

**Summary Record
Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee
Public Meeting
September 10-12, 2024
Kodiak, Alaska
Proceedings**

Overview

The September 2024 Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) meeting took place in Kodiak, Alaska, from September 10 through 12. 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, Russ Dunn, Senior Recreational Fisheries Advisor, Heidi Lovett, Supervisory Policy Analyst, Office of Policy, and Acting MAFAC Designated Federal Officer (DFO), and Katie Zanolowicz, Assistant DFO.

Jocelyn Runnebaum served as Chair of the MAFAC. The meeting opened by welcoming the 20 members: Kristina Alexander, Hugh Cowperthwaite, Jaime Diamond, Tom Fote, Jamie Goen, Amy Green, Jim Green, Jennifer Hagen, Natasha Hayden, Bobbi Hudson, Marissa Mercurieff, Meredith Moore, Linda O'Dierno, Ryan Prewitt, Kellie Ralston, Sarah Schumann, Patrick Sullivan, Clayward Tam, and Brett Veerhusen.

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

- Report of the Assistant Administrator
 - Review updates/activities since May 2024
- Climate-Ready Fisheries panel discussions
 - Community and local industry perspectives
 - Fishing industry perspectives
- Overview of Alaska equity and environmental justice activities
- Updates on regional science
- Update from the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Affairs
- Update on NOAA recreational fisheries
- Alaska Fishing Industry Snapshot Report
- Reports from the State Directors Meeting and Fisheries Commissions
- NOAA Fisheries Budget Outlook

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

Day 1 (9/10/2024)**Opening Comments**

Heidi Lovett, Acting Designated Federal Officer, read the Privacy Act statement regarding the expectations of participants in public proceedings. Jocelyn Runnebaum, MAFAC Chair, called the roll and reviewed the meeting agenda. She acknowledged on behalf of the MAFAC that they were gathered on the ancient homeland and traditional territory of the Alutiq Sugpiaq.

Welcome and Overview of Kodiak Area Native Association

Mike Pfeffer, Chief Executive Officer, Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA) welcomed the MAFAC to their facility and discussed KANA's work. KANA is a consortium of the ten federally recognized tribes in and around Kodiak Island. They provide health, social services, economic developments, and climate resilience programming. Mr. Pfeffer discussed some of their partnerships with NOAA and his experiences working in the community.

Report of the Assistant Administrator

Janet Coit, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, welcomed the members to Kodiak and provided updates on Fisheries activities since the previous MAFAC meeting in May. Fisheries issues are core to Alaska's identity, economy, welfare, and culture. Coastal communities and the fishing industry are facing a number of challenges, including the collapse of important fisheries, such as crab and certain salmon stocks, COVID-related impacts, and global market factors that are adversely affecting Alaska fisheries. There have been more federal fisheries disasters in Alaska in the last few years than ever before and the delays in getting funding out caused real pain for people. NMFS is working hard to improve this system, but acknowledges the impact this has had on the well-being of families and communities. Alaska waters support some of the most productive and valuable commercial fisheries in the world, but climate change is impacting those fisheries and the ecosystems at a devastating pace, and managing these impacts requires informed decisions. Fisheries recently published a paper about the borealization of the Bering Sea and how this is related to the crash of the snow crab. This is just one example of closures and impacts the area has seen related to climate change. This is a fundamental framework for all the work NOAA Fisheries is doing and Ms. Coit looked forward to hearing from stakeholders about what more NMFS can do with the authorities they have to address these difficult issues and increase resilience and predictability for fisheries and communities.

The National Seafood Strategy aims to support and sustain a thriving domestic U.S. seafood economy. The strategy specifically addresses actions Fisheries can take with their existing authorities, but also commits Fisheries to working with other federal partners, such as USDA and the Department of State. Using Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds wisely has been a high priority for NMFS. Ms. Coit discussed progress made on issuing grants, many of which have gone to Alaska for fish passage, recovery of west coast and Alaska salmon, tribal treaty fishing rights, Pacific salmon and steelhead science, habitat restoration, coastal resilience, citizen science, and more. In the last few years, Fisheries has awarded over 200 grants totaling almost a billion dollars, \$223

million of which have gone to tribal nations and indigenous communities. A third round of grants will begin rolling out in the fall. She highlighted one Alaskan grant that went towards working with an Alaska Native Village Corporation on the long-term survival of the Copper River salmon. NMFS appreciated MAFAC's input on their Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) Strategy and they recently shared the regional implementation plans that are intended to incorporate the strategy into the work at the regional level. Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management (EBFM) is central to Fisheries' work and climate change requires updating that science and how they approach it. NMFS appreciated MAFAC's recommendations on the revised EBFM Roadmap, particularly the points on accelerating the action to better address climate impacts, better inclusion of indigenous knowledge, and the call to apply the principles of the EEJ Strategy in the Roadmap.

Jamie Goen commented on the impact to the Bering Sea crab fleet following the collapse of the fishery and expressed appreciation for the agency working to speed up the process for getting disaster funds out.

Meredith Moore asked what MAFAC could do to help communicate the benefits of BIL and IRA funding to communities and decision makers. Ms. Coit said talking about the impact of the projects with people in decision making positions is going to be very valuable. Fisheries' website has a wealth of information on these projects.

Pat Sullivan discussed the importance of communicating NOAA's budget limitations to a wider audience and the need for a spokesperson to broadly advocate for funding ocean science.

Kristina Alexander commented that it is not clear that disaster money is getting to the people who need it most. She asked if there has been any auditing of the final disbursement of funds from NOAA to ensure it is going towards fishery and fishery-related industries as directed in the statute. Ms. Coit said that NOAA does do audits and MAFAC may want to consider a fishery disaster meeting session to discuss NMFS' process and outreach. She noted that fishery disaster funding only happens when Congress deems it necessary; it is not a consistent allocation despite the increasing frequency of fishery disasters.

Jim Green commented on a congressional bill that would force the agency to make a disaster determination within 30 days. He felt the policies should prioritize getting funding to those most impacted. Ms. Coit said that the federal fishery disaster process requires economic information that demonstrates losses above a certain amount, which is not always immediately clear. She also stated that it is the state/municipality or tribe that determines spend plans, not NOAA. NOAA and OMB simply determine whether the plans are consistent with their authorities.

Jennifer Hagen said she hoped that, in fixing some aspects of the process, NOAA will retain the ability for small communities to be flexible in their spending.

Brett Veerhusen asked what the agency is doing to be proactive to enable the industry and communities to be able to adapt to issues around climate change and avoid additional disaster funding in the future. Ms. Coit said Fisheries has released a governance policy that clarifies when they might move governance of a shifting stock to a different council or a

shared council. NMFS has also been working on updating the National Standards, particularly 4, 8, and 9, to incorporate climate and EEJ issues. Each of the regions has a Climate Action Plan and they have invested IRA funding in accelerating some of the work that needs to be done in order to address climate-related issues. Discussions about management flexibility and how science needs to better inform decision making have been central to NMFS leadership discussions. She hoped to hear some concrete suggestions on ways NMFS could improve these processes during this meeting.

Kristina Alexander commented on the concern for the shipping industry with the proposed habitat protections for the Rice's whale. Ms. Coit said NMFS is working on a critical habitat designation that is expected to be released in December. Their next step will be to develop a recovery plan.

Kellie Ralston commented that councils have struggled with understanding the flexibility available to them under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) and the National Standards. She asked how NMFS might help foster that, particularly in the context of litigation over new recreational measures in the Atlantic. It would be helpful if Fisheries could provide a framework around those options for councils. Ms. Coit said that Management Strategy Evaluations (MSEs) have been valuable in exploring options.

Jim Green discussed the need for abundance thresholds that allow managers to reduce allocations for declining stocks. Russ Dunn said that their controls include three set triggers that cause certain pre-determined actions to occur. It is something that has been explored and is being used in some scenarios, such as Atlantic highly migratory species.

Climate-Ready Fisheries Panel Part I: Community and Local Industry Perspectives

Natasha Hayden, MAFAC member, introduced the speakers and moderated the panel.

Scott Arndt, Mayor, Kodiak Island Borough, discussed his background after moving to Kodiak at age ten and the changes he has witnessed. Kodiak once had many canneries around the island, but each of the ones located outside of town have closed. The collapse of the Kodiak king crab fishery and shrimp fisheries have brought tremendous changes to the waterfront in town. Changes on the island have been consistent in his lifetime, though this cycle has been the worst in the 60 years he has lived there. A major additional stressor is the rise of imports flooding U.S. markets. He worries not only about Kodiak, but all of the remote communities in Alaska. Local governments exist off the taxes that the seafood industry brings in. When these decline, families, schools, and services all suffer.

Jordan Young, Welder, Highmark Marine, discussed his experiences as a lifelong Alaskan that has been servicing the local commercial fishing fleet since 2017. From hearing the concerns of the fishermen, he became aware of the needs for adapting to different fishing techniques in order to stay relevant in fragile and volatile markets. Designing vessels to be able to cater to different kinds of fishing is one way the industry is approaching this, and they hope to find ways to do it sooner and more effectively. An important aspect of the support the federal government can provide is improved response times, as it can be an entire year after a disaster declaration before any actions are taken. By this time the damage can be too severe to come back from. Having plans in place so that things can go into effect rapidly would be

very valuable.

Amy Peterson, Community Affairs Liaison, Kodiak, discussed her experience in the community of Old Harbor on Kodiak, having lived there since she was 19. She discussed the importance of community ties in Old Harbor and some of the changes she has seen. She spoke about her experiences teaching in Old Harbor and the importance of fishing to the identity of her students.

Natasha Hayden said that three of the six schools in traditionally Alaska native villages outside of the city of Kodiak have closed in recent years due to outmigration. She read the following comment from the Mayor of the City of Kodiak, Pat Benson: The risks in not preparing for climate change are not just for the fisheries, but for the community as a whole. Kodiak's economy revolves around fisheries and NOAA plays a critical role in explaining what to expect and how to plan accordingly. Regular updates to the island's Fisheries Work Group would be helpful. Mr. Arndt added that there is a lot of uncertainty in the community as to what the future holds. The fishermen do not know the science behind what they see happening and the government tends to be reactionary, rather than out in front of problems. The communities are trying to find ways to adapt but it is not easy to change direction, especially for families that have made major investments in their businesses. Mr. Young said that government grants have allowed for enhancements at the shipyard that have increased their capacity to service the fleet and provide cost-effective options to fishermen's needs. It is important that the stakeholders make their needs heard and that the grants are effectively put to use. One of their biggest challenges is maintaining a workforce, as smaller shipyards that provide entry-level training often lose their employees to larger shipyards. Ms. Peterson said it is important for fishermen to understand what the science shows and what the next steps are going to be to help the fisheries. The fish have gotten smaller and fewer, but very few changes to fishing practices have taken place.

Natasha Hayden asked Mr. Young to expand upon what his company is doing to help fishermen convert their vessels to adapt to different fisheries. Mr. Young said that a fishing vessel that can only do one thing will not be prosperous. Adapting deck space and managing ways of pulling gear can minimize the negative impacts of fishing on the environment.

Natasha Hayden asked Mr. Arndt to discuss the impacts to Kodiak stemming from circumstances in the global seafood market. She noted that Alaska's largest player in the fishing industry is selling their processing facilities and all of their assets in four coastal communities in the state, Kodiak being their largest holding. Mr. Arndt said it was unclear what the impact of the sale will be on Kodiak, but they were not only the largest processor on the island, they also owned the biggest apartment building to house transient workers and had bought up the fishing quotas. There will need to be more discussion about how to handle limited entry going forward. Villages around the island are already seeing population declines that may lead to more school closures. Other rural communities he has traveled to around Alaska are facing similar challenges.

Natasha Hayden asked Ms. Peterson to expand upon her comment that the fishermen in her community would never come to a MAFAC meeting to speak about the fisheries. Ms. Peterson said that if NOAA wants to hear from and support these communities, they need to go down to the docks to talk to them. Formal meeting settings are not seen as friendly

settings. She discussed some of the ways her school has adapted lessons to meet the students' experience and cater the curriculum to their interests. Much of the traditional knowledge that these communities relied on is gone now and they need NOAA to incorporate traditional understanding into their science to carry that forward.

Ryan Prewitt commented that many of the issues mentioned are similar to those faced in southeast Louisiana, particularly the graying of the fleet and exodus from the fishing industry. He asked if the panelists had any suggestions on bringing young people into the industry. Ms. Peterson said their community has tried several creative ways to allow young people to fish for a season and still retain their job, such as job sharing and reducing the frequency of services. Mr. Arndt added that Old Harbor has also been influential in the idea of purchasing community shares and allowing fishermen to lease them. These loan programs are now happening around Alaska and are helping young fishermen to gain access.

Jennifer Hagen asked if community development quotas have been used in Alaska and for more information on job sharing. Ms. Peterson said their corporation and tribe have purchased IFQs that can be leased by anyone in the community. It is an easy program to navigate that has made a significant difference. Two challenges with the program are that communities must have the capital to purchase IFQs and the owner is still subject to the fluctuations of the stock's biomass.

Clay Tam commented that many islands in the Pacific are also seeing their populations move and it is important to get local traditional knowledge integrated into the science before it is lost. Another thing that would be helpful is getting the subsidies that other agricultural industries receive.

Jamie Goen asked what might be done to help the communities on Kodiak in light of the processors leaving and workforce shortages. Mr. Arndt said housing is an issue and the unpredictability of the local economy is preventing people from investing in the community. Mr. Young recommended scholarships for trade schools to bring young people into the industry. Outreach on various platforms to inform younger demographics about the options available to them would be valuable. Mr. Arndt added that Kodiak has failing infrastructure and will require enormous investments to meet new standards. Mr. Green recommended getting the word out about NMFS' Marine Resource Education Program (MREP), a free program that teaches students how MSA works; Mr. Dunn noted that this is the first year NMFS has had MREP all around the country, including Alaska.

Jocelyn Runnebaum asked about how Kodiak has integrated outdoor education into their school programs and the role local companies might be able to play in supporting education. Ms. Peterson discussed some of these, including aquaculture and mariculture projects. She praised NOAA for the educational materials available on their website. Mr. Young said his company had explored an apprenticeship program and Mr. Arndt said the high school offers a job shadowing program to give them exposure to different businesses. Funding is a challenge, but he would like to see more hands-on opportunities in the schools.

Climate-Ready Fisheries Panel Part II: Fishing Industry Perspectives

Brett Veerhusen, Chair, Strategic Planning and Budget Subcommittee, introduced the

speakers and moderated the panel.

Tyler Schmeil, Kodiak shipyard owner, F/V Alaska Spirit, discussed his history of fishing around Kodiak since 1978. He lives in the rural village of Chiniak on the island and is a 50% owner of a crab boat heavily invested in the quota system. He also has a salmon seiner/halibut boat and owns a small shipyard on Kodiak. Climate change is impacting his seafood businesses in many ways, including the collapse of the crab fisheries due to marine heat waves. His biggest concern is not being able to react rapidly enough to current situations in order to help the stocks recover and become resilient, which could lead to the loss of entire fisheries.

Theresa Peterson, Fisheries Policy Director, Alaska Marine Conservation Council, active fisherman, and long-time resident of Kodiak, discussed her 40+ years fishing in Alaska. She initially came to Kodiak because of the diverse fishing opportunities. There she bought a small seiner and gradually grew her business. She wants to see the next generation of fishermen have the same kinds of opportunities she had in the industry, which led her to work with the Alaska Marine Conservation Council to encourage fishermen and fishing communities to get involved in the policy arena. Commercial fishing has always been a challenging, volatile industry and climate change has exacerbated this. Better science is needed to understand what the industry must do in the future, what to plan for, and how the community can become more resilient. The city of Kodiak serves as the hub for the six villages that all depend on the town's infrastructure for their survival. The island's residents are all interconnected and hope to continue living there for generations to come.

Julie Bonney, Owner and Executive Director, Alaska Groundfish Databank, discussed her work representing the trawl fleet located mostly in Kodiak. She discussed the stressors in the seafood industry, especially climate change and challenges in the seafood marketplace. Kodiak is the most diverse fishing port in Alaska and perhaps in the nation. This typically presents the opportunity for some to transition to a different fishery when one takes a downturn, though this has not been the case recently. For communities focused on a single species or that are heavily invested in IFQ there is even greater risk. The key needs of the fishing industry in Kodiak are science to understand the impacts of climate change and the ability to react more rapidly.

Nicole Kimball, Vice President, Alaska Operations, Pacific Seafood Processors Association, provided her perspective from working for a group of shoreside processors operating in Kodiak and throughout coastal Alaska. Their members take deliveries from every kind of fisherman and they are dependent on the viability of coastal communities. There is heavy pressure on the fishing industry related to lower values in the global marketplace due to poor trade policies. Foreign competitors that are less regulated, less sustainable, and have lower operating costs are making things challenging for domestic producers. Additionally, there is a high global supply and inflation is pressing down consumer demand for U.S. seafood. In the past when one stock took a downturn, there were others that could serve as a buffer. The current situation is unprecedented in that there are downturns across species and across regions - there is no buffer for processors, fishermen, or communities. Climate change is creating a situation with less predictability, which makes it challenging for the entire industry to plan ahead and there is more hesitancy in investing in products, infrastructure, and support for communities.

Brett Veerhusen asked what support communities like Kodiak need now and in the future to buffer these higher rates of variability and unpredictability. Ms. Peterson said information sources need to be enhanced and maintained in order to know what is going on. NMFS needs to integrate more social science into its work. Processors and others are making difficult decisions and they need to be able to plan for variability in order to be successful. Ms. Bonney said the federal government needs to help bolster the seafood industry. Adding seafood to the Farm Bill would help, as would more rapid disaster funding. Modernization of the seafood industry could help the domestic market compete with foreign competitors, but the Jones Act and other regulations are hamstringing the ability to get new vessels into operation. More robust surveys are also needed to better understand what is happening and these should be done more frequently in more economical ways. Ms. Kimball added that surveys are the first line of defense, yet they are being cut or underfunded at the expense of other initiatives. They are foundational to understanding fisheries and it is critical to ensure surveys and the associated research are fully funded if the industry is going to be responsive to climate impacts. She stated that regulatory stability is increasingly important in times of fishery unpredictability. It will also be essential to increase the value of U.S. fish to consumers.

Brett Veerhusen asked if NOAA does a good job communicating its core functions to the local public in Alaska. Ms. Bonney said communications from the agency have improved in terms of making their information more digestible. The North Pacific Council has been developing one-pagers that have been helpful, but more progress is needed. Ms. Peterson said the Alaska Fisheries Science Center in Kodiak does a good job reaching out to the local community. NMFS could do better at keeping stakeholders updated on the status of things like the EBFM Roadmap. Sometimes information is extracted from communities with no follow up.

Brett Veerhusen asked for the panel's thoughts on other solutions that would support the climate readiness of the fishing industry and communities. He read the following response to the question from Nick Mangini, a kelp farmer on Kodiak: Part of the change has to come from those affected, including using existing infrastructure to help fishermen diversify. Mr. Schmeil said that when stocks take a downturn it needs to be a shared burden of conservation. Allowing high numbers of bycatch when they are trying to rebuild a stock in a closed directed fishery is one of his concerns. They also need to look into habitat destruction and how it is affecting fisheries. Ms. Kimball said the Climate, Ecosystems, and Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) and the survey modernization project will be important for climate resilience. Including more environmental variables into surveys could create more stability.

Amy Green asked if more climate science is something the local community wants and is able to consume. Ms. Peterson said NOAA defining "climate-ready fisheries" would be helpful for communities trying to figure out where they need to be headed in regard to climate. Communities need help with figuring out how to take information, such as ecosystem status reports, and act on it. Ms. Bonney said that there is an ever-increasing regulatory framework and no one is revisiting earlier regulations to see if they still make sense. NOAA needs to rethink how they regulate the different fisheries to meet certain objectives.

Linda O'Dierno asked if the panel thought NMFS placing more emphasis on communicating

why domestic seafood is superior could result in better retail prices. Ms. Kimball said she believed it would be valuable all the way down the supply chain and hoped NOAA would pursue it. Sustainability certification is difficult and does not convey the complexity of the situation; enhanced communications could help with this. Ms. Peterson said that helping consumers understand the value of wild caught seafood and the benefits to fishing families would be helpful in a competitive marketplace.

Meredith Moore said that the North Pacific region has more science and ecological information than any of the other councils but they still cannot respond quickly enough to the indicators they see. She asked if managers have a clear idea of how to use the science available to them and if there are ways to improve communications between NOAA and the councils that could help with this. Ms. Bonney said things are starting to progress that direction, in terms of using the better science to affect the outcomes. Ms. Kimball added that the climate in the North Pacific is changing more rapidly than anywhere else in the nation. Better fishery management cannot solve this, but consistent data is needed in order to anticipate the impacts and avoid missed signals.

Jim Green said getting fishermen involved in the marketing of domestic seafood can make a difference. He mentioned a program called Fresh Gulf that put tags on fish that tell consumers when and where it was caught, as well as a link to online clips of interviews with the boat captain. People responded to that kind of storytelling. Ms. Peterson said there are similar programs elsewhere and it is a growing trend for families to begin direct marketing initiatives to get more value out of their product. She thought it was time to start rethinking their seafood model to aim towards lower volume fishing while increasing the communications and quality. Climate-ready fisheries and resiliency should also include ways to better utilize the fish that are coming across the docks.

Jocelyn Runnebaum said that Alaska has done a good job with cooperative surveys, while other parts of the country are still primarily dependent on NOAA ships for their fishery surveys. She asked the panelists for their thoughts on scaling up cooperative surveys using industry vessels, as well as getting that information into stock assessments. Ms. Bonney said she is involved with a project in the Gulf of Alaska using commercial fishing data to enhance the fish surveys. The program could potentially be expanded by getting more ships outfitted and calibrated to provide the information in the way it is needed for modeling, which could also provide income for the vessel. Mr. Schmeil pointed out that crabbers have been providing additional survey data, which was valuable for gathering data quickly when the stocks collapsed.

Jamie Goen asked about the one thing the panelists would like to see change in the management system that could help their business diversify. Ms. Peterson said halibut fishing is something everyone could do, but since becoming an IFQ fishery it is impossible for individuals to buy into. Set asides for community access would be very helpful. Ms. Kimball said incorporating more environmental variables from ecosystem surveys would enable more adaptive management practices.

Overview of Alaska Equity and Environmental Justice Activities

Amilee Wilson, Tribal Relations Coordinator, Alaska Regional Office, NOAA Fisheries,

discussed her background leading up to her role as tribal liaison and shared some background information on NOAA Fisheries National EEJ Strategy. Following the release of the strategy in 2023, Fisheries released ten implementation plans across the nation that identified specific actions that could be taken to incorporate EEJ into the services that Fisheries provides. Advancing social equity in marine conservation requires directing attention to three key themes: recognition, fair distribution of impacts, and procedures. She discussed the list of identities related to groups that have been historically identified as under-served by the federal government as listed in Biden's Executive Order 13985. To this list they also added subsets of the fisheries and remote communities that may not have a voice or representation, such as subsistence fishers, processors, and crew of small boat owners, as well as residents of the U.S. territories. The EEJ and national strategy includes a framework with six core areas to consider when implementing EEJ within Fisheries: policy and plans, research and monitoring, outreach and engagement, benefits, inclusive governance, and empowering environment, upon which all other core areas depend. Information gathered from Alaska Office's regional outreach efforts was incorporated into their draft Alaska EEJ Implementation Plan. Additional input gleaned after April 2024 will be incorporated into the updated Alaska Implementation Plan by December 2024.

Marjorie Mooney-Seus, Community Program Manager, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, shared some of their outreach and education activities for Alaska and where they are headed next. Alaska is made up of many remote rural villages and small commercial and recreational fishing communities that are culturally and demographically diverse. Many of these are mixed economies depending on both commercial and subsistence fishing opportunities. The initial town hall meetings in the fall of 2023 through 2024 were conducted telephonically, as many rural communities across Alaska lack the infrastructure for virtual meetings and the cost of traveling to some of the locations is very high. They followed these with in-person hub meetings to reach out to a wide variety of stakeholders, which they intend to continue. The focus of these discussions was on how to improve engagement with under-served communities on science and management activities, as well as finding the best ways to get the information to the communities to inform their decision-making. She shared some of the feedback they received from the participants that was incorporated into the Alaska Implementation Plan. They are still seeking further input and view the plan as a living document to be revisited on an annual basis, along with an evaluation of their progress.

Pat Sullivan asked them how they intend to measure success. Ms. Mooney-Seus said they intend to use the metrics that are being developed nationally. An EEJ Coordinator is expected to be hired soon and developing those metrics at a regional level will be one of their primary roles. Ms. Wilson pointed to an appendix that lists concrete actions that are being taken and measureable metrics that are associated with the Implementation Plan, such as the number of meetings with senior leadership on EEJ topics.

Meredith Moore said MAFAC has struggled with how to navigate NOAA's engagement efforts with federally recognized tribes and the overlaps that occur through the EEJ Strategy and Implementation Plans. She asked for the presenters' thoughts on how these efforts are coordinated. Ms. Mooney-Seus said EEJ is a broader umbrella, which includes tribes and indigenous communities, as well as many other groups. They are working on a parallel track in Alaska to develop a consultation protocol to work more directly with tribes in a formal

setting, but also working with tribes in an engagement setting that would fall under EEJ. These are separate but complementary. Ms. Wilson said they are learning as they move forward ways to incorporate the EEJ effort so that it complements tribal relations and improves engagement and communication with tribal partners.

Jaime Diamond asked how the agency is engaging with tribes that are not federally recognized. She also asked if the comment from the previous panel about having community set-asides for IFQ is something that has been discussed. Ms. Mooney-Seus said they do engage with tribes that are not federally recognized, particularly using what they call their engagement protocol for doing research in a community, which includes updates and follow up with the community. Ms. Wilson said the panel's suggestion is similar to solutions they have heard and can be discussed internally as to whether it is a possibility. As an unfunded mandate, there are limitations on what the program can commit to; it would be great to have funding available to support these actions, perhaps through grant opportunities.

Jennifer Hagen asked how the EEJ Strategy is going to improve relationships with treaty tribes and if they have included the Department of State in this process. Ms. Wilson said that because Alaska native tribes and corporations have a unique status, a lot of their EEJ efforts have been combined with both tribal and non-tribal entities, so treaties are not part of the conversation associated with that. In the West Coast Region, the West Coast Tribal Liaison works with tribes and the State Department to make sure their needs are met.

Natasha Hayden asked if the presenters had insight into how to have difficult conversations with people involved in fishery management or fishing communities that do not think that this work is warranted. Ms. Wilson said EEJ is new and that makes some people nervous. Change always presents an unknown. Fisheries has tried to make sure that the changes have benefits to all communities and avoid situations where it may have unintended consequences. Having champions that are able to voice those concerns and move forward with initiatives will be helpful towards taking positive strides in the direction the agency wants to move. Ms. Mooney-Seus said institutionalizing EEJ will be essential. It is a long-term commitment and it is important to continue communicating its benefits to all communities.

Jocelyn Runnebaum asked how the strategy is supporting the councils in their EEJ efforts. Ms. Mooney-Seus said they have been increasing their social science and economics program, which will inform the council process. At some point there will be more direct engagement with the councils, but the initial steps were focused internally. Ms. Wilson added that they have been working with the North Pacific Fisheries Council staff on incorporating some of the actions that have come out of council. They are also making inroads on incorporating indigenous knowledge into regional science.

Day 2 (9/11/24)

Regional Science Update

Cisco Werner, Director, Scientific Programs and Chief Science Advisor, began the panel's presentations on regional highlights from NMFS' CEFI and climate-ready fisheries programs. Dr. Werner read the following definition of climate-ready fisheries that was drafted by MAFAC's Climate and Ecosystems Subcommittee: The concept of climate-ready fisheries

encompasses the need to maintain long-term sustainability in the face of climate impacts, use the best available science and information, create more adaptive systems that include consideration of vulnerability and risk, manages for resilience, and prioritizes equity and thoughtful consideration of impacts to communities. CEFI will provide a robust and sustained ability to do projections from seasonal to decadal timescales. This will enable much more robust scenario planning and MSEs. CEFI is a national program that will be regionally implemented. Regional ocean modeling teams will provide regional decision support teams the information to produce socioecological outlooks, MSEs, and more, that address many of the issues that have been brought up at this meeting. In FY25, NMFS will begin to produce decadal predictions and hindcasts that will allow scientists to begin to explore how to better provide climate-informed advice. Dr. Werner provided some examples and highlights of how this is happening and how improved understanding of shifting distribution allows them to avoid fishery closures. These included regional efforts to better understand and prepare for the impacts of climate change on yellowtail flounder, black sea bass, dolphinfish, shrimp, Pacific hake, and North Pacific albacore. He discussed the collaboration between the Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers to develop new survey capabilities and anticipate changes with the Fisheries fleet, including incorporating new methods such as molecular approaches, 'omics, gliders, and acoustics.

Bob Foy, Director, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, presented on climate-ready fisheries in the Alaska region as they aim to improve industry, fishing community, and indigenous climate resilience in the Arctic. Dr. Foy discussed the national effort to build out projection models that allow scientists to take advantage of new skills in communicating climate predictions. Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) is building on the work of the Alaska Climate Integrated Modeling project to look at where species range expansions or contractions are going to occur in the Alaska region. They are predicting the overlap of different commercial fish species, particularly in the Bering Sea. In the future, they intend to focus on products like hindcasts in order to evaluate the models, seasonal forecasts, and long-term projections. Delivering this climate information to managers is the ultimate goal. Dr. Foy also discussed a product that came out of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council Climate Workshop that helps with local scenario planning. Long-term management support means also recognizing that there are some stocks that will not necessarily be negatively impacted by climate change. AFSC is taking a more focused view of fisheries impacts and climate impacts on markets and seafood strategies. Alaska has five large marine ecosystems, three of which have major fisheries that provide product throughout the world. It is essential to acknowledge these different ecosystems in efforts to build resilience. AFSC is modernizing their entire survey design in the Eastern Bering Sea, an area of ~200,000 square nautical miles, using a 50-year time series and rethinking nearly every aspect, while also striving to maintain a balance and continue to conduct ecosystem surveys. AFSC is building off of the National EEJ Strategy and the regional strategy to inform the kinds of information they need to consider in order to be climate ready.

Emily Ryznar, Research Fisheries Biologist, Resources Assessment and Conservation Engineering Division, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, presented on the Kodiak Lab's regional climate-related research to help build climate-ready fisheries for Alaska. AFSC's goal is to try and provide the best scientific information available to stakeholders in Kodiak, and communities like Kodiak, that depend on Alaskan fisheries as they make adaptation

decisions. However, there exist some cognitive barriers to this adaptation decision making that are apparent in the literature. A framework was developed with this in mind that identified key pieces of information that are integral to adaptation decision making by stakeholders to overcome these cognitive barriers. Stakeholders need to be able to recognize the cause of the fishery's volatility, there needs to be information provided that allows stakeholders to attribute the cause of these volatilities, and stakeholders need to be provided information that allows them to be able to anticipate these changes. Dr. Ryznar discussed examples of AFSC work with collaborators to provide this type of information for stakeholders to make these adaptation decisions, including studies of climate effects on Pacific cod recruitment and the impacts of borealization on Bering Sea snow crab. In addition, they have also tried to be responsive to real time stakeholder needs surrounding fishery changes. With increasing stakeholder needs for information, there often arises an allocation battle between stakeholder groups and with this comes the need to understand where commercial fish populations are occurring throughout the year and how they may be interacting with different fisheries. However, this information is not always readily available throughout the year so they have initiated a collaborative effort between industry, federal, and state partners to fill in the gaps.

Jamie Goen commented that fishermen's knowledge is now being incorporated into the Ecosystem Socioeconomic Profile that is anonymized and made available to scientists to include with the health of the stocks.

Linda O'Dierno asked about the possibility of using AI or other machine learning techniques for predicting future biomass of species and their distribution. Dr. Foy said they need to be using these methods to build on the information they currently have. They are in the process of testing some of these approaches now but find that forecasting ecosystems is too complex to trust the AI outputs. They will continue to refine and validate these models. Dr. Werner added that CEFI will help in this regard by producing more data for the AI models to learn from, particularly its hindcasts. These will tie the data and modeling together in a way that will enable NMFS to take advantage of these new approaches.

Meredith Moore asked if NMFS is able to do forecasts with respect to anticipated size of individuals as the stock moves into an area. She also asked whether the speakers had a sense of who is able to react to this information and quickly incorporate it into science management or business practices. Dr. Foy said they do track and model changes in growth and there are specific process studies that have looked at the potential for growth to change over time. On the second question, the ability to react begins with awareness and this is a key role for AFSC.

Jennifer Hagen asked for more information on what was meant by "co-produced" research, since the presentation did not include how NOAA is transitioning from the way its science has traditionally been done. Dr. Werner said it is an iterative process, and they are in the midst of exploring how they can be more inclusive at the outset of their research. Chair Runnebaum encouraged Ms. Hagen to consider if there is a recommendation MAFAC should make to NOAA on this topic.

Public Comment

Paddy O'Donnell, owner of a trawler in Kodiak, shared his experience as a lifelong fisherman. He felt that it was clear there was no agreement on what a "climate-ready fishery" is, but to him it is being proactive rather than reactive. It is imperative that the fishermen are involved in educating and incorporating their information to the stock assessment process. Survey funding in the Gulf of Alaska has been significantly reduced and the surveys are not necessarily capturing the biomass accurately because of the time of year they are being conducted. The U.S. needs to modernize its aging vessels and processors if they want to be competitive on the global or the domestic markets. This needs to be done with government support. There is a need to educate the U.S. consumer as to the value of wild, sustainable fish versus what is typically sold in America today, which is for the most part imported and farmed. He said NMFS needs to reassess its survey techniques and incorporate more local and traditional knowledge to their data gathering.

MAFAC Reflections on the Discussions and Lab Tour

MAFAC members shared their thoughts on the meeting up to this point. These reflections included: the struggle to define "climate-ready fisheries" and the importance of staying actively engaged with NOAA to resolve this; many of the things MAFAC has heard from the community fall outside of NOAA's jurisdiction and they need to figure out how to carry these ideas forward; there is a need to focus on fishing community well-being and the current fishery management system struggles to identify goals and objectives in this area; there is a need for community on-ramps for accessing NOAA science and information that is relevant to the public; a pilot program in a community like Kodiak may help refine the concept of climate-ready fisheries; many of the issues that have been raised fit nicely into the Saltonstall-Kennedy grant program, though the program has limited funds available and other sources should be pursued; the growth and abundance research happening at the AFSC lab was great to see and will not only help with climate-ready fisheries, but also help fishermen make important decisions about where they are going to put their time and resources; the focus should be on climate-ready fishing communities that are able to respond to changes and not so much the resource itself; more awareness and training are needed around the U.S. and NOAA should provide funding for these; there is a need to support fishing communities of all sizes and MAFAC should make recommendations on how to approach this at a local level with various scales in mind rather than as a blanket national policy; there was a need for increased interagency cooperation, given the forces impacting fishing communities that fall outside of NMFS' purview; there were calls for adaptive management and enhancing communities' ability to respond in real time to impacts; and there is a need for MAFAC to tackle the larger issue of increasing recognition of the value of NOAA Fisheries.

Update from the Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Affairs

Sam Rauch, Deputy Assistant Administrator of Regulatory Programs, discussed NMFS' regulatory activities since the last MAFAC meeting. Fisheries has released its EEJ implementation plans for their regional and headquarters offices and would appreciate any additional feedback from MAFAC. He discussed the work of two other FACAs that MAFAC may want to consider aligning their efforts with. One of these is the Marine and Coastal Area-Based Management Advisory Committee, which NMFS co-chairs. They have been focusing on the President's goal of conserving 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030 and

how BIL and IRA funds could be used to better support and prioritize indigenous-led conservation stewardship. The other one is the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council, which is now an inter-departmental FACA advising both Interior and Commerce. They have been focused on infrastructure and access issues, how sport fish restoration funds are being spent, and better engaging with recreational and restoration organizations. NMFS has given the councils \$20 million to help enable putting climate-ready fisheries information into practice. NMFS has finalized their governance guidance on shifting fish stocks to address jurisdictional issues between councils. This includes triggers for when to assess the change and what criteria will be considered in making a determination. He discussed the Makah final rule on whaling and NMFS West Coast Region's work creating a structure that would allow the tribe to hunt for a small subset of whales. They are currently in the process of working out a management agreement with the tribe. Lastly, Mr. Rauch discussed the National Standards rulemaking, particularly National Standard 9, which deals with minimizing bycatch to the extent practicable. NMFS was concerned about a repeating pattern they were seeing in which a fishery was taking fish that was having significant impacts elsewhere. The proposed rule to amend existing guidance is now being reviewed by OMB.

Jocelyn Runnebaum asked if the council had received the funding yet. Mr. Rauch did not believe they had.

Brett Veerhusen asked if there was anything MAFAC could do to strengthen the proposed rule or ensure that it is taken forward through into the next administration. Mr. Rauch said he anticipates a proposed rule coming out at the end of 2024 and MAFAC can comment on that. They will roll it out through the council process, which will provide another opportunity to weigh in. If it results in a final rule, the Congressional Review Act process would be the next step.

Pat Sullivan said it would be helpful to know more about how FACAs can work together. He also related a comment he received from someone in the North Pacific about a lack of engagement with communities on CEFI. Mr. Rauch said NMFS has been adamant about making sure the councils and regional offices are influencing how CEFI funds are used. There is not enough money for CEFI to do everything so NMFS is attempting to tailor the work to the things that managers can actually make use of.

Meredith Moore asked what the jurisdictional shifts might look like between the U.S. and Canada or Mexico and if NMFS plans to provide any guidance to the commissions on this. Mr. Rauch said some of the Regional Fishery Management Organizations are having these bilateral discussions. He was not aware of any set guidance but this is part of their annual negotiations under individual statutes. It is not something Fisheries can unilaterally provide guidance on because of the nature of the international discussion.

Jaime Diamond asked if there is a way to use EEJ as a way to address overly burdensome mandates or policies on fishing communities and businesses. Mr. Rauch pointed to certain mechanisms NMFS can use, such as community quotas, to address hardships for smaller communities, but the better way is to avoid those disproportionate pressures in the first place. NMFS has asked the National Academies of Science to review their limited entry programs with the EEJ policy in mind. They have also asked each of the councils to assess

whether the program has EEJ effects on their communities. NMFS is using the EEJ policy to try to bring more tribal engagement into council processes and other areas. They are also investing in social and economic data from communities to better understand the impacts that future decisions may have. Ms. Diamond also asked about standards for what is considered best scientific information available (BSIA), particularly in data-poor areas where use of limited information in stock assessments can be detrimental. Mr. Rauch said NMFS is required to make a decision even in the face of uncertainty or a lack of data. They usually address this by setting uncertainty bounds so they can account for this. The councils often adopt risk policies to determine where to put their management efforts.

Jamie Goen asked what NOAA is doing to speed up the fishery disaster process and if it is possible to get to a point where it takes months rather than years to get funds out. Mr. Rauch said there was a congressional bill that created a lot of efficiencies in the process. It added some new obligations while also creating new timeframes, and NMFS has been implementing that for some of the recent disasters. This significantly reduced the processing time on NMFS' part. Because there are no standing appropriations for disasters, the pace at which Fisheries can give out money depends on the pace at which they can get the money. Fishery disaster funds have never been the kind of rapid relief that other agencies can provide because it is often unclear what the extent of the disaster is until some time has passed. It is not designed to ameliorate a disaster as it is happening; it will always be after the fact, which limits some of the models NMFS can use.

NOAA Recreational Fisheries Update

Russ Dunn, National Policy Advisor for Recreational Fisheries, presented a status update on the Fishing Effort Survey (FES) and NMFS' effort in re-envisioning the state-federal recreational data partnership. The FES is a survey instrument to estimate recreational fishing effort, collecting the number of days fished by anglers from shore and private boats for specified periods of time. After an evaluation of potential shortcomings in the initial FES pilot, NMFS launched a longer-term large-scale follow up study that began in January 2024 and will continue until the end of the year. They have gathered about five months of data and they are seeing that the data is in line with the pilot study evaluation. NMFS is currently laying the groundwork for potentially transitioning to the new methodology and beginning work on the calibration model development. In the spring, they anticipate having the final estimates from the year-long study available and a final report in the summer. 2026 would be the earliest the new methodology would be available.

Kellie Ralston asked about the implications of the FES for management, particularly given the significant management decisions that are going to be made before the final data is released and the existing data is presumed to be inaccurate. Mr. Dunn said the guidance that the agency has put forward is to continue using the existing FES data until an updated time series is available. It is difficult to guess what the impact would be if the final results of the study were available and integrated. Vice Chair Ralston said it would be nice to see some of the more impactful management decisions delayed until they have more solid data. Mr. Dunn said there are legal pressures coming from other directions requiring NMFS to act on the information they have in hand.

Meredith Moore complimented NMFS on the updates, transparency, and testing that led to

this effort to reduce uncertainties. Jim Green added that he was pleased to see the numbers revisited. Using the FES numbers to reallocate a fishery in the Gulf will likely lead to a legal challenge once the methodology is finalized and the numbers recalibrated. He thought the agency should steer away from that for now. He commended NOAA for going back and addressing the problems with their initial survey and felt it led to goodwill in the community.

Russ Dunn continued his presentation to focus on NMFS' initiative to collaboratively re-envision the recreational fishing data partnership with the states. Following four webinars with councils, commissions, state directors, and other stakeholders, their key takeaways were to: build trust and credibility across the board; acknowledge and seek regional data collection flexibility; ensure stability and consistency for aspects of the program that work; develop adaptive management frameworks that better consider data uncertainty and limitations; and continue work to improve recreational fishing effort estimates. Their working goal is to create a nationally coherent system that is region-specific and allows NMFS to obtain the best possible data for informing sustainable and adaptive management. They expect to compile a report in the coming months, build workshop agendas, and identify working groups. Next summer, NMFS plans to take the outputs from the working groups and everything they have heard to date and host a series of regional visioning workshops. In 2026, they anticipate coming forward with a final structure and plan for moving forward, but they intend to improve things as they progress. Mr. Dunn discussed some of the projects currently underway, including strengthening state partner review of preliminary catch and effort estimates, supporting development of a regionally consistent for-hire logbook framework in the Atlantic, and commissioning independent review of national survey and data standards. He reviewed some of their recent and upcoming public engagements.

Jocelyn Runnebaum confirmed that the Recreational Subcommittee was drafting recommendations on this and asked what the timeframe is for when MAFAC would need to approve and submit them. Mr. Dunn said that they would want them by early winter, but the sooner the better. Heidi Lovett noted that, because it was a listening session, the feedback did have to be consensus-based.

Jaime Diamond said they need to clarify who they are trying to reach with these engagements. Translation services for some of the materials would also be very helpful. She thought better private recreational reporting would be valuable.

Jim Green said that he agreed with using state data, which often include robust local data systems. He also agreed that more private recreational data would be helpful and suggested a free national fisheries permit for federal waters to create a database that could provide a broader picture of resource use. He also said that more focus needs to be given to depredation and discards, which is a major issue for recreational fisheries.

Kellie Ralston said that, from the perspective of the average angler, a successful program would be management actions that match the conditions they are seeing. This is a high bar but what NOAA should be aiming for. She added that having a good understanding of where the data gaps are is something to strive for and that as new data streams are identified, they need to meet the data standards required for management decisions. She suggested the Recreational Subcommittee update their paper on electronic reporting with more up-to-date and targeted information, but thought the recommendations included in it are still

important.

Day 3 (9/12/24)

Alaska Fishing Industry Snapshot Report

Bob Foy provided background on the report, which was initiated by a meeting in May to discuss the global seafood crisis and how to improve the competitive position of U.S.-produced seafood in global markets. Secretary Raimondo asked for further information from NMFS on the current state of the industry. The information contained in the report is available on an annual basis in different forms, but this is the first time they have assembled it in a way that communicates out to the industry and the public the full situation for Alaska fisheries. This is an example of the kind of product that NMFS hopes to be able to produce as an industry service in the future.

Ben Fissel, Economist, Office of Science and Technology, and Stephen Kasperski, Economist, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, presented highlights of the report, which serves as an independent assessment of the current economic and social conditions in the Alaska seafood industry. The seafood industry is a major private sector employer in Alaska, and fisheries are an economic and cultural engine across coastal communities. A number of the recent challenges that the industry has been facing revolve around lower seafood prices. This has many causes, one of which is changes in the way that retail operations are handling seasonal influx of seafood products, which have contributed to large seafood inventories and lower prices received by processors and wholesalers. There is a lack of market differentiation between the sustainably harvested and regulated Alaska seafood and products produced in Russia through the MSE certification. The strength of the U.S. dollar makes exports less competitive, which is particularly a challenge for the Alaskan industry. Asymmetries in seafood tariffs still exist for several important trading partners, including China, the EU, and Japan, which have duty free access to the U.S. markets, while U.S. producers on average face between 1 and 30 percent tariffs in those countries. There is no federally sponsored revenue insurance mechanism for the fisheries sector that might help to mitigate against unexpected revenue declines as a result of market collapses or environmental challenges. There are higher input costs, both on the harvesting and processing side for Alaskan producers. The fisheries disasters are also an ongoing challenge in Alaska. Since 2019, the Secretary of Commerce has approved \$340 million in disaster relief funds for loss of crab, salmon, and cod fisheries, and there are amounts still to be determined for three additional cases of disaster relief. This has also resulted in a number of processing plant closures, either seasonal or permanent, which have impacted a variety of Alaskan fishing communities. In addition to residual COVID impacts, the area has aging physical capital infrastructure. Cumulatively, the result of these stressors has been a severe decline in the commercial fishing participation in the region for about the last decade. Communities with plant closures face substantial tax revenue losses from processing and local spending, creating uncertainty in community budgets and spending. And community businesses that support the fishing industry and rely on fishermen's spending are also struggling to survive. Upwards of 70 percent of Alaska's seafood products are exported and many will undergo secondary processing in China, which means Alaska is exposed to a number of trade shocks, supply chain disruptions, or changes in costs. Between 2022 and 2023, the statewide first wholesale average price is estimated to have declined by about 23%, and the statewide average ex-

vessel price is estimated to have dropped by 38%. Mr. Fissel discussed the process for estimating impact on fisheries and support sectors, which reach well beyond just the state of Alaska and impact many local community infrastructure projects. The \$1.8 billion loss in direct revenue to the Alaska seafood industry between 2022 and 2023 resulted in a loss of 38,000 jobs to the U.S. jobs, both fishing and non-fishing, for a result of a \$4.3 billion loss in U.S. output and a \$269 million decrease in U.S. state and local tax revenues.

Pat Sullivan asked if they had a presentation to give some idea of what can be done about this. Mr. Kasperski said the Alaska state legislature has a task force that will be looking at this and this report will be informing their thinking. Ms. Coit added that the National Seafood Strategy is also intended to address the issue, though many of the challenges are outside of NOAA's purview. They have been working to find ways to make progress beyond NOAA, including a successful effort at a recent G-7 meeting to get the other countries to commit to reducing Russian seafood imports through prohibitions or tariffs.

Hugh Cowperthwaite asked for more information on the processing done in China. Mr. Kasperski said China processes a lot of seafood for many countries, not just the U.S., because of their low labor costs. Mr. Fissel said there are two ways to address this, bolstering U.S. processing and shifting the non-domestic processing to alternative countries. Mr. Veerhusen discussed this experience in the industry and the demands on U.S. producers in a global marketplace. Mr. Prewitt said this exemplifies some of the problems he has witnessed in the seafood supply chain that are a barrier to being able to offer top quality seafood.

Kristina Alexander commented on the tax benefits for farmers compared to those available for fishermen and asked what sort of tax claims are available to fishermen that would help offset these losses. Mr. Fissel said they have not looked at the industry's tax returns. Mr. Kasperski said that, in the past, NOAA has put together information about tax and other benefits available to fishermen and could likely do so again. Chair Runnebaum said it would be worth including in both the National Seafood Strategy and snapshot report how taxes compare across these different industries and how it plays into the full picture.

Meredith Moore asked about revenue insurance and if there are functional models for insurance that work for the fishing industry. Mr. Kasperski said there have been some self-organized voluntary risk pools attempted, but he was not aware of a successful model nor was he sure people would be willing to pay into this kind of insurance scheme. It is an area that needs more work and discussions with USDA about the programs they offer.

Reports from the State Directors Meeting and Fisheries Commissions

Bob Beal, Executive Director, Atlantic States, highlighted some of the recent fishery management issues along the East Coast. Striped bass is currently overfished and the commission is working to rebuild the stock by 2029. An updated assessment will be released in October, which will inform any necessary management adjustments. For at least the last five years, recruitment has been at its lowest levels in the time series data available and there appears to be a link to climate changes associated with it. They are now trying to determine if the productivity of the stock has significantly changed and if they are attempting to rebuild to levels the stock no longer supports. Mr. Beal discussed concerns

around Chesapeake Bay menhaden harvest levels and the commission has initiated a working group to determine if more precautionary management is needed. Coast-wide, the population is doing well, but they do not currently have the resolution of data to make sense of what is happening in the Chesapeake. There is a lot of potential interaction between North Atlantic Right Whales and lobster fisheries and other fixed gear on the East Coast. The commission developed a plan to better understand the situation and required all federally permitted vessels to carry cellular trackers on board. They are also pursuing initiatives to have high resolution data that characterizes where the North Atlantic Right Whales are and then overlay those two sets of data to determine where to put their focus for potential interactions. There are some legal challenges to this and the commission is doing outreach to explain the need for the high resolution data. There are signs that the lobster population in the Gulf of Maine is down, with landings having declined 35-40 percent. The commission is proposing a minimum size increase, which has been repeatedly delayed due to potential economic concerns for the lobster fishery as well as some trade issues with Canada. Biological sampling in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast is down by about 50% in the past few years and is projected to be down as much as 80% in the future. They are looking at ways to supplement biological sampling and trawl surveys, including a pilot program allowing industry boats to tow gear that could provide additional data. The commission has been working on a scenario planning exercise with several partners to explore likely climate scenarios and how to prepare to manage impacts. Mr. Beal briefly discussed several other topics that the commission has been working on, including plankton monitoring, ropeless gear, and offshore wind energy development.

Jocelyn Runnebaum asked about the funding outlook for fundamental data collection and support for the industry-based pilot. Mr. Beal said they are seeking about \$3 million for the pilot program and the Senate mark of the FY25 budget included it, while the House version did not.

Amy Green asked about the timeline for the actions on rebuilding the menhaden stock. Mr. Beal said they have been hamstrung by a lack of data and lack of resolution in the data they do have. The working group's final report on menhaden management will likely be available in early February and then the Menhaden Management Board will decide whether to initiate management actions.

Tom Fote asked about the recent decision on black sea bass at the joint meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Council and ASMFC. Mr. Beal said an assessment came out this year based on a new model showing the black sea bass population to be at about 200% of the target. The assessment made a number of assumptions about the future of recruitment that the council and commission differed on. The council's recommendation has to go to the Regional Administrator for approval and the commission is waiting for that decision.

David Donaldson, Executive Director, Gulf States, discussed recent topics of interest in the Gulf of Mexico region. Data collection is a major concern, as several funding streams ran out in 2024 and the possibility of increased funding for FY25 is not promising. There is a possibility there will not be any recreational biological sampling in the Gulf of Mexico through the GulfFIN program, which would have a significant impact on assessments. The commission is working to secure long-term funding for new recreational state surveys in Mississippi and Alabama. They received some IRA funding to help address several issues,

including strengthening the state-federal partnership. Another issue the commission is focusing on is revisiting and updating the recreational data standards. From that, they would then evaluate and improve data management systems, both for GulfFIN as well as the states. Ultimately, they plan to house all the recreational data for the Gulf of Mexico states. The commission has been convening workshops on recreational fishing effort and discards. They have assembled a steering committee that developed terms of reference and they are currently using the findings from these two workshops to develop an RFP to solicit research projects in these areas. The RFP should be out by fall and the research proposals selected by early 2025, with work to begin later in the year. Mr. Donaldson commented that many of the Alaska issues discussed during this meeting have been issues they are facing in the Gulf as well.

Kristina Alexander asked about the process within the commissions for transferring fishery disaster funding to the states. Mr. Donaldson said that in the Gulf, it depends on the magnitude of the disaster. They only get involved if the disaster affects three or more of the states, in which case they work closely with the states in developing their spend plans and getting the necessary information to NOAA Fisheries. Once the spend plans are approved, the commission enters into agreements with the states on the various activities and then the money comes to the commission and they distribute it through these sub-agreements. Mr. Beal said the Atlantic states operate in a similar manner, an administrative role rather than a decision making role on who gets the money and how much they get or what projects are priorities for those individual states.

NOAA Fisheries Budget Outlook (FY25)

Emily Menashes, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations, discussed her role in NOAA Fisheries since taking over for Paul Doremus and provided an overview of the FY25 NMFS budget outlook. FY24 was a particularly challenging year due to the transition over to several new financial systems. The FY25 budget has received both its House and Senate marks and they were still waiting for Congress to conference. The new fiscal year will begin on October 1 and they anticipate the government will be operating under a continuing resolution. NMFS is currently in the formulation phase for the FY26 budget, which is typically issued in early February though it may come out later due to the election. NOAA Fisheries' budget is structured around four main activities: protected resources, fisheries science and management, enforcement, and habitat conservation and restoration. Ms. Menashes discussed the breakdown of spending for the FY24 enacted budget for NMFS' Operations, Research, and Facilities account, which represents nearly all of their funding and received a net increase of \$20.5 million in FY24. Additionally, NMFS received \$46 million in community funded projects that were congressionally directed. She discussed the activities with the largest spending in FY24, which included repairing and renovating infrastructure to support sustainable fisheries on the East Coast, standing up an Aquaculture Cooperative Institute, and increases for Pacific salmon. The FY25 President's budget for Fisheries was \$9.7 million below the FY24 enacted. The FY25 House mark was almost \$250 million less than the FY24 enacted budget, which would have a significant impact across all of their program areas; while the Senate mark was \$43 million above what the President requested. The budget will end up somewhere between these two, which is a \$300 million spread for a \$1 billion agency, making planning very challenging. The election cycle adds another layer of

complexity and uncertainty to their planning. Fisheries is exploring ways to convey their core needs and priorities to a new administration and how these might fit within a new administration's priorities as well. Ms. Menashes thanked MAFAC for their letter that outlined priority areas they felt should be taken into account. It is helpful for NMFS to have that kind of documented support and justification for why those activities are important. She also discussed recent work to develop program plans for five areas. These include illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing, aquaculture, fishery surveys, Right Whales, and consultations. Fisheries is eager to engage MAFAC on these plans.

Jocelyn Runnebaum asked if there is a specific timing for when championing NOAA Fisheries is most impactful. Ms. Menashes said the development of NMFS' internal budget is in the spring; opportunities for influencing Congress would be in late spring and summer.

Brett Veerhusen asked if Ms. Menashes had any suggestions for MAFAC on providing advice to the Secretary. Ms. Menashes said part of the potential advantage of the program plans will be to have conversations around what NMFS could achieve with more and what they will not be able to deliver if funding is below certain levels. It is important to be able to manage those expectations and be clear with external stakeholders and get them to understand that if they want to influence those expectations, there is a way to do that without necessarily talking about specific budget asks.

Meredith Moore said it would be nice to see the IRA roll-out timeline added to the slide showing the budget cycle timeline. She also said it would be worthwhile to invite representatives from OMB and OSTP to a MAFAC meeting to hear about their ocean priorities and discuss some of MAFAC's concerns around budget. She noted that the program plans are not addressing some of NMFS' core programmatic needs and there is a lot of work Fisheries does that has needs that need to be articulated.

Bobbi Hudson asked about the current status of the Saltonstall-Kennedy grants, which were proposed for cutting. Ms. Menashes said it is a complicated program in how it interacts with USDA, tariffs, and NOAA's budget. Congress can decide how much of the fund they want to use for the agency budget and what is left over goes to the grant program itself, so it varies every year. She did not have an answer to its current status for FY25. Ms. Coit added that it is a very popular program that needs more money than it gets. Ultimately, it is Congress that decides how much funding it will receive. While MAFAC cannot lobby Congress, the members as individuals or on behalf of their organizations do have the opportunity to influence Congress.

Pat Sullivan asked how much funding for surveys was proposed to be set aside. Ms. Menashes said this is an activity that generally has been relatively consistent. Dr. Sullivan said that survey coverage for FY24 was 70% of what is expected and consistent funding would seem to be insufficient for the need. Dr. Werner said that the 70% coverage NMFS has had for the last few years were due to issues with staffing and ship time that have been largely resolved. They believe they will be able to achieve close to 90% now, though they are entering a period of mid-life ship repairs, which will present a challenge. Members asked further clarifying questions about survey coverage.

Brett Veerhusen requested that, while developing the program plans, MAFAC have an

opportunity to provide input prior to their public release. These plans would be great tools for internal and external communications, and MAFAC may be able to assist in elevating them. He added that he would like to see an update at the next meeting on how the NAPA report recommendations are being acted upon within the agency.

Public Comment

Clayton Hevly, who works at Alaska Pacific Seafoods in Kodiak, commented on some of the discussions during the meeting. To him, climate-ready fisheries are supported by climate-ready communities that are balanced and adaptable. The unique fishing community in Kodiak has weathered many challenging market conditions over the last several years as it has seen major changes in processing facilities, shipping challenges, and labor shortages. He discussed some of Alaska Pacific Seafoods' efforts to remain resilient and take care of its staff in the face of changing conditions. Kodiak continues to struggle with processing innovations and market challenges. NOAA could help identify and scale green energy usage and help promote sustainably processed seafood products that domestic customers would be proud to buy. The U.S. should look at sustainable practices being tried in other countries. Climate change is bringing new protein sources to U.S. waterfronts and they need to be able to adapt and use what comes in. Some fish species might not be able to survive future ocean conditions and policy needs to be able to adapt to the way things are, not the way things were. To better understand fishing's impact on resources and to minimize bycatch, they should be using available assets for in-season management.

Rebecca Skinner, a member of the Chinook Tribe of Kodiak that works with the Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association, discussed her experiences traveling to fishing communities throughout the state and the rest of the country. She felt more awareness needs to be brought to the work of MAFAC as they advise NOAA Fisheries. NMFS policies impact people, businesses, and communities and it is important for the public to have visibility on that process and the opportunity to be involved. U.S. seafood needs champions in Congress and the administration. More funding should be geared toward revamping or improving seafood processing facilities in the U.S. and there needs to be someone pushing for this when opportunities arise. She mentioned that there are still five flatfish codes that have not been exempted from Section 301 tariffs. Finally, she commented on the complexity of managing the seafood industry and marine resources, especially given all of the regulatory systems and bodies, most of which have little communication with each other. It would be helpful to bridge some of these gaps to ensure stakeholder concerns are being addressed.

Paddy O'Donnell commented that NOAA should have gotten the word out about the MAFAC meeting, possibly through the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. The U.S. government must increase its promotion of U.S. seafood domestically and educate the public on its benefits. The U.S. has the lowest per capita consumption of seafood globally. It is essential to promote, along with education on how to properly cook fish. He was frustrated that they were not able to get enough money to add an additional survey vessel and he felt NMFS should move towards collaborative research.

Scott Arndt thanked MAFAC and NOAA Fisheries staff for coming to Kodiak to see first-hand what they do.

Jeffrey Stephan, former MAFAC member, also thanked the advisory committee for having their meeting in Kodiak and encouraged them to think about how they advertise their meetings in the future.

MAFAC Committee Reflections and Discussion

Each of the subcommittee chairs facilitated conversations on what they heard during the meeting and how it relates to their work plans. Linda O'Dierno, Commerce Subcommittee Chair, said the message came through clearly that American fisheries are in crisis and if no action is taken, there may be no fish for the future. It is important to remember that the money earned in fishing communities goes towards supporting the rest of the local economy, as well as public services and infrastructure. The ability of a nation to provide an affordable, nutritious food supply for its citizens is the cornerstone of its national security. Currently, the U.S. imports about 85% of the seafood it consumes. That supply may not be there in the future as many of the countries we import from have rising middle class populations that are keeping more of those products at home. She pointed to the goals of the National Seafood Strategy and encouraged MAFAC members to read through the implementation plan. NOAA has limited funds available, so reaching out to other agencies is a critical direction for the industry. Members discussed the need for improved interagency coordination. Ms. Coit suggested having an interagency panel at a future MAFAC to discuss their relevant programs.

Brett Veerhusen, Strategic Planning and Budget Subcommittee Chair, said the committee is wrestling with timing around the release of the program plans and want to be able to provide advice to inform future iterations of them. Throughout the meeting, he heard the need for NMFS to be more proactive and to be less reactive. Members heard the need for strategic outreach and educational opportunities for communities. MAFAC should consider partnering with universities to offer alternative breaks to provide fishery education and outreach to students. Members suggested finding ways to keep abreast of what other committees are working on to align their efforts. Members suggested looking into the cost efficiency of NOAA doing research versus funding grants to institutions to perform research.

Meredith Moore, Climate and Ecosystems Subcommittee Chair, said the subcommittee is focusing on the science-to-management gap that has been discussed during this meeting. MAFAC should be thinking about how they can help the management system and industry be more proactive and reactive to the science that is coming in. She suggested that the subcommittee work on characterizing community well-being and how it can be incorporated into management. They also need to figure out how to bring more voices into this conversation. The subcommittee also wants to start thinking outside of routine fishery management questions and they heard during the meeting that climate-ready fisheries also means thinking about trade, jurisdiction, and many other issues that are part of the structural ecosystem that will make fisheries more prepared for climate and ecosystem change and other stresses.

Jaime Diamond and Jim Green, Recreational Subcommittee Co-Chairs, said they were focusing on the Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy's primary goal of promoting inclusive and sustainable saltwater recreational and non-commercial fishing for the social, cultural, and economic benefit of the nation. They are exploring how NOAA can better achieve this

goal in partnership with communities. In order to realize the benefits of recreational fishing, they need to be looking at things like multiparty engagement to strengthen partnerships and promote angler stewardship and improving the ability to address challenges in fisheries science and management. It is a far-reaching sector that impacts significant economic revenue and jobs in the U.S. It is crucial to take the time to look at how to ensure equitable access and sustainable fisheries for recreation for the benefit of all Americans. The subcommittee reviewed the 2023 NOAA Fisheries Recreational Fisheries Economic Constituents Workshop Report and the key needs that it highlighted. They would like to hear input from MAFAC members on which tasks they thought would be most valuable to address. The subcommittee also discussed how improved technologies could lead to more selective fishing and more satisfied anglers, though there needs to be a conservation ethic consideration as well. Mr. Fote commented that catch-and-release mortality is a long-standing issue that needs to be addressed.

Pat Sullivan, Protected Resources Subcommittee Chair, discussed the survey the subcommittee developed to capture knowledge and perceptions about the nature of marine mammal interactions and the use of deterrents. The survey will be released soon and Dr. Sullivan will then be involved in analyzing the data collected. Ms. Zanowicz added that they will be asking for the MAFAC's help in distributing the survey as broadly as possible.

Close Out: Review of Action Items, Next Steps, and Next Meeting

Jocelyn Runnebaum provided a recap of some of the key points MAFAC heard during the meeting.

The next MAFAC meeting is tentatively scheduled the week of April 22-24, 2025, in either the Gulf of Mexico or South Atlantic region. They will be sending out a poll to get feedback on those and alternative dates.

Janet Coit said she would likely not be at the next MAFAC meeting after a new administration comes in. She thanked the MAFAC for all their work and contributions to the agency. She cautioned them that to have too many priorities is to have no priorities; she suggested narrowing their focus and getting some feedback on what would be most actionable. Things take a long time in government but she felt NMFS was moving in the right direction in many areas and MAFAC members played an important role in influencing this. NOAA Fisheries need champions and improved communications strategies to talk about food security and cultural relevance in a way that the public responds to in order to gain traction for their critical mission.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:27 p.m.