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Caribbean

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Gulf of Mexico

Dr. Carrie Simmons
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Mid Atlantic

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Western Pacific

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NEWS RELEASE

Nation’s Fishery Management Councils Find Consensus on MSA Changes, Advocate for Efforts to Address Environmental Justice Issues

PORTLAND, OR (25 October, 2021) Leaders of the nation’s eight Regional Fishery Management Councils concluded their second biannual meeting in 2021 last week by videoconference. The Council Coordination Committee (CCC) meeting provides the Councils and heads of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) an opportunity to discuss issues relevant to all of the Councils. The three-day meeting was open to the public and hosted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council. Among the issues discussed were proposed changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and the need to more fully address environmental justice for underserved fishing communities. A short summary of major issues is presented below. For a comprehensive summary, visit the U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils website at: <http://www.fisherycouncils.org/ccm-meetings/october-2021>.

Congressman Jared Huffman (D-CA), Congressman Ed Case (D-HI) and Congressman Don Young (R-AK) joined the meeting to discuss MSA reauthorization activities in the House of Representatives. In opening remarks, all three emphasized the accomplishments of the MSA and the work of the Councils in successfully managing fisheries, noting reauthorization efforts are intended to refine a system that already works well.

In 2020, the congressmen held listening sessions with Federal and state fishery managers, fishermen, seafood industry, conservations, and other stakeholders, and gathered feedback regarding concerns with the MSA and fisheries that needed to be addressed. The CCC approved a letter responding to Reps. Huffman and Case’s request for comments on their bill H.R. 4690, the “Sustaining America’s Fisheries for the Future Act of 2021.”

The CCC also approved the Legislative Workgroup’s proposed consensus statements on climate change and Regional Action Plans for Climate Science, bycatch, Council jurisdiction, essential fish habitat, transparency requirements, ethics/standards of behavior, and Secretarial plans. One notable proposed amendment to the MSA would replace the term “overfished” to “depleted” to distinguish between fish populations declining due to fishing or other external causes.

The CCC and NMFS discussed efforts to integrate equity and environmental justice into fisheries management. The committee concluded that the issue is both too broad and regionally distinct to be addressed in one meeting agenda item alone. The members advocated for a joint workshop prior to the next CCC meeting in May 2022 to evaluate, respond to, and inform equity and environmental justice efforts. The Western Pacific Council volunteered to spearhead this issue and will work with the CCC to bring the workshop to fruition. The CCC also requested NMFS to provide funds to expand support for underserved communities to implement the Administration’s priority areas.

NMFS Assistant Administrator Janet Coit outlined the priorities of the Biden-Harris administration and said the Councils would have a significant role in climate change resilience; greenhouse gas emission reduction; diversity, equity, and inclusion emphasis; food supply, aquaculture, and marketing; and climate change and science support.



NMFS Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations Paul Doremus noted the president's budget includes priorities for the Blue Economy, science, climate change, offshore wind energy, and social and environmental justice. Both the FY22 President's budget and the House mark have discretionary and programmatic increases, with the House mark including an additional \$1.5M for Regional Councils and Fisheries Commissions over the FY21 enacted budget.

Regarding the Biden Administration's America the Beautiful initiative (Executive Order 14008), the CCC's Area-based Management Subcommittee reported the group had proposed a working draft definition of conservation areas. Subcommittee members compiled a database for each Council region, with preliminary results indicating that more than 663 conservation areas have been established in the U.S. exclusive economic zone, and more than 54 percent is closed to all bottom-tending fishing gears. The CCC requested NMFS to assist the Councils with geographic information system (GIS) needs for this project.

Under the MSA, each Council is authorized to develop, monitor, and amend fishery management plans for federally-managed fisheries in its region. Once approved by the Secretary of Commerce, these plans are implemented by NMFS. For more information on the CCC meeting, including a complete summary of outcomes and recommendations and briefing materials, go to <http://www.fisherycouncils.org/ccc-meetings/october-2021>.

Regional Fishery Management Council Leadership

Pacific Council: Chair Marc Gorelnik, Vice Chair Brad Pettinger, Executive Director Chuck Tracy
New England Council: Chair Eric Reid, Vice Chair Rick Bellavance, Executive Director Tom Nies
Mid-Atlantic Council: Chair Mike Luisi, Vice Chair Wes Townsend, Executive Director Chris Moore
South Atlantic Council: Chair Mel Bell, Vice Chair Carolyn Belcher, Executive Director John Carmichael
Gulf Council: Chair Dale Diaz, Vice Chair Martha Guyas, Executive Director Carrie Simmons
Caribbean Council: Chair Marcos Hanke, Vice Chair Tony Blanchard, Executive Director Miguel A. Rolón
North Pacific Council: Chair Simon Kinneen, Vice Chair Bill Tweit, Executive Director David Witherell
Western Pacific Council: Chair Archie Soliaj, Vice Chair (Hawaii) Roger Dang, Vice Chair (Guam) Manny Duenas II, Vice Chair (CNMI) John Gourley, Vice Chair (American Samoa) Will Sword, Executive Director Kitty M. Simonds

NOAA Fisheries Participants

Janet Coit, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
Samuel D. Rauch III, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs
Francisco Werner, Scientific Programs Director and Chief Science Advisor
Paul Doremus, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations
Rick Methot, Senior Scientist for Stock Assessments
Kelly Denit, Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries
Marian Macpherson, Acting Branch Chief for Policy and Guidance, Office of Sustainable Fisheries
Danielle Blacklock, Director, Office of Aquaculture
Caroline Park, Deputy Section Chief for Sustainable Fisheries, General Counsel Fisheries and Protected Species