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New England Fishery Management Council

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Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 30, 2026
TO: Council
FROM: Executive Committee
SUBJECT: Council Stipend Policy

BACKGROUND

At the September 17, 2025 Executive Committee meeting, the Executive Director presented a proposal to implement half-day Council member stipends for webinar meetings with a duration of less than 5 hours. The proposal was considered as an austerity measure based on the highly uncertain funding environment with a range of possible budget cuts up to 30% for fiscal year (FY) 2026. The Executive Committee approved the proposal, the Council was informed of the new policy during the September 2025 Council meeting, and the policy was implemented on October 1, 2025. Subsequently, the FY2026 NOAA budget included CY2026 funding for the Council at a nearly flat level without reduction. Based on the funding, the Executive Committee requested an analysis of cost-savings associated with half-day stipends and virtual Council meetings.

STIPEND POLICY ANALYSIS

Council staff analyzed the potential cost-savings associated with the half-day stipend policy. The analysis showed a potential cost-savings of ~\$22K if the half-day stipends were in place for the full calendar year. The Executive Committee considered the estimated savings from the half-day stipend policy in the context of incentives, alternative use of funds, current funding status, and Council member input. They noted that other Councils have implemented half-day stipends for short webinar meetings but highlighted the importance of maintaining full-day stipends to properly compensate for participation and maintain incentives for Council members. They recognized that the cost savings could be applied to other activities but noted that the total estimated savings (\$22K) would not warrant the potential loss of engagement.

VIRTUAL COUNCIL MEETING COST COMPARISON

Council staff compared the costs of the January 2025 and 2026 Council meetings. The 2025 meeting was held in Portsmouth, NH over three days with a total cost of \$48,730, and the 2026 meeting was conducted virtually over two days with a total cost of \$14,690. The Executive Committee noted that the estimated saving from a virtual Council meeting is substantial (~\$35K) and there may be benefits to conducting the annual January/February meeting remotely in future years.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDED POLICY

The Executive Committee recommended the following policies:

- Revert to full-day stipends for all eligible meetings: implementation April 1, no retro payments.
- Continue to review available funding to determine cost-saving measures, where needed.
- Provide periodic reminders about funding uncertainty, when needed.
- Distribute Stipend and Travel Guidance updates before April 1st:
 - Reminder that meal reimbursements should be for actual meal costs and reflective of GSA travel policies (i.e., breakdown for breakfast, lunch, dinner).
- Continue to consider webinar vs. in-person meeting needs:
 - For 2027, the Council will meet in-person in Portsmouth, NH in order to facilitate robust discussion around Inflation Reduction Act projects.
 - For 2028 and beyond, the Council may consider remote meetings to align with objectives.