

MEMORANDUM FOR: Members of MAFAC

FROM: James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.

SUBJECT: New MAFAC Handbook in Draft

We have updated and expanded a MAFAC Handbook for the use of all new and existing members. Its final form will be electronic (on a web site and CDROM). I hope it will help us maximize the contributions of MAFAC to the conservation and management of the nation's living marine resources. Your feedback and suggestions on the draft are welcome.

This Handbook has the primary function of serving as a relevant "user's guide" to MAFAC and NOAA – to provide essential information to members on the organization, purpose and conduct of the Committee and its members ranging from practical matters such as how to comply with expense reimbursement requirements, to basic policy documents and information sources. It also includes two key recent MAFAC documents that should serve as a ready reference for all our deliberations this year: *The Future of Marine Fisheries: Fisheries and Ocean Policy for the New Administration*; and *Vision 2020: The Future of U.S. Marine Fisheries*.

MAFAC is unique in its role and potential. MAFAC advises the Secretary of Commerce on policies and guidance for stewardship of the Nation's living marine resources. It is one of only four Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) groups in NOAA (which also include the Science Advisory Board, the Marine Protected Areas Advisory Committee, and the Hydrographic Services Review Panel). It is also quite different from the Fishery Management Councils that are responsible primarily for recommending specific fishery management actions to the Secretary. In its pursuit of excellence for NOAA Fisheries, MAFAC can take the "broad view" and aggressively debate and recommend essential changes for the agency. As a national advisory committee with diverse expertise and disciplines in the fields of living marine resource management and science, MAFAC has proven to be an invaluable resource for the Administration to identify common ground on which controversial and highly visible issues can move forward.

MAFAC is the oldest advisory body in NOAA, having advised on implementation of such landmark initiatives as the Law of the Sea and the original Fisheries Conservation and Management Act of 1976. It is the only FACA-chartered advisory committee with responsibility to "advise the Secretary on all living marine resources that are the responsibility of the Department of Commerce." Many marine resource issues tend to be highly controversial and require a great deal of public transparency and consensus building. The MAFAC has become an increasingly useful asset for serving in this role, providing the agency and the Administration with a public sounding board to identify issues and develop strategies on which common ground and mutual agreement can be established. While regional commissions and councils exist, MAFAC is the only national,

open, transparent organization that focuses on oceans policy and living marine resource stewardship from the unique perspective of stakeholders collaborating with the government to advise on national policy. MAFAC meetings are open to the public. The detailed and explanatory discussions of complex issues (that are not always articulated well in the media) allow the agency a degree of public discussion and education that is proving increasingly valuable.

The NOAA Administrator (Chair) and the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries (vice-Chair) actively participate on the Committee and help identify topics for deliberation by the Committee that are timely and relevant to the Secretary. MAFAC in return provides recommendations to the Secretary regarding policies, regulations, and programs that are the responsibility of the Department.

In FY 2008, MAFAC provided advisory recommendations on: development of national aquaculture legislation and the operation of NOAA's Aquaculture Program; the NOAA Marine Recreational Improvement Program to expand and refine the agency's collection of data on recreational fisheries; completed and delivered to NOAA a long-term strategic plan on the future of living marines resources management, with a general summary of expectations for U.S. fisheries and aquaculture in the year 2020 and the necessary science and management priorities to be anticipated; defined the appropriate roles of the Department and NOAA in the eco-labeling of seafood; identified the priorities and programs necessary to ensure seafood safety and quality; and prepared for use by future administrations a transition document highlighting key marine policy issues that will be faced by the federal government in early 2009.

I am confident that MAFAC will position itself to be particularly relevant and helpful to the next administration. I am counting on MAFAC to help the agency maintain some continuity as an institution, and to serve as an active and effective advisory group to the Secretary on issues of policy and priority, particularly regarding the management of the nation's living marine resources. In particular, I am anxious to hear what MAFAC, as a public group that's providing a lot of different perspectives on challenges within the fishing and seafood community, can advocate or promote from a strategic level. MAFAC can contribute views somewhat different than what the Administration and people already know; such as one that identifies for the first 100 days, or the first year, what aspects of Vision 2020 should be addressed right away, starting with the early days of the transition between administrations.

This year is unique and important in a number of ways: It marks MAFAC's 37<sup>th</sup> birthday; we have many new members; and the next 12-18 months will be a period of significant change for the Administration and at all levels in the nation. It will be a challenging time that will also offer opportunities. I look forward very much to working with you on behalf of the nation and its living marine resources.