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New England Fishery Management Council

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 John F. Quinn, J.D., Ph.D., *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 28, 2019
TO: Council
FROM: Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director
SUBJECT: Summary of March 27, 2019 Executive Committee Meeting

Attendance: The Executive Committee met in Wakefield, MA. Executive Committee members attending were Dr. Quinn, Mr. Stockwell, Mr. Grout, Mr. Alexander, and Mr. Reid. Also attending were Mr. Nies, Ms. Heil, and Dr. Simpkins. The Committee discussed the following agenda items.

1. Executive Director's Report

Budget Overview – Mr. Nies summarized the Council's budget status. The 2019 budget is not yet known. The FY 2019 appropriations bill included a 12 pct increase in the Councils/Commission line, but how that will be distributed has not been announced. In addition, distribution of several add-ons is also unknown. The expectation is that the Council will see an increase from FY 2018. The timing of the increase may cause problems since the five-year grant cycle ends at the end of 2019, and a no-cost extension may be necessary. Council spending for this year is expected to approach \$4.6-\$4.8 million.

Personnel – Melissa Errend, an economist, recently agreed to join the Council staff. She will begin work for the Council May 6. She is currently working under contract for the NEFSC, primarily on groundfish Amendment 23.

Program review – The Committee reviewed progress on the Program Review. Another Steering Committee call will be held before the June Council meeting to monitor progress and recommend next steps.

Staff Offsite - As recommended by the Program Review, the staff held is first offsite on March 12-13 in Kensington, NH. With the assistance of a professional facilitator, the staff focused on three broad topics: managing staff workloads, teamwork and integration, and stakeholder involvement. A number of ideas were generated for improving meeting schedules, sharing of information, and the involvement of the public. While the focus was on issues that the staff can directly control, some ideas may be brought to the Council for further development. The Executive Director will work with the Deputy Director to select those ideas that will be immediately adopted, as well as those that may need further development. The Council will be provided a report at the April meeting.

2. **Timelines:** Timelines for all pending actions were reviewed. Ms. Heil advised the Groundfish FW 58 will not be implemented on May 1, but the agency is expecting it to be implemented later in May.
3. **East Coast Climate Change Discussion:** In early March, Dr. Quinn, Mr. Stockwell, and Mr. Nies attended the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) meeting to discuss management of east coast fisheries in the face of climate change. The MAFMC and ASMFC also participated. Attendees agreed to continue a regular discussion at future Council Coordination Committee meetings and perhaps in other venues. While the Councils have made progress on sharing Committee seats when cross-boundary issues arise, there is an interest in identifying additional ways to move the discussion forward.
4. **Operations Handbook** – The Committee reviewed proposed changes to the Operations Handbook as a result of the dissolution of the Research Steering Committee. The changes will be brought to the Council for approval.
5. **Priorities** – The Committee began a discussion of the priorities setting process, one of the recommendations from the Program Review. This initial discussion will be continued over the course of several additional meetings. The discussion generally focused on several questions
 - a. *What does the Committee like about the current system?* Early start to the process gives time for public, Advisory Panel, and Committee input; the ranking system helps understand how the Council as a whole sees the need for specific tasks; the identification of the next year's planned projects assists GARFO and the NEFSC in planning their support to the two Councils, ASMFC, and internal tasks (i.e. don't go to an ad hoc approach).
 - b. *What doesn't the Committee like about the process?* Difficult to understand how long tasks will take and what the resource limits are; takes a lot of staff and Council time to develop; need more clarity on when and how public input is brought into the process; need more guidance on adding tasks after priorities are initially determined.
 - c. *What initial ideas might help?* Write out the process so it is better defined. Define when public input is accepted. Consider requiring mid-year changes to go through the relevant Committee or Executive Committee before adoption. Consider a different voting standard for new additions (e.g. 2/3 rather than a majority). Estimate time necessary to take care of regulatory requirements.
6. **MAFMC eVTR Action:** The Committee discussed the pending MAFMC framework to adopt eVTRs for all vessels that hold a MAFMC permit. Nearly all participants in NEFMC fisheries are likely to be affected. Initial reports were that the final action would take place before the June NEFMC meeting, giving little opportunity for input. Ms. Heil clarified that the MAFMC Executive Director recently said that the final action might not occur until August or later. The Committee agreed to wait until the April Council meeting to communicate with the MAFMC on the timeline for this action.
7. **Appropriations Bill Updates:** Ms. Heil and Dr. Simpkins provided brief reports on language accompanying the FY 2019 Appropriations Bill.
 - a. **ASM Funding:** The bill includes \$10.3M for ASM funding in FY 2019. NMFS is working on a spending plan that will not be ready until the summer. The

Committee suggested that GARFO consider a discussion with the Council on how this funding and any leftover funding from FY 2018, could be used to inform A23 development.

- b. EM Report: The bill includes guidance for the agency to file a report on EM in the groundfish fishery, to include implementation by a date certain. The agency does not currently intend to consult with the Council on this report, which is likely to be an update of an earlier version.
 - c. Northeast Groundfish Research: Funds were identified for targeted research on groundfish stocks. The agency will follow a similar process to that used last year, using the regional climate action plan to inform selected projects. While Council research priorities are not explicitly considered, last year's research was guided by the Climate Action plan as well as priority species and issues.
 - d. Cooperative Research: The NEFSC will prepare a strategic plan for research as directed. A new Cooperative Research Branch Chief has been hired that will take on this role. Stakeholder engagement will be a key element.
8. The Committee met in closed session to discuss NTAP appointments and the Janice Plante Award for Excellence.