

Ecosystem Committee Minutes

Monday, May 21, 2007 1pm-5pm
Traynor Room, Building 4, AFSC, Seattle, WA
Videoconference sites: NMFS Alaska Region offices, Anchorage and Juneau

Committee: Stephanie Madsen (chair), David Benton, David Fluharty, Jim Ayers, Jon Kurland, Diana Evans (staff)

AI Ecosystem Team: Steve Barbeaux, Forrest Bowers, Sarah Gaichas, Carol Ladd, Sandra Lowe, John Olson, Francis Wiese

Others participating included: Jennifer Boldt, Melanie Brown, Steve Davis, Kristy Despars, Tony Ellison, Ben Enticknap, Roy Hyder, Peter Jones, Chris Krenz, Joe McCabe, John Moller, Ivonne Ortiz, Chris Oliver, Tom Van Pelt, Dave Witherell

The Committee reviewed the Aleutian Islands Fishery Ecosystem Plan. Members of the Aleutian Islands Ecosystem Team discussed the FEP with the Committee, and presented the new chapters of the document, including implications for management resulting from the qualitative risk assessment. Dr Jennifer Boldt updated the Committee on how the FEP indicators will be incorporated into the annual Ecosystem Considerations report. The Committee developed the following recommendations.

The Committee recommends that the Council adopt the AI FEP at the June meeting, with some minor changes. Overall, the Committee believes that the FEP provides a new and holistic perspective on the Aleutian Islands ecosystem that will help guide fishery management decisions regarding the area. The Committee emphasizes that the FEP is a living document, and should not be considered a final product. While the FEP as it is now can inform the management and scientific process, it represents one stage of a stepwise process. As such, the FEP should be reviewed on an annual basis.

The Committee suggests some rewriting of the socioeconomic and regulatory interactions. The discussions in some of these interactions should be more explicitly tied to the FEP's goal statement to "promote ecosystem health, sustainable fisheries, and vibrant communities". Additionally, Interaction R, "Changes in commercial seafood processing capabilities in the AI fishery ecosystem impact fisheries and communities", should be broadened to include all coastal infrastructure and development impacts (for example, harbor improvements and upland development). The existing writeup under Interaction R fits more appropriately with the community sustainability discussion (Interaction Q).

Section 6.5 of the FEP provides a list of research priorities identified during the development of the FEP. **The Committee recommends that the research priorities are folded in to the Council's overall research priorities and forwarded to the appropriate research and funding entities.**

The AI Ecosystem Team's remit ends with the final edits to the FEP document, and the preparation of the glossy FEP synthesis that will be put together over the summer. **The Committee recommends that the Council keep the AI Ecosystem Team active, with the same membership.** In order for the FEP to serve an effective role in the Council management process, there needs to be a designated group to coordinate the FEP's utility. The Team would have the following tasks. First, the Team would complete the FEP, and refine it on a periodic basis as new information becomes available. Second, the Team would bring forward the assessment of FEP indicators and AI modeling to the Plan Teams on an annual basis. Third, the Team would report to the SSC with regard to the FEP indicators and updates to the document.

Fourth, the Team would serve as a conduit for the Council to provide AI FEP information to other agencies, through the Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum.

The Committee will continue to work with the Team to review FEP progress, and provide feedback to the Team and the Council. The FEP also includes ideas about how the Council could move forward with formally integrating ecosystem-based management and mitigating risks associated with management. Specifically, the FEP suggests the Council further develop the concept of 'ecosystem health' referred to in the goal statement. **The Committee offers to begin the task of defining desirable or undesirable states of the ecosystem as a first step.**

The Committee agrees with the Team's recommendation to use and refine the AI FEP before embarking on FEPs for other Alaska regions. At the same time, **the Committee suggests that the Council revisit the question of whether to initiate other FEPs in Alaska next year.**

The Committee also urges the Council to continue to actively engage in the Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum. The FEP demonstrates the interconnectivity of fishery activities with other actions ongoing in the ecosystem area. It is important for the Council to interact with other agencies, to find out about issues affecting fishery resources, and to share information.