



## New England Fishery Management Council

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 E.F. "Terry" Stockwell III, *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** June 8, 2015  
**TO:** NEFMC Executive Committee  
**FROM:** Tom Nies, Executive Director  
**SUBJECT:** *Draft Communications Strategic Plan*

#### **Council/Purpose**

Eight regional fishery management councils are charged by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (later renamed the Magnuson-Stevens Act) to develop, in accordance with the national standards contained in the Act, federal fishery management plans that will achieve and maintain, on a continuing basis, optimum yield from each fishery.

As described in the Act, the New England Council must exercise sound judgement in the stewardship of fishery resources when it prepares and revises management plans for the fisheries under its jurisdiction and enable the states, the fishing industry, consumer and environmental organizations, and other interested persons to participate in, and advise on the establishment and administration these plans, which take into account the social and economic needs of the states.

#### **Council/Overarching Goal**

An effective Council communications plan will help the NEFMC meet its responsibility to involve the public in the fishery management plan process by focusing efforts on the information needs of its key audiences.

#### **Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats**

A listing of these factors places the communications plan within the context of current realities that could impact or derail intended outcomes. Awareness is one way to anticipate, mitigate, and possibly avoid these scenarios and may help turn challenges/threats into opportunities.

#### *Strengths*

- Network of resources and partners - includes GARFO, NEFSC, member states, ASMFC and the two other east coast Councils
- Established process
- Historic active participation by some stakeholder groups
- High level of technical staff expertise and commitment

- Good community presence in some NE areas through workshops, event participation, etc.
- Opportunities for two-way dialogue at committee meetings; issues well-vetted in this forum
- Defined annual priorities that set public expectations
- Defined timelines for management actions

### *Challenges*

- Established process not fully grasped
- Low community presence on MA south coast and SNE
- Technical aspects of fishery management plans difficult to convert into plain language
- Required documents with important information not user-friendly (some EAs, EISs)
- Poor image among some stakeholder groups (recreational sector)
- Disruptions in accomplishing annual priorities
- Lack of stakeholder input into communications needs
- Few cultivated relationships with staff of NE Congressional delegation members

### *Opportunities*

- Develop, where possible, coordination with partner organizations to use their capabilities for outreach and information sharing purposes (ex., port agents)
- Explore the use of NEFMC Research Set-aside program for outreach purposes
- Improve the industry/Council meeting experience by considering Robert's Rules Training (simplified) and/or communications/meeting management training sessions for all Council members
- Conduct staff training session on working with the media

### *Threats*

- Stakeholder disenfranchisement
- Chronic low levels of some groundfish species abundance, and associated negative economic fallout in some fishing communities
- Potential lack of funding for new activities/increased efforts
- Lawsuits and politics

### **Key Audiences**

*Internal:* Council members and staff, Advisory Panel members, Scientific and Statistical Committee members, GARFO and NEFSC staffs.

*External:* Commercial and recreational fishermen, non-governmental organizations, local, state, and federal fishery officials, members of Congress and their staff, scientific and academic communities, media, sustainable food movement and consumer advocates, and the general public.

### **Current Activities**

This list details the NEFMC's current, institutionalized communications activities and tools.

- **Redesigned website**, launched fall 2014.
- **Press releases**, most, but not all associated with final actions taken at Council meetings.
- **Newsletter**, *Council Report*, produced after each Council meeting.
- **Meetings Live-Streamed**, all Council and SSC meetings, some committee meetings.
- **Three-meeting Outlook**, published on web homepage, [www.nefmc.org](http://www.nefmc.org) and revised between Council meetings.
- **Detailed Council meeting agendas**, distributed three weeks prior to each of the five Council meetings.
- **Occasional special reports and projects**, often in collaboration with NEFMC tech staff, (Seafood 101 published in Boston Globe, October 2014; Commercial Fisheries News (6-8 page inserts providing an overview of major Council actions), Omnibus Fish Habitat Amendment 2 public hearing document.
- **Outreach and education** at fisheries forums (Maine), community events, workshop panels (generally tech staff)
- **NOAA-funded Marine Resource Education Program (MREP)** twice annual Council staff participation (Public Affairs Officer and Executive Director).
- **Email notifications** of relevant events, important regulatory changes, Council announcements, etc. to full constituent list.
- **Identified first point of contact** for all public and media queries.

### **Communications Goals**

- A. Promote a greater public understanding about Council actions (all objectives feed into this broad goal)
- B. Foster more effective stakeholder and participation in the federal fishery management plan (FMP) process
- C. Improve the ability of stakeholders to comment on fishery management actions during all phases of Council decision-making
- D. Optimize stakeholder receipt of information about NEFMC management actions
- E. Communicate management successes and accomplishments

### **Communications Objectives**

1. Improve public and stakeholder understanding of how the fishery management process works
2. Ensure the development of timely, clear, and understandable information about proposed management actions
3. Improve dissemination and use of Council management action-related materials and investigate the development of new tools
4. Engage mass media, explore additional communications mechanisms
5. Develop tools to evaluate communications efforts, including stakeholder feedback mechanisms

### **Approaches – Objective 1**

**Improve public and stakeholder understanding of how the fishery management process works**

- Review potential uses of the NEFMC website to meet this objective
  - Example, develop a downloadable *Navigating the Council Process* document for the NEFMC website; reproduce as a handout at Council and committee meetings
  - Example, develop a website “at-a-glance” tool for stakeholders and public to determine the status of NEFMC management actions
- Partner with established organizations/programs to replicate previous successful outreach efforts (MREP, GMRI, but maybe others?)
- Investigate the feasibility of creating an app (possibly with GARFO and MAFMC for one stop shopping re who does what, list of FMPs and managed species, status of current management actions, and what’s new (example, info about EM)

### **Approaches – Objective 2**

#### **Ensure timely, clear, and understandable information about proposed management actions and associated alternatives**

- Identify the most timely and effective opportunities for stakeholder engagement in the Council process
- Develop companion fact sheets/simplified overviews and mini or traditional public hearing documents written in plain language for major Council actions, and distribute prior to Council decision-making

### **Approaches – Objective 3**

#### **Improve dissemination and use of Council management action-related materials and tools**

- Use a variety of formats/methods to communicate with stakeholders; could include:
  - greater promotion of website
  - coordinate with partners to increase distribution of materials
  - direct engagement (speak at fishing or other organizations)
  - increase dialogue communications (during NEFMC meetings or other fishery-related events)
  - participation in non-Council events in MA south coast or SNE (New Bedford Working Waterfront Festival early fall, NE Saltwater Fishing Show, late Feb/March);

### **Approaches – Objective 4**

#### **Communicate management successes and accomplishments**

- Continue to work with media representatives to publicize major Council decisions and rationale
- Explore non-traditional outlets (trade newsletters, hand-outs at trade shows; other)

### **Approaches – Objective 5**

#### **Develop evaluation tools**

- Use Google Analytics to evaluate website use
- Explore the use of survey(s) to establish a baseline of current attitudes, behavior, and use of available tools in order to assess program outcomes in the future.

**Issues to Consider**

In addition to ensuring that communications efforts are measurable, even if they are qualitative rather than quantitative, it's important to be realistic in terms of timeframes, budgets and resources. These topics will require additional discussion among the Executive and Deputy Directors, and the Public Affairs Officer, and possibly other staff as appropriate.

Furthermore, most organizational communications plans cover a period of several years. This plan should cover a two to three-year timeframe, but that period depends on the approval of specific plan elements, and the development of new initiatives. Once the process is complete, a work plan detailing performance metrics and a timeline will be added to the plan.