

# Ecosystem Committee Minutes

March 14, 2005 1-4 pm  
Teleconference

Committee: Stephanie Madsen (Chair), Jim Balsiger, Doug DeMaster, David Fluharty, David Benton, Jim Ayers, John Iani, Chris Oliver (staff), David Witherell (staff), Diana Evans (staff)

Others present: Heather Brandon

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The Committee discussed the two items on its agenda: preparatory discussions for the national conference, and review of the staff discussion paper on ways for the NPFMC to be involved or take the lead in development of ecosystem approaches to management.

Ms Evans presented a synopsis of the discussion topics for the ecosystem approaches panel of the national Managing Fisheries II conference. The Ecosystem Committee discussed each topic.

On the subjects of *technical requirements for an ecosystem approach to fisheries*, and *science limitations*, the Committee agreed that ecosystem-based management should be adopted regardless of the current state of ecosystem knowledge, as uncertainty will always be present in management decisions. At the same time, however, continuing to expand and improve ecosystem research is critical to ensure the goal of healthy ecosystems is met. A suggestion was made that research requests should be focused to address specific issues; Dr Balsiger agreed to present the Committee with a summary of the Alaska region's research funding requests for the next three years.

With regard to the *type of ecosystem planning document*, the Committee discussed the inter-relationship of ecosystem plans with fishery management plans. The related topic of a *process of developing ecosystem-based goals and objectives* elicited a discussion of the fact that the type of decisions that are made at each planning level determines the chosen goals and objectives. Staff agreed to provide a graphic diagram illustrating the interrelationship of documents and decision points in conjunction with the presentation of the Aleutian Islands discussion paper at the April Ecosystem Committee meeting. The Committee is also interested to hear discussions on these items at the national conference.

The Committee did not come to a conclusion about *developing national guidelines* or *ecosystem-based changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Act*, and intends to reinitiate these discussions at future meetings. On both issues, members of the Committee expressed caution about loosely-worded requirements that are overly binding or overly optimistic, and commented that the North Pacific has been successful in proceeding with ecosystem-based management under current authority. It was, however, noted that other Councils may not have the same history of tending towards precaution. The Committee had no comments on the *overfishing scorecard* topic resulting from Mr Rufe's invited paper.

The discussion of the final topic, *regional ocean or ecosystem councils*, segued into the review of the staff discussion paper. Ms Evans presented an overview of the paper and the three options describing the potential roles for NPFMC involvement in regional ecosystem councils. The Committee discussed the three options, and suggested the paper make clear that the Council's fishery management mandate includes promoting healthy ecosystems. The Committee also suggested that staff continue to develop the options for the April Ecosystem Committee meeting, and provided some guidance on variations of Option 2 that might be closer either to Option 1 or Option 3. Revisions to the paper will expand the discussion of who would sit on an ecosystem council and the scope of the council's work. The paper should also recognize that guidance to date has emphasized the need for regional flexibility among large marine ecosystem areas, and has recommended that the ecosystem councils be voluntary.