North Pacific Fishery Management Council Ecosystem Research Workshop

Workshop Discussion Guide
June 2018

This document is provided as a discussion guide to accompany the Ecosystem Research Workshop Summary. For more information about the workshop, including the agenda, workshop objectives, and briefing materials, please see the Ecosystem Research Workshop page of the Council website.

Introduction

June 2018 briefing and discussions

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) convened a one-day Ecosystem Research Workshop on February 7th, 2018 to support discussion among the Council community regarding the integration of ecosystem knowledge into the Council process. At the June 2018 Council meeting in Kodiak, AK, the Council, Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), Ecosystem Committee (EC), and Advisory Panel (AP) will each receive a briefing on the workshop summary and engage in a discussion of next steps. The purpose of this discussion guide is to help focus and frame each group's discussion and help generate ideas for further consideration by the Council, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), advisory bodies, and the public.

This discussion guide was developed by the Fisheries Leadership & Sustainability Forum based on input provided by the Ecosystem Research Workshop steering committee and workshop speakers. It includes proposed discussion questions and examples of specific next steps. These ideas and guidance are provided as a starting point for discussion and are not intended as recommendations to the Council on behalf of any group or individual.

Defining next steps

At the workshop, "next steps" were defined broadly as opportunities for the Council community to stay informed of ecosystem research, provide input, and integrate this knowledge into Council processes. For example, next steps could involve identifying specific ideas to implement, questions to consider, conversations to continue, and coordination, planning, or communication needs to support.

At the June Council meeting, the Council and its advisory bodies may identify more specific next steps for consideration during the staff tasking session or at a later date. For example, next steps could also include:

- Identifying linkages to work that is currently underway, planned, or under consideration by the Council, NMFS Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC), universities, or other groups
- Developing requests for further analysis and support by Council staff (for example, in the form of focused discussion papers or future Fishery Ecosystem Plan modules)
- Developing specific questions or requests for additional information, analysis, or guidance by NMFS AFSC and/or the SSC

Discussion questions

The following questions may be useful to consider in preparation for the Ecosystem Workshop discussion and to support discussion among the Council and its advisory bodies.

1. What were your individual takeaways from the workshop? What conversations are you most interested to continue?

2. What are potential next steps or action items associated with the major themes of workshop discussions?

    - What next steps do you consider most actionable or easily accomplished?
    - What are the areas where it is more difficult to gain traction?

3. How should the Council prioritize next steps to best support its conservation and management objectives? For example, is it more important to engage in broad strategizing, or to focus on specific issues and actionable ideas?

4. What next steps could be considered in the near term, and how would they be initiated? What next steps could be considered in the longer term, and what steps could be taken to support longer term planning?

5. How can NMFS, the SSC, EC, and AP each inform and support the Council's consideration of next steps given their role in the Council process?

6. How can the Council community maintain the valuable dialogue and sense of shared ownership supported by the workshop?

7. Are there additional topics that were not a focus of the workshop that you would like to see the Council community explore in the future?

Opportunities and examples of next steps

Workshop speakers and the workshop steering committee identified next steps that include 1) efforts that have already been undertaken or proposed by the Council and AFSC, and 2) additional opportunities for the Council community to respond to ideas and concerns identified through workshop discussions.

1. Current and proposed efforts

Council initiatives

- Bering Sea FEP module: The Council is continuing to refine the definitions of LTK and co-production of knowledge in the context of the Bering Sea FEP and the Council process. The draft FEP specifically proposes the development of an action module to develop a formalized process for analysts to include and consider LTK and subsistence information in the Council process.

- Social Science Planning Team: The Council recently established a Social Science Planning Team (SSPT), tasked with improving the quality and application of social science data to inform fisheries management and program evaluation. The SSPT will play an important role in considering how LTK can be integrated into the Council process and will partner with the BS FEP team on the LTK and subsistence action module.

- Rural outreach – At the February 2018 meeting, the Council generated two requests related to outreach to rural Alaskan communities and Alaska Native populations. These requests included 1) directing staff to review existing outreach protocols and identify additional outreach opportunities, and 2) a motion directing the Bering Sea FEP Team to develop an approach for a community engagement plan and process to integrate LTK into the Council process. Council staff developed a discussion paper on rural community outreach for the Council's April 2018 meeting and identified possible next steps, including reconvening the Council's Rural Outreach Committee (ROC), convening ad-hoc committees to develop recommendations on specific issues, or revisiting the role of the ROC following the Bering Sea FEP Team's development of an outreach plan and LTK module.

NMFS AFSC initiatives

- "Okay/not ok" framework: AFSC scientists are developing a conceptual "okay/not okay" framework that would support a systematic and consistent approach for evaluating ecosystem and stock assessment information relative to one another to proactively identify issues of concern (Zador and Harvey, in prep). The SSC has requested that the AFSC provide more guidance to inform the determination of "okay" or "not okay," in particular for ecosystem status with respect to a given stock.

- Early review of ecosystem information: AFSC is considering establishing a routine spring review of ecosystem and socioeconomic data as a way to identify potential ecosystem-related concerns earlier in the year. This review could also include a review of industry data (e.g., catch rates).

- Ecosystem and socioeconomic profiles (ESPs): AFSC scientists are developing ESPs that will interpret ecosystem information in the context of a particular stock. This will increase the potential to incorporate environmental information directly into stock assessments and may strengthen the region's ability to identify early warnings.

2. Additional opportunities

The additional opportunities identified below are provided as a starting point for discussion. At the June Council meeting the Council and its advisory bodies can reflect on these opportunities and consider how they could be framed as a specific task or request, as well as identify additional ideas for the Council's consideration.

Opportunities for further discussion and dialogue

The following topics were identified as high priorities for further discussion and consideration by the Council. The Council could consider a range of requests related to these topics, such as a presentation, a discussion paper, or additional information or guidance from the SSC and/or AFSC.

- Shifting stock distributions: The Council could support a focused discussion of changes in stock distribution.

- Gradual vs. abrupt changes: The Council could reflect on the difference between gradual or incremental and abrupt changes, including the implications for scientists' ability to detect changes and red flags and implications for a management response.

- Management flexibility and resilience: The Council could examine whether current management strategies limit or impede flexibility, and how resilience could be enhanced.

- Robustness of management strategies: The Council could consider the robustness of management strategies to abrupt changes in abundance and distribution, and specific challenges that might arise, such as bycatch constraints.

- Management options and scenarios: The Council could consider how to support an iterative process between scientists, managers, and stakeholders to frame management options and scenarios to explore through management strategy evaluation (MSE).

- Prioritization: The Council could examine its priorities with regard to integrating climate and ecosystem-related information and planning for change and identify next steps that are most important to achieving its conservation and management objectives. (Also referenced in discussion question 3).

- Integrating scientific initiatives with management: The Council could engage in a big-picture strategic discussion of how to integrate scientific initiatives with the management process (including specific projects, funding sources, and research opportunities), as well as how to integrate the full breadth of ecosystem information and considerations into future decisions. (In other words, "connecting the dots" and "putting it all together" to support the management process.)

Opportunities for additional information or scientific guidance

The following topics were identified as opportunities for the Council to request additional information or guidance from the SSC or AFSC.

- "Blind spot" – The Council could request guidance on how to address the medium-term (3-5 year) blind spot referenced during workshop discussions.

- Stakeholder-generated information: The Council could request that AFSC provide suggestions for enhancing or developing cooperative research and citizen science opportunities and integrating this information into Council processes.

- Industry costs: The Council could request additional information and analysis of the intersection between management policies and industry costs (e.g., related to infrastructure, capital investments, and variable costs) to understand how management strategies may impact industry flexibility and efficiency.

Opportunities for outreach and two-way communication

The following strategies were identified as opportunities for the Council to support outreach, engagement, and two-way dialogue with stakeholders.

- Focused regional discussions: The Council could support focused discussions in regions (e.g., Bering Sea communities) where ecosystem change may create tension between user groups and management objectives.

- Stories, scenarios, and visuals: The Council could identify specific "storylines" or scenarios (e.g., potential changes in the northern Bering Sea) and engage in a focused discussion to consider how the Council community and other stakeholders might respond. The Council could also consider strategies for synthesizing and communicating key information about potential climate scenarios and impacts, for example through visuals or tables.

- Pathways for communication: The Council could assess the existing pathways for communication to identify the mechanisms already in place, what is working well, and where there are opportunities to expand or improve. This could include pathways for communication between Council bodies (Council, AP, SSC, and Council committees); between the Council and the NMFS region, science center, and broader scientific community; and between the Council and industry stakeholders. (The Council is already taking steps to assess outreach specifically to rural Alaskan and Alaska Native communities).

Other topics

The following topics were identified as ongoing high-priority challenges and information needs.

- Improving timeliness of information and early warnings
- Maintaining adequate funding to support research needs
- Developing modeling and predictive capacity related to shifting distributions