad Pettinger was recognized for his service as PFMC Chair.

The CCC meeting adjourned at approximately 12:30pm.

DRAFT

Appendix 1: Motions and Action Items

MOTIONS

1. Mr. Dugas moved, and Mr. Sword seconded:
Move that the CCC draft a letter to the Secretary of Commerce and other appropriate audiences within the Presidential Administration. The letter should be a short letter that requests FY 2025

Council funding be made available to the Council as soon as possible. These funds should align with the recent grant renewal process.

The motion *carried* by unanimous consent.

2. Mr. Witherell moved, and Mr. Carmichael seconded:

Move that the CCC adopts revisions to the Terms of Reference for the Council Coordination Committee as modified and recommended by the CCC on May 15, 2025.

The motion *carried* by unanimous consent.

3. MOTION: Mr. Sword moved, and Ms. Banks seconded:

Move that the CCC submit a letter to President Trump to reaffirm support for the 2016 CCC Resolution on Marine National Monuments.

The motion *carried* by unanimous consent.

4. MOTION: Mr. Moore moved, and Mr. Carmichael seconded:

Move that the CCC form a working group of the Executive Directors to work with NMFS to develop a process to identify nationwide and regional management and science priorities.

The motion *carried* by unanimous consent.

Action Items

1. Request extension to deadline for Councils to respond to EO 14276 to Oct. 1, 2025
2. Reconvene the CCC NEPA Workgroup and update Council Workgroup contacts
3. Develop a 50th anniversary communications plan and report at the October CCC meeting