

STATEMENT OF ORGANIZATION PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

of the

MID-ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Department of Commerce - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Revised June 6, 2023



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MID-ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

STATEMENT OF ORGANIZATION, PRACTICES, AND PROCEDURES

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The organization, practices, and procedures contained herein shall constitute the procedures that will be followed by the Council, except when they conflict with or are incomplete as to the requirements of the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, or 50 CFR Part 600 Subparts A, B, and C, which shall prevail in any event.

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MID-ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

STATEMENT OF ORGANIZATION, PRACTICES, AND PROCEDURES

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, created by Section 302(a)(1)(B) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1801 *et seq.* (the Act or MSFCMA), hereby publishes a revised Statement of Organization, Practices, and Procedures (SOPP), as required by Section 302(f)(6) of the Act. Upon approval, this SOPP supersedes the previous version approved by NMFS, published on July 29, 1992.

The SOPP is available on the Council's website at <http://www.mafmc.org/about>. Hard copies are available upon request by calling 302-674-2331 or by submitting a written request to 800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901.

1.0 COUNCIL FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In accordance with the requirements of the Act, the Council shall:

- (a) Prepare and submit to the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) or his or her delegate a fishery management plan with respect to each fishery requiring conservation and management within the Council's geographic area of authority and such plan amendments as are necessary.
- (b) Review and comment on applications for foreign fishing transmitted to the Council under a governing international fishery agreement by the Secretary of State under the terms of the Act.
- (c) Prepare comments on any fishery management plan or amendments prepared by the Secretary which are transmitted to the Council under Section 304(c)(4) of the Act.
- (d) Conduct public hearings at appropriate times and locations in the Council's membership area, to allow interested persons an opportunity to be heard in the development of fishery management plans and amendments and with respect to the administration and implementation of the provisions of the Act. When conducting a hearing outside Council's usual jurisdiction, the Council will first consult with the Council in that area.
- (e) Submit to the Secretary such periodic reports as the Council deems appropriate, and any other relevant report which may be requested by the Secretary.
- (f) Review on a continuing basis, and revise as appropriate, the assessments and specifications contained in each fishery management plan for each fishery within its geographical area with regard to:
 - (1) The present and probable future condition of the fishery;
 - (2) The maximum sustainable yield from the fishery;
 - (3) The optimum yield from the fishery;
 - (4) The capacity and the extent to which fishing vessels of the United States will harvest the optimum yield on an annual basis; and
 - (5) The portion of such optimum yield on an annual basis which will not be harvested by fishing vessels of the United States and can be made available for foreign fishing.

- (g) Develop annual catch limits for each of its managed fisheries that may not exceed the fishing level recommendations established by mechanisms and processes under the Act.
- (h) Develop multi-year research priorities for fisheries, fisheries interactions, habitats, and other areas of research that are necessary for management purposes, in the manner prescribed in the Act.
- (i) Conduct any other activities which are required by or provided for in the Act or which are necessary and appropriate to the foregoing functions.
- (j) The Council expects to participate in international negotiations concerning any fishery matters under the cognizance of the Council. The Council also expects to be consulted during preliminary discussions leading to U.S. positions on international fishery matters, including the allocation of fishery resources to other nations within its area of authority.

2.0 COUNCIL ORGANIZATION

2.1 Council Composition and Jurisdictions

2.1.1 General

- (a) The Council has 21 voting members and 4 non-voting members.
- (b) The states of New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina are represented on the Council.
- (a) The Council's geographic area of authority includes the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Atlantic Ocean, seaward of the preceding states. The boundary between the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Councils begins at the seaward boundary between the States of Virginia and North Carolina (36°33'01.0" N. lat), and proceeds due east to the point of intersection with the outward boundary of the EEZ as specified in the Act.

2.1.2 Voting Members

- (a) The voting members of the Council shall be:
 - (1) The principal state official in the government position with marine fishery management responsibility and expertise in each constituent state, who is designated as such by the Governor of the State, so long as the official continues to hold such position, or the designee of such official.
 - (2) The Regional Administrator of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for the Greater Atlantic Region, so long as the Administrator continues to hold such position, or a designee;
 - (3) 13 members appointed by the Secretary of Commerce:
 - i) 7 *obligatory* seats are state-specific and must be filled by one individual from each of the Council's constituent states.
 - ii) 6 *at-large* seats may be filled by individuals from any constituent state.

2.1.3 Non-Voting Members

- (a) The non-voting members of the Council shall be:
 - (1) The Northeast Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or a designee;
 - (2) The Commander of the 5th District Coast Guard District, or a designee;
 - (3) The Executive Director of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, or a designee;
 - (4) A representative of the U.S. Department of State, designated for such purpose by the Secretary of State, or a designee.
- (b) Non-voting members of the Council may serve on committees of the Council and may serve as chairpersons of committees and, as members of the committee, may initiate and second motions, as well as vote on matters that pertain to the committee. At meetings of the Council, non-voting members may neither initiate nor second motions, nor vote on matters that may be classified as business of the Council. They may, however, participate fully in discussions of such matters.

2.2 Oath of Office

As trustees of the nation's fishery resources, all voting members must take an oath specified by the Secretary as follows:

I, [name of the person taking oath], as a duly appointed member of a Regional Fishery Management Council established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, hereby promise to conserve and manage the living marine resources of the United States of America by carrying out the business of the Council for the greatest overall benefit of the Nation. I recognize my responsibility to serve as a knowledgeable and experienced trustee of the Nation's marine fisheries resources, being careful to balance competing private or regional interests, and always aware and protective of the public interest in those resources. I commit myself to uphold the provisions, standards, and requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and other applicable law, and shall conduct myself at all times according to the rules of conduct prescribed by the Secretary of Commerce. This oath is given freely and without mental reservation or purpose of evasion.

2.3 Council Members

2.3.1 Term of Appointment - Voting Members

- (a) Voting members (other than principal state officials, the Regional Administrator, or their designees) are appointed for a term of three years and may be reappointed. A voting member's Council service of 18 months or more during a term of office will be counted as service for the entire three-year term.
- (b) The anniversary date for measuring terms of membership is August 11. The Secretary may designate a term of appointment shorter than three years, if necessary, to provide for balanced expiration of terms of office.
- (c) Members may not serve more than three consecutive terms. A member who has completed three consecutive terms will be eligible for appointment to another term one full year after completion of the third consecutive term.

2.3.2 Council Nomination and Appointment Procedures

When the terms of both an obligatory member and an at-large member expire concurrently, the Governor of the state holding the expiring obligatory seat may indicate that the nominees who were not selected for appointment to the obligatory seat may be considered for appointment to an at-large seat, provided that the resulting total number of nominees submitted by that Governor for the expiring at-large seat is no fewer than three different nominees.

2.3.3 Nomination Deadlines

Nomination packages (Governor's) letters and completed nomination kits must be forwarded by express mail under a single mailing to arrive at the address specified by the Assistant Administrator by March 15. For appointments outside the normal cycle, the Secretary will provide a deadline for receipt of nominations to the affected Council and state governors.

- (a) Obligatory seats:
 - (1) The Governor of the state for which the term of an obligatory seat is expiring should submit the names of at least three qualified individuals to fill that seat by the March 15 deadline.

- (2) If the Governor fails to provide a nomination letter and at least three complete nominations kits by March 15, the obligatory seat will remain vacant until all required information has been received and processed and the Secretary has made the appointment.
- (b) At-large seats:
- (1) If a Governor chooses to submit nominations for an at-large seat, he/she must submit lists that contain at least three qualified nominees for each vacant seat. A nomination letter and a nomination kit for each qualified nominee must be forwarded by express mail under a single mailing to arrive at the address specified by the Assistant Administrator by March 15.
 - (2) Nomination packages that are not substantially complete by March 15 may be returned to the nominating Governor. At-large members will be appointed from among the nominations submitted by the governors who complied with the nomination requirements.

2.3.4 Rules of Conduct

Council members, employees, and contractors must comply with the Federal Cost Principles Applicable to Regional Fishery Management Council Grants and Cooperative Agreements, especially with regard to lobbying, and other restrictions with regard to lobbying as specified in 2.3.5 (Lobbying) of this part.

2.3.5 Lobbying

- (a) Council members, employees and contractors must comply with the requirement of 31 U.S.C. § 1352 and Department of Commerce implementing regulations published at 15 CFR Part 28, "New Restrictions on Lobbying." These provisions generally prohibit the use of Federal funds for lobbying the Executive or Legislative Branches of the Federal Government in connection with the award.
- (b) Because the Council receives in excess of \$100,000 in Federal funding, the regulations mandate the Council must complete Form SF-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," regarding the use of non-Federal funds for lobbying.
 - (1) The Form SF-LLL shall be submitted within 30 days following the end of the calendar quarter in which there occurs any event that requires disclosure or that materially affects the accuracy of the information contained in any disclosure form previous filed.
 - (2) The recipient must submit the Forms SF-LLL, including those received from sub-recipients, contractors, and subcontractors, to the Grants Officer.
- (c) Council members, employees, and contractors must comply with the Federal Cost Principles Applicable to Regional Fishery Management Council Grants and Cooperative Agreements summarized as follows:
 - (1) Either Title 2 CFR Part 200 - Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards or Title 2 CFR Part 225 - Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments (OMB Circular A-87), depending on the year of the award, is applicable to the Federal assistance awards issued to the Council.
 - (2) The purpose of the cost principles at 2 CFR Parts 200 and 225 are to define what costs can be paid on Federal awards issued to non-profit organizations. The regulations establish both general principles and detailed items of costs.

- (3) Under 2 CFR Parts 200 and 225, costs for certain lobbying activities are unallowable as charges to Federal awards. These activities would include any attempts to influence:
 - i) The introduction of Federal or state legislation; or
 - ii) The enactment of a modification of any pending legislation by preparing, distributing, or using publicity or propaganda, or by urging members of the general public to contribute to or to participate in any demonstration, march, rally, fundraising drive, lobbying campaign, or letter writing or telephone campaign.
- (4) Generally, costs associated with providing a technical and factual presentation directly related to the performance of a grant, through hearing testimony, statements, or letters to Congress or a state legislature are allowable if made in response to a documented request.
- (5) Costs associated with lobbying to influence state legislation in order to reduce the cost or to avoid material impairment of the organization's authority to perform the grant are also allowable.

2.3.6 Financial Interest

- (a) Financial interest in harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing includes:
 - (1) Stock, equity, or other ownership interests in, or employment with, any company, business, fishing vessel, or other entity or employment with any entity that has any percentage ownership in or by another entity engaging in any harvesting processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activity in any fishery under the jurisdiction of the Council concerned;
 - (2) Stock, equity, or other ownership interests in, or employment with, any company or other entity that has any percentage ownership in or by another entity that provides equipment or other services essential to harvesting, processing lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activities in any fishery under the jurisdiction of the Council concerned, such as a Chandler or a dock operation;
 - (3) Employment with, or service as an officer, director, or trustee of, an association whose members include companies, vessels, or other entities engaged in any harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activities, or companies or other entities providing services essential to harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activities in any fishery under the jurisdiction of the Council concerned; and
 - (4) Employment with an entity that has any percentage ownership in or by another entity providing consulting, legal, or representational services to any entity engaging in, or providing equipment or services essential to harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activities in any fishery under the jurisdiction of the Council concerned, or to any association whose members include entities engaged in the activities described in paragraphs (a) and (b) of this section.
- (b) Financial interest in harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing does not include: stock, equity, or other ownership interests in, or employment with, an entity engaging in scientific fisheries research in any fishery under the jurisdiction of the Council concerned, unless it is covered under paragraph (a) of the definition. A financial interest in such entities is covered by 18 U.S.C. § 208, the Federal conflict-of-interest statute.

2.3.6.1 *Financial Interest Form*

- (a) Financial Interest Form means NOAA Form 88-195, "STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS For Use by Voting Members of, and Nominees to, the Regional Fishery Management Councils, and members of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)" or such other form as the Secretary may prescribe.
- (b) Reporting. The Act requires the disclosure of any financial interest in harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activity that is being, or will be, undertaken within any fishery over which the Council concerned has jurisdiction. An affected individual must disclose such financial interest held by that individual; the affected individual's spouse, minor child, or partner; or any organization (other than the Council) in which that individual is serving as an officer, director, trustee, partner, or employee. The information required to be reported must be disclosed on the Financial Interest Form (as defined in paragraph (a) of this section), or such other form as the Secretary may prescribe.
- (c) The Financial Interest Form must be filed by each nominee for Secretarial appointment to the Council with the Assistant Administrator by April 15 or, if nominated after March 15, one month after nomination by the Governor. A seated voting member appointed by the Secretary must file a Financial Interest Form with the Executive Director of the appropriate Council within 45 days of taking office; must file an update of his or her statement with the Executive Director of the appropriate Council within 30 days of the time any such financial interest is acquired or substantially changed by the affected individual or the affected individual's spouse, minor child, or partner, or any organization (other than the Council) in which that individual is serving as an officer, director, trustee, partner, or employee; and must update his or her form annually and file that update with the Executive Director of the appropriate Council by February 1 of each year, regardless of whether any information has changed on that form.
- (d) The Executive Director must, in a timely manner, provide copies of and updates to the Financial Interest Forms of appointed Council members to the NMFS Regional Administrator, the Regional Attorney who advises the Council, the Department of Commerce Assistant General Counsel for Administration, and the NMFS Office of Sustainable Fisheries. These completed Financial Interest Forms shall be kept on file in the office of the NMFS Regional Administrator and at the Council offices, and shall be made available for public inspection at such offices during normal office hours. In addition, the forms shall be made available at each Council meeting or hearing and shall be posted for download from the Internet on the Council's website.
- (e) The Council must retain the Financial Interest Form for a Council member for at least 5 years after the expiration of that individual's last term.
- (f) An individual being considered for appointment to an SSC must file the Financial Interest Form with the Regional Administrator for the geographic area concerned within 45 days prior to appointment. A member of the SSC must file an update of his or her statement with the Regional Administrator for the geographic area concerned within 30 days of the time any such financial interest is acquired or substantially changed by the SSC member or the SSC member's spouse, minor child, or partner, or any organization (other than the Council) in which that individual is serving as an officer, director, trustee, partner, or employee; and must update his or her form annually and file that update with the Regional Administrator by February 1 of each year.

- (g) An individual who serves as an SSC member to more than one Council shall file Financial Interest Forms with each Regional Administrator for the geographic areas concerned.
- (h) The Regional Administrator shall maintain on file the Financial Interest Forms of all SSC members for at least five years after the expiration of that individual's term on the SSC. Such Forms are not subject to Sections 302(j)(5)(B) and (C) of the Act.
- (i) It is unlawful for Council nominees, affected Council members, and members of the SSC to knowingly and willfully fail to disclose, or to falsely disclose any financial interest or to knowingly vote on a Council decision in violation of 50 CFR § 600.235. In addition to the penalties provided under 50 CFR § 600.735, a violation may result in removal of the individual from Council membership.

2.3.7 Recusal

- (a) Definitions:
 - (1) Affected individual means an appointed Council member or a member of the Scientific and Statistical Committee.
 - (2) Council decision means approval of a fishery management plan (FMP) or FMP amendment (including any proposed regulations); request for amendment to regulations implementing an FMP; finding that an emergency exists involving any fishery (including recommendations for responding to the emergency); and comments to the Secretary on FMPs or amendments developed by the Secretary. It does not include a vote by a committee of a Council.
 - (3) Significant and predictable effect means a close causal link between the decision and an expected and substantially disproportionate benefit to the financial interests described in section 2.3.6(a).
 - (4) Expected and substantially disproportionate benefit means a quantifiable positive or negative impact with regard to a matter likely to affect a fishery or sector of the fishery in which the affected individual has a significant interest, as indicated by:
 - i) A greater than 10-percent interest in the total harvest of the fishery or sector of the fishery in question;
 - ii) A greater than 10-percent interest in the marketing or processing of the total harvest of the fishery or sector of the fishery in question; or
 - iii) Full or partial ownership of more than 10 percent of the vessels using the same gear type within the fishery or sector of the fishery in question.
- (b) *Restrictions on voting.* Affected individuals may not vote on any Council decision that would have a significant and predictable effect on a disclosed financial interest.
- (c) *Participation in deliberations.* An affected individual who is recused from voting may participate in Council and committee deliberations relating to the decision, after notifying the Council of the voting recusal and identifying the financial interest that would be affected. Participation may include the making of motions by the individual, involvement in discussion of motions made by the individual or others, discussion of alternatives, and indicating the position of the individual on the matter under deliberation, but may not include voting on the matter under deliberation.
- (d) *Voluntary Recusal.* Any individual who believes that a Council decision would have a significant and predictable effect on that individual's disclosed financial interest may, at any time before a vote is taken, announce to the Council his or her intent not to vote on the decision and identify the financial interest that would be affected.

- (e) *Requests for Determination.* At the request of an affected individual or upon the initiative of an appropriate designated official (See Section 302(j)(1)(b)), such official shall determine for the record whether a Council decision would have a significant and predictable effect on that individual's financial interest.
 - (1) The determination will be based upon a review of the information contained in the individual's financial disclosure form and any other reliable and probative information provided in writing. All information considered will be made part of the public record for the decision.
 - (2) At the beginning of each Council meeting, or during a Council meeting at any time reliable and probative information is received, the designated official shall announce the receipt of information relevant to a determination concerning recusal, the nature of that information, and the identity of the submitter of such information.
 - (3) If the designated official determines that the affected individual may not vote, the individual may state for the record how he or she would have voted. The Council Chair may not allow such an individual to cast a vote.

2.3.8 Security Assurances

- (a) The Department of Commerce Office of Security will issue security assurances to Council members following completion of favorable background investigations. A Council member's appointment is conditional until such time as the background investigation has been favorably adjudicated.
- (b) The Secretary will revoke the member's appointment if that member receives an unfavorable background investigation. In instances in which Council members may need to discuss, at closed meetings, materials classified for national security purposes, the agency of individual (e.g., Department of State, U.S. Coast Guard) providing such classified information will be responsible for ensuring that Council members and other attendees have the appropriate security clearances.

2.3.9 Council Member Training

- (a) The Secretary shall provide a training course covering a variety of topics relevant to matters before the Councils and shall make the training course available to all Council members and staff and staff from NMFS regional offices and science centers. To the extent resources allow, the Secretary will make the training available to Council committee and advisory panel members.
- (b) Council members appointed after January 12, 2007, shall, within one year of appointment, complete the training course developed by the Secretary. Any Council member who completed such a training course within 24 months of January 12, 2007, is considered to have met the training requirement of this section.

2.3.10 Removal

- (a) The Secretary of Commerce may remove for cause any Secretarial appointed member of a Council in accordance with Section 302(b)(6) of the Act, wherein the Council concerned first recommends removal of that member by not less than two-thirds of the voting members.
- (b) A recommendation of the Council to remove a member must be made in writing to the Secretary and accompanied by a statement of the reasons upon which the recommendation is based.

2.3.11 Council Member Compensation

- (a) The voting members who are not employed by the Federal Government or any State or local government (that is, anyone who does not receive compensation from any such government for the period when performing duties as a Council member) receives compensation at a daily rate as specified by the Act when engaged in the actual performance of duties as assigned by the Chairman of the Council, i.e. the daily rate of a GS15 Step 7 of the General Schedule. Actual performance of duties, for the purposes of compensation, may include travel time subject to section 5.0.
- (b) Effective September 1, 1991, all Council members whose eligibility for compensation has been established in accordance with NOAA guidelines will be paid on a contract basis without deductions being made for Social Security, or Federal and State income taxes. Until that time, such deductions may be made at the Council's option. A report of compensation will be furnished each year as required by the Internal Revenue Service. Such compensation may be paid on a full day's basis whether in excess of eight hours a day or less than eight hours a day. The time is compensable where the individual member is required to expend a significant private effort which substantially disrupts the daily routine to the extent that a work day is lost to the member. "Homework" time in preparation for formal Council meetings is not compensable. State officials may be compensated if they can document they are on leave without pay (LWOP). (LWOP does not include annual leave, holidays, or weekends.)
- (c) Non-government Council members receive compensation for:
 - (1) Days spent in actual attendance at a meeting of the Council or jointly with another Council.
 - (2) A member may claim daily compensation for travel on days before or after the meeting if his or her normal business activity was unduly disrupted by the travel.
 - (3) Meetings of standing or ad hoc committees of the Council, if approved in advance by the Chair.
 - (4) Individual member meeting with scientific and technical advisors when approved in advance by the Chair and a substantial portion of any day is needed.
 - (5) Conducting or attending hearings when authorized in advance by the Chair.
 - (6) Other meetings involving Council business when approved in advance by the Chair.
 - (7) Compensation for webinars: To be compensated for webinars, the webinar must last more than one hour before compensation is paid. Any webinar lasting 1-4 hours, compensation will be paid at 50%. Webinars lasting more than 4 hours will merit a full day of compensation.
- (d) The Council Chair must submit to the Regional Office annually a report of Council member compensation authorized. This report shall identify, for each member, amount paid, dates, and location and purpose of meetings attended.

2.4 Officers and Terms of Office

2.4.1 General

- (a) A Chair and a Vice Chair shall be elected annually at the first Council meeting following the seating of new Council members (on or after August 11 of each year) by the voting members of the Council present and voting; each such officer shall serve for a period of one year and until a successor is elected.

- (b) Officers may succeed themselves.
- (c) The Council may elect other officers as it deems necessary.

2.4.2 Nominations

The Chair shall appoint a Nominating Committee, who shall make its nominations at the beginning of the election process. Following the Committee's nomination, any voting member may nominate additional candidates from the floor. When nominations are closed the election shall be held.

2.4.3 Elections

- (a) The election of Chair will be held first, followed by the election for Vice Chair. If only one candidate accepts the nomination for an office, the Chairman of the Nominating Committee shall cast all votes for that candidate. If there are two or more candidates, the election shall be by a secret ballot with the votes tabulated by two or more Tellers appointed by the Council Chair.
- (b) The Tellers shall use the following rules to determine the winning candidate:
 - (1) To win, a candidate must receive a majority of the votes cast.
 - (2) If no candidate receives a majority of the votes, the Tellers shall declare no election. If there are more than two candidates, the candidate receiving the lowest number of votes shall be dropped from consideration and a vote will be taken for the remaining candidates. If there are multiple candidates tied with the lowest number of votes they shall all be dropped from consideration, unless this would result in less than two candidates remaining, in which case the candidates tied with the lowest number of votes shall draw straws to determine one candidate to be dropped from consideration. This process will continue until a candidate receives a majority of the vote cast. If neither of the final two candidates receives a majority there shall be another vote taken, but after three votes without a majority determined, the final two candidates shall draw straws to determine the winner.
 - (3) Those preferring not to vote for any candidate shall check "ABSTAIN" on the ballot.
 - (4) The number of ballots cast for an individual shall not be announced. Any Council member who questions the result may review the ballots. The ballots will not identify which Council member cast a particular ballot.

2.4.4 Special Elections

In the event that the Chair cannot fulfill the Chair's obligations for the balance of the Chair's term, a special election will be held at the next scheduled Council meeting to fill the position of Chair. In the event that the Vice Chair cannot fulfill the Vice Chair's obligations for the balance of the Vice Chair's term, a special election will be held at the next scheduled Council meeting to fill the position of Vice Chair. The procedures for nominations and elections set forth above will be followed for special elections.

2.4.5 Authority of the Chair

- (a) The Council Chair shall be the chief executive officer of the Council. Subject only to the authority of the Council, the Chair shall have general charge and supervision over, and responsibility for the business and affairs of the Council. Unless otherwise directed by the Council, the Chair may enter into and execute in the name of the Council, contracts or other instruments in the regular course of business or contract or other instruments not in the regular course of business which are authorized, either generally or specifically, by the

Council. The Council Chair shall have the general powers and duties of management usually vested in the office of the Chair of the Board of a corporation.

- (b) The Council Chair shall have the authority to appoint and dissolve committees of Council members, name their officers and membership, and describe their functions, duties, and responsibilities consistent with the Charter of the Council, the Act, and other applicable law.
- (c) The Council Chair shall also have the full authority to call meetings as necessary for the conduct of the Council's business.
- (d) The Council Chair shall have the authority to authorize reimbursement of travel expenses and/or compensation of any eligible members of the Council, its committees or subpanels except that proper notification, at the direction of the Chair, in the Federal Register of a regular meeting of the Council or one of its committees or subpanels shall constitute authorization for travel expenses and/or compensation to be paid to eligible members.
- (e) The Council Chair shall have the authority to authorize, approve, or disapprove all meetings of Council subpanels or committees.
- (f) In the event of the absence or inability of the Council Chair to serve or fulfill the Chair's obligations, the Council Vice-Chair shall assume authority and duties of the Chair.

2.5 Designees

- (a) The Act authorizes only the principal State officials, the Regional Administrator, and the nonvoting members to designate individuals to attend Council meetings in their absence. The Chair of the Council must be notified in writing, in advance of any meeting at which a designee will initially represent the Council member, the name, address, and position of the individual designated. A designee may not name another designee. However, such officials may submit to the Chair, in advance, a list of several individuals who may act as designee, provided that the list designates who would serve if more than one designee is in attendance.
- (b) Only a full-time state employee of the state agency responsible for marine and/or anadromous fisheries shall be appointed by a constituent state Governor as the principal state official for purposes of Section 302(b) of the Act.
- (c) A principal state official may name his/her designee(s) to act on his/her behalf at Council meetings. Individuals designated to serve as designees of a principal state official on a Council, pursuant to Section 302(b)(1)(A) of the Act, must be a resident of the state and be knowledgeable and experienced, by reason of his or her occupational or other experience, scientific expertise, or training, in the fishery resources of the geographic area of concern to the Council.
- (d) New or revised appointments by state Governors of principal state officials and new or revised designations by principal state officials of their designee(s) must be delivered in writing to the appropriate NMFS Regional Administrator and the Council Chairman at least 48 hours before the individual may vote on any issue before the Council. Written appointment of the principal state official must indicate his or her employment status, how the official is employed by the state fisheries agency, and whether the official's full salary is paid by the state. Written designation(s) by the principal state official must indicate how the designee is knowledgeable and experienced in fishery resources of the geographic area of concern to the Council, the county in which the designee resides, and whether the designee's salary is paid by the state.
- (e) Reimbursement of travel expenses to any meeting must be limited to the member, or authorized designee; in any case, one person.

2.6 Advisory Groups

2.6.1 Scientific and Statistical Committee

2.6.1.1 Objectives and Duties

- (a) The Council will establish a Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) which shall:
 - (1) Assist the Council in the development, collection, evaluation, and peer review of such statistical, biological, economical, social and other scientific information as is relevant to the Council's development and amendment of any fishery management plan;
 - (2) Provide the Council ongoing scientific advice for fishery management decisions, including recommendations for acceptable biological catch, preventing overfishing, maximum sustainable yield, and achieving rebuilding targets, and reports on stock status and health, bycatch, habitat status, social and economic impacts of management measures, and sustainability of fishing practices. Specifically in order to allow the Council to fulfill its obligations under Section 302(h)(6), the Committee shall, based on current stock conditions, the status determination criteria specified in the Fishery Management Plans (FMPs), and consistent with 50 C.F.R. Part 600.310, National Standard 1- Optimum Yield, provide the "fishing level recommendation" in terms of harvest for each of the Council's managed species.
 - (3) Assist the Council in determining what statistical, biological, economical, social or other scientific information is needed for the development of a management plan that meets the requirements of the Act; and shall advise the Council as to the best way of obtaining this information, including identifying entities with ongoing research programs that may be able to develop the needed information.
- (b) When requested by the Council, through the Council Chair or the Chair's designee, the Committee shall:
 - (1) Provide expert scientific and technical advice to the Council on the development of fishery management policy, on establishing the goals and objectives of fishery management plans or amendments thereto, and on the preparation of such plans or amendments thereto. However, The Committee will not provide another peer review of the Northeast Regional Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW) results or the Stock Assessment Review Committee (SARC).
 - (2) Advise the Council on preparing comments on any fishery management plan or amendments thereto prepared by the Secretary or Secretary's delegate.
 - (3) Comment on any proposed regulations which the Council deems necessary to implement any fishery management plan or amendment to a fishery management plan which is prepared by the Council;
 - (4) Assist the Council in establishing criteria for judging plan effectiveness;
 - (5) Perform such other necessary and appropriate duties as may be required by the Council to carry out its functions under the Act; and
 - (6) Attend Council meetings as requested by the Council Chair. Members of the Committee may be tasked to serve as Chair or member of the Northeast Stock Assessment Review Committee (SARC) when requested by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC).

2.6.1.2 Development of ABCs

- (a) Section 302(g)(1)(B) of the Act provides that the Committee shall provide recommendations for acceptable biological catch (ABC) that prevent overfishing.

- (b) The Council Chairman, in consultation with the Executive Director and the Chair of the Species Committee that has responsibility for a stock under consideration, shall develop a set of terms of reference based on the relevant ABC control rule that will guide the work of the Committee in developing ABC recommendations for that stock. The terms of reference will specify a date by which all material to be considered by the Committee will be provided. This date shall be at least 15 working days prior to the Committee meeting. The Committee is not obligated to consider any material submitted after this date.
- (c) Any Committee member who has a financial conflict of interest in providing advice on the species under consideration shall recuse him/herself from discussion and voting.
- (d) Only those Committee members present at the meeting may participate in developing the ABC recommendation. At least 50% of the members must be present to establish a quorum for ABC recommendations.
- (e) The Committee Chair may request oral presentations or comments from analysts and/or interested stakeholders during the meeting.
- (f) On the basis of the submitted material, the Committee shall provide an ABC recommendation for the upcoming fishing year(s) that follows the ABC control rule adopted by the Council for a given species (stock). The recommended ABC will reflect the level of scientific uncertainty inherent in the assessment of stock status and the Council's risk policy, such that the recommended ABC is less than or equal to the overfishing limit in line with the Act and 50 C.F.R. § 600.310, *National Standard 1—Optimum Yield*. The Committee recommendation will be provided to the Council in the form of a written report that clearly identifies the:
 - (1) materials considered in developing the ABC;
 - (2) the overfishing limit;
 - (3) the magnitude and sources of uncertainty in the overfishing limit that were considered by the Committee; and
 - (4) the level of risk adopted in the ABC control rule recommended by the Committee following the Council's risk policy.
- (g) The ABC report shall include a statement in writing to accompany any scientific advice provided to the Council that the advice is based on the best scientific information available, as defined in 50 C.F.R. § 600.315, *National Standard 2 – Scientific Information*.
- (h) The Committee report shall be transmitted to Council staff within 10 working days following the Committee meeting.
- (i) The Council may remand back to the Committee its ABC recommendation based on the following criteria:
 - (1) failure of the Committee to follow the terms of reference provided to it by the Council;
 - (2) an error, in fact or omission, in the materials provided to the Committee;
 - (3) an error in fact in the calculations, if any, undertaken by the Committee in developing its ABC recommendation; and
 - (4) failure of the Committee to follow its standard operating procedures.
- (j) These criteria do not limit the ability of the Council to seek clarification of the foundation for the Committee recommendation.
- (k) The Committee Chair, or designee, shall present the Committee's ABC recommendation at a subsequent Council meeting.

2.6.1.3 *Members and Chair*

- (a) The Committee shall have up to 20 members, all of whom shall be nominated for membership on the Committee by Council members, and shall be appointed to the Committee by a majority vote of the Council. The Committee may be composed of Federal employees, State employees, academicians, or independent experts, and each shall have strong scientific and/or technical credentials and experience in the biological, statistical, economical, social, and other relevant disciplines. The goal will be to structure the committee such that there is a balance in both home bases and expertise of its members. Each member of this committee shall be treated as an affected individual for purposes of paragraphs (2), (3)(B), (4), and (5)(A) of subsection (j) of Section 302 of the Act. The Secretary shall keep disclosures made pursuant to this subparagraph on file.
- (b) Members of the Committee will be appointed by the Council for a period of three years, and may be reappointed at the discretion of the Council. Appointments to the Committee will be staggered to allow overlap of membership. Vacancy appointments shall be for the remainder of the unexpired term of the vacancy. When vacancies arise the Committee shall provide the Council with a list of recommended candidates for consideration; the Council is not bound by the Committee's list of recommended nominees.
- (c) In addition to the 20 members identified in (a) above, interim or special appointments to the Committee of limited duration (not to exceed one year) may also be made to add expertise in special topic areas being addressed by the Committee. These interim appointments have all the rights and privileges of regular Committee members.
- (d) Committee members shall be notified of meetings at least 30 days in advance of each meeting. Committee members who cannot attend a scheduled meeting shall so advise the Executive Director. The terms of members who are absent for three consecutive SSC meetings without notifying the Executive Director in advance of the absence and without a reasonable excuse may be revoked. In addition, Committee members shall attend at least half of the meetings each year in person. Failure to do so may also lead to loss of membership on the Committee.
- (e) From within the membership of the Committee, the Council Chair shall appoint a Chair of the SSC.
- (f) From among their membership, the Committee may elect a Vice-Chair. The Committee Vice-Chair assists the Committee Chair in running meetings, and may represent the Committee to the Council if requested.

2.6.1.4 *Administrative Provisions*

- (a) The Committee shall meet as a whole, or in part, at the call of the Committee Chair, with the approval of the Council Chair, as often as necessary to fulfill the Committee's responsibilities, taking into consideration time and budget constraints.
- (b) The Council staff, in consultation with the Council Chair and SSC Chair, shall be responsible for developing an agenda for Committee meetings.
- (c) The Committee shall report to the Council Chair or the Chair's designee.
- (d) The Executive Director of the Council shall, upon request of the Committee Chair, provide such staff and other support, as the Council considers necessary for Committee activities, within budgetary limitations.
- (e) The Council shall pay the actual expenses of the Committee members, in accordance with Section 302(f)(7)(D) of the Act, while engaged in the performance of Council business, and subject to the availability of appropriations.

- (f) Meetings shall be open to the public. Public comments may be received during the meeting at the discretion of the Committee Chair. Notice of meetings of the SSC shall comply with the applicable notice requirements specified for Council meetings.
- (g) Committee decisions shall be made by consensus whenever possible. The Committee Chair retains the right to call for a vote if it becomes apparent that a consensus cannot be reached on decision that is considered vital. All voting will be anonymous and not by roll call. Proxy votes will not be allowed.
- (h) Minutes of each meeting of the Committee shall be kept and posted on the Council website. The minutes shall contain a record of the persons present, a description of matters discussed, and conclusions reached. ABC reports will also be posted on the Council website.
- (i) The Committee can establish subcommittees or working groups to address specific issues and provide feedback to the general SSC membership for action.
- (j) Pursuant to Section 302(g)(1)(F) of the Act, stipends are available, subject to the availability of appropriations, to SSC members who are not employed by the Federal Government or a State marine fisheries agency. For the purposes of this section, any personnel from state or tribal agencies that have conservation, management or enforcement responsibility for any marine fishery resource, are not eligible for stipends.
- (k) SSC members shall file Financial Interest Forms as described in section 2.3.6.

2.6.2 Advisory Panels

Advisors shall be appointed as needed to assist the work of the Council and will ordinarily be named to provide advice to a particular Council committee. Such advisors will constitute Advisory Panels which fulfill the requirement for a fishing industry advisory committee as required by Section 302(g)(3)(A) of the Act.

2.6.2.1 Objectives and Duties

- (a) When requested by the Council, through the Council Chair or the Executive Director, Advisory Panels shall:
 - (1) Advise the Council on the assessments and specifications contained in each fishery management plan for each fishery within the Council's geographical area of concern, with particular regard to:
 - i) the capacity and the extent to which the fishing vessels (commercial and recreational) of the United States will harvest the resources considered in fishery management plans,
 - ii) the effect of such fishery management plans on local economies and social structures,
 - iii) potential conflicts between user groups of a given fishery resource,
 - iv) the capacity and the extent to which United States fish processors will process that portion of an optimum yield harvested by United States fishing vessels, and
 - v) enforcement problems peculiar to each fishery with emphasis on the expected need for enforcement resources;
 - (2) Advise and/or prepare comments for the Council on:
 - i) fishery management plans or amendments thereto during preparation of such plans or amendments by the Council, and on

- ii) fishery management plans prepared by the Secretary and transmitted to the Council for review;
 - (3) Advise the Council on current trends and developments in fishery matters; and
 - (4) Perform such other necessary and appropriate advisory duties as may be required by the Council to carry out its functions under the Act.
- (b) Advisory Panel, subcommittees of the panels, or panel members shall meet and attend Council meetings and public hearings on fishery management plans and amendments as authorized by the Council Chair or the Executive Director.

2.6.2.2 *Membership*

- (a) Advisory Panel members shall apply for appointment, be recommended by the Executive Committee, and be appointed by the Council Chair. Advisory panel members shall be appointed by the Chairman for a period of three years, and may be reappointed at the pleasure of the Chair. Vacancy appointments shall be filled, when practicable for the remainder of the unexpired term of the vacancy. Neither proxies nor designees can serve in place of an appointed member.
- (b) Advisory Panels shall be composed of persons who are either actually engaged in the harvesting or processing of, or are knowledgeable and interested in the conservation and management of, the fisheries to be managed. Advisory Panels shall also reflect expertise and interest from the standpoint of geographical distribution, industry and other user groups, and the economic and social groups encompassed in the Council's geographical area of concern.
- (c) Advisory Panel members shall be notified of meetings at least 23 days in advance of each meeting. Advisory Panel members who cannot attend a scheduled meeting shall advise the Executive Director.

2.6.2.3 *Administrative Provisions*

- (a) The Advisory Panels shall meet with the approval of the Council Chair, as often as necessary to fulfill the Advisory Panels' responsibilities, taking into consideration time and budget constraints.
- (b) The Council shall pay the actual expenses of the members of the Advisory Panels, in accordance with Section 302(f)(7)(D) of the Act, while engaged in the performance of Council business. Pursuant to Section 302(g)(1)(F) of the Act, stipends are available, subject to the availability of appropriations, to panel members who are not employed by the Federal Government or a State marine fisheries agency. For the purposes of the section, any personnel from state or tribal agencies that have conservation, management or enforcement responsibility for any marine fishery resource, are not eligible for stipends.
- (c) Notice of meetings of Advisory Panel meetings shall comply with the applicable notice requirements specified for Council meetings.

2.7 Working Groups

Fishery management planning and development of FMPs may be performed by various types of working groups, under the direction of the Council. For example, the Council may establish a Plan Team to assess the need for management, assemble information, conduct and evaluate analyses, evaluate public/industry proposals and comments, and estimate the costs of plan development, implementation, and monitoring.

2.8 Ad-Hoc Committees

The Council may use ad hoc groups to address resource user conflicts or other issues. The Council Chair may appoint standing and ad hoc committees from among the voting and nonvoting members as it deems necessary for the conduct of Council business.

2.9 Council Coordination Committee

The Councils may establish a Council Coordination Committee (CCC) consisting of the chairs, vice chairs, and executive directors of each of the eight Councils or other Council members or staff, in order to discuss issues of relevance to all Councils.

The CCC is not subject to the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.2). Procedures for announcing and conducting open and closed meetings of the CCC shall be conducted in accordance with the provisions of 50 CFR § 600.135.

3.0 COUNCIL MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

In fulfilling the Council's responsibilities and functions, the Council members may meet in plenary session, in working groups, or individually to hear statements in order to clarify issues, gather information, or make decisions regarding material before them. To provide for review and decision by the Secretary, recommendations of each of these groups must be documented and available. The documentation must include, at a minimum, a statement of the problem, recommendations for corrective action, likely impact on the affected resource, and likely impact on affected user groups.

3.1 Meetings

3.1.1 General

The Council will meet at the call of the Chair of the Council or upon request of a majority of the voting members. In the latter case, the Council members who want the meeting communicate in writing to the Executive Director in the form of individual letters or a petition. When eleven signatures are received, the Executive Director (a) informs the Chair and (b) arranges for the meeting. Advisory groups may meet with the approval of the Chair. Emergency meetings may be called by the Chair or equivalent presiding officer.

3.1.2 Frequency

The Council must meet in plenary session at least once every six months. Council committees and advisory groups may meet as frequently as necessary, with the approval of the Council Chair.

3.1.3 Location

- (a) The Council must conduct its meetings at appropriate times and places in any of the constituent states of the Council.
- (b) Two or more Councils may hold joint meetings within a constituent state of one of the Councils for the purpose of discussing issues of mutual concern or for the purpose of developing or amending a joint FMP.
- (c) The Council meeting place should have a capacity large enough to accommodate the anticipated public attendance and be accessible to those interested in attending, including consideration of the cost of transportation and lodging.

3.1.4 Notice

- (a) Public notice of regular meetings of the Council, Scientific Statistical Committee or Advisory Panels, including the agenda, must be published in the Federal Register on a timely basis, and appropriate news media notice must be given.
- (b) Appropriate notice shall be provided by any means that will result in wide publicity in the major fishing ports of the region (and in other major fishing ports having a direct interest in the affected fishery), except that email notifications and website postings alone are not sufficient.
- (c) The published agenda of any regular meeting may not be modified to include additional matters for Council action without public notice, or such notice must be given at least 14 days prior to the meeting date, unless such modification is to address an emergency under Section 305(c) of the Act, in which case public notice shall be given immediately.
- (d) Drafts of all regular public meeting notices must be transmitted to the NMFS Headquarters Office at least 23 calendar days before the first day of the regular meeting.

- (e) Drafts of emergency public notices must be transmitted to the NMFS Washington Office at least 5 working days prior to the first day of the emergency meeting. Although notices of, and agendas for, emergency meetings are not required to be published in the Federal Register, notices of emergency meetings must be promptly announced through the appropriate news media.

3.1.5 Conduct of Meetings

- (a) All meetings of the Council advisory and working groups must be open, unless closed in accordance with section 3.1.8.
- (b) Interested persons will be permitted to present oral or written statements regarding the matters on the agenda at regular meetings of the Council, within reasonable limits established by the Chair. All written information submitted to a Council by an interested person shall include a statement of the source and date of such information. Any oral or written statement shall include a brief description of the background and interests of the person in the subject of the oral or written statement (MSFCMA 302(i)(2)(D)).
- (c) At any time when a Council determines it appropriate to consider new information from a state or Federal agency or from a Council advisory body, the Council shall give comparable consideration to new information offered at that time by interested members of the public. Interested parties shall have a reasonable opportunity to respond to new data or information before the Council takes final action on conservation and management measures.
- (d) A vote is required for Council approval or amendment of a fishery management plan (including any proposed regulations), a Council finding that an emergency exists involving any fishery, or Council comments to the Secretary on fishery management plans developed by the Secretary.
- (e) A majority of the voting members of any Council constitutes a quorum for Council meetings, but one or more such members designated by the Council may hold hearings.
- (f) Decisions of any Council are by majority vote of the voting members present and voting (except for proposed removal of Council members, see 50 CFR § 600.230). Voting by proxy is permitted only pursuant to 50 CFR § 600.205(b). An abstention does not affect the unanimity of a vote.
- (g) Voting members of the Council who disagree with the majority on any issue to be submitted to the Secretary, including principal State officials raising federalism issues, may submit a written statement of their reasons for dissent. If any Council member elects to file a minority report, it should be submitted at the same time as that of the majority. The staff shall provide statistical and clerical support as requested and as approved by the Council Chair in preparation of such a minority report. The Regional Administrator of the National Marine Fisheries Service serving on the Council, or the Regional Administrator's designee, shall submit such a statement, which shall be made available to the public upon request, if the Regional Administrator disagrees with any such matter.
- (h) The Council may comment on and make recommendations concerning any activity undertaken or proposed to be undertaken, by a State or Federal agency that, in the view of the Council, may affect the habitat of a fishery resource under its jurisdiction and shall comment on and make recommendations concerning any such activity that NMFS brings to the Council's attention that is likely to substantially affect the habitat of an anadromous fishery resource under its jurisdiction.
- (i) Parliamentary procedures should be used as a guide, but need not be rigidly adhered to, at the Chair's prerogative. Decisions by consensus are permitted, except where the issue is

Council approval of a Fishery Management Plan or amendment (including any proposed regulations), or comments for the Secretary on foreign fishing applications, or Secretariially-prepared management plans, when a vote is required.

- (j) Prior to all roll call votes, a written copy of the motion to be voted on will be made available to Council members. The written motion, as voted on, must be preserved as part of the record or minutes of the meeting. For a vote on a Council finding that an emergency exists in a fishery, the exact number of votes (for, against, and abstaining) must be preserved as part of the record of the meeting. At the request of any voting member of a Council, the Council shall hold a roll call vote on any matter before the Council. The official minutes and other appropriate records of any Council meeting shall identify all roll call votes held, the name of each voting member present during each roll call vote, and how each member voted on each roll call vote.

3.1.6 Deeming Process

- (a) If draft regulations have not been deemed necessary and appropriate at the time an FMP or an Amendment or Framework adjustment to an FMP is approved by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, the Council's Executive Director shall review the draft regulations, when available, for such actions before they are implemented by NMFS.
- (b) After reviewing the draft regulations, the Executive Director shall recommend to the Council Chair whether they are necessary and appropriate for the purposes of implementing the Council-approved action.
- (c) After considering the Executive Director's recommendation, the Council Chair, on behalf of the full Council, shall make the determination to deem the draft proposed regulations as necessary and appropriate for the purposes of implementing the action, consistent with Section 303(c) of the Act.
- (d) Once this process has occurred and if approval has been granted, the Executive Director shall forward the appropriate documents to NMFS.

3.1.7 Record

- (a) Detailed minutes of each meeting of the Council, except for any closed session, shall be kept and shall contain a record of the persons present, a complete and accurate description of matters discussed and conclusions reached, and copies of all statements filed. The Chairman shall certify the accuracy of the minutes of each such meeting and submit a copy thereof to the Secretary. The minutes shall be made available to any court of competent jurisdiction.
- (b) Subject to the procedures established by the Council under 50 CFR § 600.405, and the regulations prescribed by the Secretary under 50 CFR § 600.130 relating to confidentiality, the administrative record (including minutes required under paragraph a of this section) of each meeting, and records or other documents which were made available to or prepared for or by the Council, SSC, or APs incident to the meeting, must be available for public inspection and copying at a single location in the offices of the Council.
- (c) Each Council is required to maintain documents generally available to the public on its Internet site. The following documents shall be posted on the Council's website: fishery management plans and their amendments for the fisheries for which the Council is responsible; drafts of fishery management plans and plan amendments under consideration; analysis of actions the Council has under review; minutes or official reports of meetings of the Council and its committees and Advisory Panels; materials provided by the Council staff to Council members in preparation for meetings; and other Council documents of interest to

the public. For documents too large to maintain on the Web site, not available electronically, or seldom requested, the Council must provide copies of the Documents for viewing at the Council office during regular business hours or may provide the documents through the mail.

3.1.8 Closed Meetings

- (a) A Council, SSC, AP, or other committee shall close any meeting, or portion thereof, that concerns Information bearing on a national security classification.
- (b) A Council, SSC, AP, or other committee may close any meeting, or portion thereof, that concerns matters or information pertaining to national security, employment matters, briefings on litigation in which the Council is interested, or internal administrative matters other than employment. Examples of other internal administrative matters include candidates for appointment to AP, SSC, and other subsidiary bodies and public decorum or medical conditions of members of a Council or its subsidiary bodies.
- (c) If any meeting or portion is closed, the Council shall notify local newspapers in the major fishing ports within its region (and in other major, affected fishing ports), including in that notification the time and place of the meeting.
- (d) In deciding whether to close a portion of a meeting to discuss internal administrative matters, a Council or subsidiary body should consider not only the privacy interests of individuals whose conduct or qualifications may be discussed, but also the interest of the public in being informed of Council operations and actions.
- (e) Without the notice required by paragraph (c) of this section, a Council, SSC, or AP may briefly close a portion of a meeting to discuss employment or other internal administrative matters. The closed portion of a meeting that is closed without notice may not exceed 2 hours.
- (f) Before closing a meeting or portion thereof, a Council or subsidiary body should consult with the NOAA General Counsel Office to ensure that the matters to be discussed fall within the exceptions to the requirement to hold public meetings described in paragraph (a) of this section.
- (g) Actions that affect the public, although based on discussions in closed meetings, must be taken in public. For example, appointments to an AP must be made in the public part of the meeting; however, a decision to take disciplinary action against a Council employee need not be announced to the public.
- (h) Members of the Council, advisory, and working groups planning to attend a closed meeting must obtain the necessary security clearance in advance of the meeting.

3.1.9 Agendas

Suggested agendas for all Council meetings will be drawn up by the Executive Director and approved by the Chair. The Chair will be assisted by the Vice Chair, the staff and the members of the Council who wish to contribute. Members may submit items for the agenda of a meeting within three weeks of the close of the previous meeting.

3.1.10 Special Accommodations

- (a) All meetings of the Council and its associated bodies are held in a manner and place physically accessible to people with disabilities.
- (b) The Council will provide for language interpreters or other auxiliary aids if a request is received at least five days prior to the meeting date.

3.2 Hearings

3.2.1 General

- (a) The Act directs the Council to hold public hearings, at appropriate times and in appropriate locations in the geographical area concerned, to provide the opportunity for all interested persons to be heard in the development of FMPs and amendments, and with respect to the administration and implementation of the Act. The Chair will determine when hearings are appropriate.
- (b) The term "geographical area of concern", for purposes of holding hearings, may include an area under the authority of another Council if the fish in the fishery concerned migrate into, or occur in, that area or if the matters being heard affect fishermen of that area; but not unless such other Council is first consulted regarding the conduct of such hearings within its area.

3.2.2 Notice

Hearings must follow the same procedures for announcement as for Council and advisory group meetings (see section 3.1.4). Timely public notice also should be given to the local media where the hearing is to take place. Publicity should be sufficient in time, substance, and area coverage to assure that all interested parties are aware of the opportunity to make their views known.

3.2.3 Conduct of Hearings

When it is determined that a hearing is appropriate, the Chair of the Council must designate at least one voting member of the Council to officiate. All points of view must be given a reasonable opportunity to be heard.

3.2.4 Record

An accurate and timely report of the participants and their views must be provided in writing to the Council and maintained as a part of the Council's official records.

4.0 EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

4.1 Staffing

4.1.1 Executive Director

- (a) The voting members of the Council shall hire an Executive Director.
- (b) The duties and functions of the Executive Director are:
 - (1) Supervise, direct, and account for the administration and operation of the Council.
 - (2) Retain, set the salary of, conduct performance evaluations of, and dismiss staff as necessary to accomplish the goals of the Council. The Executive Director shall prepare staff job descriptions, revise them as necessary, and review personnel duties to determine if they are consistent with job descriptions and Council guidelines.
 - (3) Assign the duties of the staff as may be necessary to accomplish the goals of the Council.
 - (4) In consultation with the Chair, make and enter into any and all contracts, agreements, or stipulations, and retain, employ and contract for the services of private and public consultants, research and technical personnel, and procure by contract consulting research, technical and other services and facilities, whenever the same shall be deemed necessary or desirable in the performance of the functions of the Council and whenever funds have been made available for such purposes. All legal procedures and applicable regulations shall be followed.
 - (5) Maintain such facilities as may be required for the effective and efficient operation of the Council.
 - (6) Prepare an annual budget for approval by the Council.
 - (7) Coordinate efforts of the Council with other Councils and related Federal agencies.
 - (8) Transfer funds between line items in accordance with NOAA and NMFS regulations, guidelines, and grant conditions.
 - (9) Prepare an Administrative, Operating, and Accounting Procedures Manual for the operation of the Council staff.
 - (10) Prepare fishery management plans in accord with Council policy.
 - (11) Carry out other duties as may be assigned by the Council and/or the Council Chair pursuant to section 4.1.2(c).

4.1.2 Employment Practices

- (a) *Nondiscrimination.* All activities supported in whole or in part by federal funds shall be operated under a policy of equal employment opportunity. Council staff positions must be filled solely on the basis of merit, fitness for duty, competence and qualifications. The Council is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer. All employment actions will be free from discrimination based on race, religion, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, status as a parent, and reprisal. See 50 CFR § 600.120.
- (b) Except for complaints alleging sexual orientation and status as a parent, complaints by employees alleging that they have been discriminated against on the basis listed above, should be processed in accordance with 29 C.F.R. Part 1614. Employees must contact an EEO Counselor at NOAA's Office of Civil Rights within 45 days of the date of the alleged discrimination. Employees alleging discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation will have their complaints processed in accordance with Department Administrative Order (DAO) 215-

11. Employees must contact an EEO Counselor at NOAA's Office of Civil Rights, 800-452-6728 (voice), 301-713-0982 TDD, within 45 days of the date of the alleged discrimination.
- (c) *Relationship Between Council and Staff.* Council members may submit requests for task performance by the Executive Director or the staff to the Council or the Chair for approval and transmittal. Only the Chair, or the Council acting at a duly constituted meeting, may direct task performance by, and exercise supervision over, the Executive Director. The members of the staff shall receive their direction and supervision solely from the Executive Director.
 - (d) No employee of the Council may be deprived of employment, position, work, compensation, or benefit provided for or made possible by the Act on account of any political activity or lack of such activity in support of or in opposition to any candidate or any political party in any national, State, county, or municipal election, or on account of his or her political affiliation.
 - (e) In conducting official Council business, Council members and staff generally have the same protection from individual tort liability as Federal employees on official actions, and are protected by the Federal workers' compensation statute, by the minimum wage/maximum hour provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), and by the rights of access and confidentiality provisions of the Privacy Act (PA).
 - (f) Council staff is eligible for unemployment compensation in the same manner as Federal employees.
 - (g) *Drug Free Workplace.* The Council's workplace will remain drug-free at all times. The unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession or use of a controlled substance will not be tolerated in the Council office. Appropriate personnel action, up to and including termination of employment, will be taken against any employee in violation of this prohibition. Employees are expected to notify management of any criminal drug statute conviction for a violation occurring in the workplace no later than 5 days after such conviction.
 - (h) *Harassment.* The Council will not tolerate harassment or retaliation against those who report harassment. For purposes of this policy, harassment includes unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, older age (beginning at age 40), disability, or genetic information (including family medical history). This policy does not cover allegations of incivility not based on a protected characteristic. However, this policy is not intended to limit in any way the Council's ability to address incivility, inappropriate behavior, or other issues in an appropriate manner for the context. Employees are strongly encouraged to report any incident they perceive as harassment, to include incidents personally experienced or witnessed, to their supervisor or the designated point of contact (Executive Director or other person designated by the Executive Director) as soon as possible. Any Council process participant who observed or receives a report of harassment of a Council employee should report the incident to the Executive Director or Chair or Vice Chair of the Council as soon as possible. The Council's policy on addressing allegation of harassment of Council employees is detailed here as Attachment 1. The Council's Harassment Policy extends beyond staff and includes the conduct of Council members, staff members, and public during the course of official Council meetings, advisory body meetings, or committee meetings. The Council's policy on addressing harassment of process participants other than Council employees is detailed here as Attachment 2.
 - (i) *Whistleblower Protections.* It is the intent of the Council to adhere to all applicable laws and regulations. The underlying purpose of this Employee Protection Policy is to encourage the

organization's goal of full legal compliance. The support of all employees is necessary to achieving this result. To this end, any employee who reasonably believes that a policy, practice, or activity of the Council is in violation of law has a right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Commerce's Office of Inspector General. This right notwithstanding, any employee with such concerns is encouraged to report those concerns to the Council for review and any necessary correction.

- (j) The Council will not retaliate against employees who disclose or threaten to disclose to the Department, any activity, policy, or practice of the Council that the employee reasonably believes is in violation of a law, or a rule, or regulation mandated pursuant to law or is in violation of a clear mandate of public policy concerning the health, safety, welfare, or protection of the environment.

4.1.3 Staff Training

- (a) On the job or part time education (undergraduate or postgraduate college level) training assignments are made by the Executive Director as required by changed job requirements and as budgeted funds permit.
- (b) Employees desiring Council support for on the job training or education assignments shall submit a written request through their supervisor to the Executive Director containing the details of and justification for the assignment. In evaluating a request the Executive Director will consider the extent to which the course or degree pursued relates to the work which the employee is now performing or may reasonably be expected to perform; the relationship between the employee's work schedule and the educational schedule; and funding available in the budget.
- (c) Training must be authorized in advance in order to be reimbursed, with reimbursement made upon satisfactory completion of the course. Allowable costs are:
 - (1) training materials;
 - (2) textbooks;
 - (3) fees charged by the educational institution; and
 - (4) tuition charged by the educational institution, or in lieu of tuition, instructors' salaries and the related share of indirect cost of the educational institution to the extent that the sum thereof is not in excess of the tuition which would have been paid to the participating educational institution.

4.2 Details of Government Employees

All Federal agencies are authorized by Section 302(f)(2) of the Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1852(f)(2), to detail personnel to the Council on a reimbursable basis to assist the Council in the performance of its functions. Council requests to the heads of such agencies must contain the purpose of the detail, length of time, compensation to be paid, if any, and the stipulation that the Assistant Administrator be consulted prior to granting the request. Copies of this correspondence will be transmitted to the Assistant Administrator through the servicing Regional Office. Federal employees so detailed retain all benefits, rights, and status they are entitled to in their regular employment. The Council may negotiate arrangements with State or local governments to utilize employees of those governments. Assistance in arranging these details may be obtained through the servicing Regional Office.

4.3 Personnel Actions

4.3.1 Probation

All appointments shall be for a probationary period of six (6) months during which the individual's fitness for permanent appointment shall be evaluated. If the Executive Director deems it necessary, the probationary period may be extended for not more than two additional six month periods. In no case shall any probationary period be extended beyond eighteen (18) consecutive months. At any time during the probationary period, the Director may dismiss the employee for reasons of unsatisfactory service or conduct. The Executive Director shall notify the employee in writing of the action.

4.3.2 Unauthorized Absences

Any absence from duty that is not in compliance with the various authorized leaves shall be considered an absence without leave and is cause for disciplinary action. No employee shall be absent from duty without authorization by a supervisor except in case of emergency illness, accident, or serious unforeseen circumstances. Such emergency conditions shall be brought to the attention of the supervisor as soon as practicable. Any employee who is absent from work without a valid leave of absence for three (3) consecutive working days, may be deemed to have abandoned the position and to have resigned from the staff unless proven to the satisfaction of the Executive Director that such absence was excusable. Nothing herein contained shall be construed as preventing the Director from taking disciplinary action against an employee under section 4.3.5 because of unauthorized absence.

4.3.3 Employee Inquiries, Requests, Suggestions and Grievances

Employees and their immediate supervisors should discuss and resolve all employee inquiries, requests and suggestions informally. It is the responsibility of each supervisor to conduct such discussions objectively and to initiate action to resolve problems. If, after such informal action, the problem is not resolved, a formal written grievance may be taken to the Executive Director. Should the employee not be satisfied with the Executive Director's resolution of the grievance, an appeal may be taken to the Council.

4.3.4 Disability

Requests for disability-related accommodations should be processed by the Council with procedures similar to those found in DAO 215-10. Action may be initiated by the employee, the employee's legal representative or the supervisor, but in all cases, must be supported by medical evidence acceptable to the Executive Director, the Council, and their insurance carrier.

4.3.5 Reprimand or Suspension Without Pay

In situations where a verbal warning has not resulted in the expected improvement, or where more severe action is warranted, the employee may be reprimanded in writing and a copy shall be placed in the employee's personnel folder. An employee may be suspended without pay by the Executive Director for reasons of misconduct, negligence, inefficiency, insubordination, conduct unbecoming to a Fishery Management Council employee, unauthorized absence, or other justifiable reasons when alternate personnel action would not be appropriate. Suspensions without pay shall not exceed thirty (30) calendar days unless approved by the Council. In no case shall suspension with pay be utilized, but retroactive pay may be granted should the suspension subsequently prove unfounded.

4.3.6 Reasons for Disciplinary Action

Disciplinary action may be taken for any conduct not in keeping with reasonable standards, as determined by the Executive Director and/or Council.

4.3.7 Dismissal

The Executive Director may dismiss employees for reasons of misconduct, negligence, inefficiency, insubordination, conduct unbecoming to a Fishery Management Council employee, unauthorized absence, lack of funding, or other justifiable reasons if it is documented that other personnel actions will not solve the problem. The employee may appeal this action to the Council.

4.4 Salary and Compensation Administration

4.4.1 General

In setting rates of pay for Council Staff, the principle of equal pay for equal work is followed. Variations in basic rates of pay should be in proportion to substantial differences in the difficulty and responsibilities of the work performed. The duties of any new position shall be contained in a brief description to be submitted to the NOAA Personnel Office servicing the NMFS Regional Office assigned to the Council prior to the submission of a budget in which the salary of that position is requested. The Council will request a salary range appropriate to the position within the labor market of the Council's office and a determination of the applicability of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The Council may fill the position at any salary level within that range, except that, unless recruitment of exceptionally qualified employees is hampered, the policy of hiring at the beginning rate shall be recognized. After a position has been filled, the employee may be promoted annually and be recognized for superior performance within the specified salary ranges in accordance with the Council policies.

4.4.2 Pay Bands

Each position shall have assigned to it a pay band for compensation purposes. The pay of employees shall be according to the published rates as set forth in the Alternative Personnel Management System for the U.S. Department of Commerce (62 FR 67434). A part time employee working on a regular and continuous schedule of less than 37.5 hours per week shall be paid the hourly rate appropriate to the pay band of the employee for the hours actually worked. Such schedule shall be established as the work situation requires, with the approval of the Executive Director.

4.4.3 Wage Increases for Full-Time Employees

All wage increases shall occur at the beginning of the calendar year. Those employees who have been employed six (6) months or longer shall be eligible for pay raise advancement. Those employees with less than six (6) months service shall not be eligible for pay raise advancement until the following year. The Council has the discretion to adjust pay rates and pay increases based on cost of living (COLA) differentials in their geographic locations. No pay adjustment based on geographic location shall exceed the COLA and locality pay adjustments available to Federal employees in the same geographic area.

Employees will be entitled to promotions and associated pay raises solely on the basis of merit and performance. The Executive Director, acting for the Council, shall conduct performance reviews at least biennially with each Council employee and will approve promotions and raises based on the employee's performance, length of service, or special accomplishments. Pay raises and performance evaluations for the Executive Director will be accomplished through a review process involving the

Council Chair and/or members of the Council designated by the Chair. Career development, including formal training, will be supported by the Council, subject to budgetary limitations, when directly beneficial to both the employee and the Council.

4.4.4 Incentive/Special Act and Service Awards

Incentive Awards are designed to motivate employees to increase productivity and creativity by rewarding those whose job performance and ideas benefit the Council and are substantially above normal job requirements and performance standards. Cash awards for outstanding service may be granted to full-time employees in addition to salary increases at any time during the year. The amount of the award will be determined by the Executive Director within budget constraints after consultation with the Chairman. The total amount of a cash award will not exceed 10 percent of the employee's base pay. A cash award is a one time, lump sum payment and not a part of the basic annual salary of the employee. The payment is subject to Federal and State withholding taxes, and social security and Medicare deductions. Cash awards are not subject to retirement fund contributions. Cash awards may be granted for various reasons such as: a) completion of short-term project in less time than expected or where there were unusual difficulties to overcome; b) development of new/revised procedures or other contribution toward improvement of office productivity; c) handling an unusually heavy workload, such as when coworkers are absent or vacant positions are not filled immediately; d) completion of significant special assignment outside normal job responsibilities; and e) contribution that improved public awareness and/or understanding of programs.

4.4.5 Work Schedule and Overtime Pay

- (a) The standard work week for all full-time employees shall be 37.5 hours. The standard work day shall be 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. with a one hour lunch period. Deviation may be authorized by the Executive Director to meet operational needs through the use of flex-time or telework.
- (b) Cases of continuing or permanent schedule deviation shall be subject to the approval of the Executive Director or Council. Employees in supervisory, executive or professional positions shall not be eligible for overtime cash payments. However, they shall be eligible for compensatory leave at the rate of one hour leave for one hour's work.
- (c) Compensatory leave must be taken within six (6) months of the date from which it was earned. Employees other than supervisory, administrators, executives or professionals shall be eligible for cash overtime payments at the rate of one hour's pay for each hour up to 40 hours per week or in excess of 7.5 hours per day and 1.0 hours worked in excess of 40 hours per week or in excess of 8 hours per day.
- (d) Overtime payments shall be made in accordance with the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) 29 U.S.C. § 201 *et. seq.* Employees eligible for cash overtime may elect to receive compensatory time in lieu of cash overtime. Such requests must be in writing and approved by the Executive Director prior to the end of the pay period in which it is earned. Requests for compensatory time in lieu of cash overtime may not exceed 75 hours at any one time and must be taken within 6 months of the time that it was earned.

4.4.6 Recruitment

All personnel vacancies should be filled on a competitive basis, unless unusual circumstances clearly dictate otherwise. For this purpose, the Executive Director may use the vacancy advertising system

operated by NOAA through the servicing Regional Office or any other recruitment tool, including newspapers and local employment agencies.

4.4.7 Severance pay

- (a) When the Executive Director in his or her discretion finds it is in the Council's interest that an employee (other than an employee subject to disciplinary action described in section 4.3, and other than an employee entitled to disability pay described in section 4.6.4) not continue as an employee, the Council may provide severance pay as described below.
- (b) The Executive Director, in consultation with the Council Chair, may specify such severance pay if: (i) the periodic-payment amount is no more than the regular compensation the former employee would have been entitled to had he or she continued in employment; (ii) the duration of the payments is no more than 24 months after the former employee's severance from employment; and (iii) the sum of all payments is no more than two years' worth of the regular compensation the former employee would have been entitled to had he or she continued in employment. Further, the Executive Director's discretion in deciding the amount and duration of the severance pay may be guided by a reasonable relation to the employee's years of service to the Council.
- (c) Unless the Executive Director finds that doing so would be contrary to the Council's interests, the Executive Director should condition the Council's offer of severance pay on the employee's permanent severance from employment and the employee's written release of claims under 4.1.2 and other Federal anti-discrimination laws and regulations.

4.5 Leave

4.5.1 Annual Leave

- (a) Full-time employees of the Council shall be entitled to annual leave in accordance with the following schedule. Part time employees accrue leave at the same rate, per hours worked.
 - (1) Up to 3 years of service: 13 days per year (2 hours leave per 40 hours).
 - (2) 3 to 15 years of service: 20 days per year (3 hours leave per 40 hours).
 - (3) Over 15 years of service: 26 days per year (4 hours leave per 40 hours).
- (b) Prior Federal, State or local government service will be credited for the purpose of determining leave accrual of individual employees.
- (c) Though accruing, employees shall not normally be granted paid annual leave until the completion of six (6) months of continuous service.
- (d) At the end of the calendar year, employees may carry over up to 30 days unused annual leave from one year to the next. Amounts remaining above 30 days will be forfeited. Employees who were authorized to carry over 40 days in accordance with Council SOPPs prior to December 11, 1980, may continue under such policy. Under certain conditions, forfeited annual leave may be restored if it was properly scheduled for use and circumstances beyond the employee's control caused the forfeiture. Approval for this restoration must be obtained from the Executive Director, who will refer to the NOAA Personnel Regulations and other source documents for guidance.
- (e) Employees shall request annual leave as per the guidelines established by the Executive Director.

4.5.2 Sick Leave

- (a) All employees except temporary, seasonal, and emergency shall accrue paid sick leave credit at the rate of 13 days per year (two hours leave per 40 hours). Permanent part time employees shall accrue sick leave at the same rate, per hours worked. Sick leave credit may be accumulated without limit.
- (b) An employee eligible for sick leave with pay may use such sick leave for absence due to illness or death of a member of the employee's immediate family requiring the employee's personal presence. In addition, sick leave can be used for appointments with doctors, dentists, or other recognized medical practitioners, subject to prior approval of the Executive Director.
- (c) An employee, at his option, may also use sick leave to provide full regular pay during periods when he is paid less than full pay under workmen's compensation provisions. Such leave shall be charged in proportion to the difference between workmen's compensation pay and full pay. Employees cannot take sick leave with pay in excess of the days actually accrued.
- (d) An employee needing sick leave shall inform his immediate supervisor of the fact and the reason in advance when possible, or otherwise as soon as practicable; failure to do so may be cause for denial of pay for the period of absence.
- (e) Before approving pay for sick leave, the Executive Director may require either a medical practitioner's certificate or a written statement signed by the employee setting forth the reason for the absence. In the case of an absence of more than three (3) consecutive days, a medical practitioner's certificate may be required as a condition of approval.
- (f) In meritorious cases, the Council may advance up to one year's earnings of sick or annual leave when it is reasonably expected that the advanced leave will be repaid by the employee. This must be approved by the Council Chair or an individual to whom the Chair has designated this authority in writing.

4.5.3 Paid Holidays

Paid holidays shall be official Federal holidays plus one holiday designated by the Executive Director.

4.5.4 Administrative Leave

The Executive Director may grant any employee administrative leave for jury duty (no limit); inclement weather (at the discretion of the Executive Director); military duty (not to exceed 15 days each calendar year); military induction examination; and blood donation (up to 4 hours); and for such other reasons as the Executive Director may designate.

4.5.5 Personal Leave

Upon a permanent employee's written request, the Executive Director may approve a leave without pay, not to exceed three (3) months. Such leave may be renewed for an additional period not to exceed three (3) months by formal action of the Executive Director and written approval by the Chair of the Council.

4.5.6 Parental Leave

- (a) The Council provides twelve weeks of paid parental leave to an eligible employee (as described below) following the birth of the employee's child or the placement of a child with the employee in connection with the employee's adoption of the child or the employee's foster care for the child. The purpose of paid parental leave is to enable the employee to care for and bond with a newborn or a newly adopted or newly placed child.

- (b) To be eligible for paid parental leave, an employee must be a full-time employee and must have been employed by the Council for at least 12 months.
- (c) Paid parental leave is compensated at the employee's regular pay.
- (d) After paid parental leave is exhausted, an employee may (within the limits described below) take additional leave charged against the employee's accumulated sick or annual leave credits. The employee also may take leave without pay to extend parental leave. An employee need not exhaust accumulated annual and sick leave credits before taking unpaid parental leave.
- (e) An employee may use a combination of paid parental leave, annual leave, sick leave, and unpaid leave for a period not to exceed 14 weeks following the birth, adoption, or placement of a child with the employee. (The Council may grant a leave to begin prior to the child's birth if the Council finds such a leave is medically necessary for the birth mother.)
- (f) An employee may take an approved parental leave at any time during the six-month period immediately following the birth, adoption, or placement of a child with the employee.
- (g) As stated in section 4.5.2(f), in meritorious cases, the Council may advance up to one year's earnings of sick or annual leave. An employee may use advanced leave as described in paragraph (4) above.
- (h) A parental leave taken under this policy will be counted toward the 12 weeks of leave available under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) as described in section 4.5.7.
- (i) Nothing in this policy supersedes or changes the provisions of any employee-benefit plan or fringe benefit. If the provisions for a plan or benefit are ambiguous, the Council may resolve an ambiguity by treating a parental leave similarly to another leave, such as an annual leave or sick leave.
- (j) Nothing in this policy can increase an employee's credit for unused annual-leave days or unused sick days. A post-severance payment for unused leave is not provided regarding unused personal leave, family-and-medical leave, parental-absence leave, or other leave.

4.5.7 Family and Medical Leave

Full-time employees of the Council shall be entitled to family leave in accordance with the U.S. Department of Labor Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) 29 CFR Part 825. Employees are eligible to receive up to a total of 12 workweeks of unpaid leave during any 12 month period for one or more of the following reasons:

- (a) For the birth and care of the newborn child of the employee;
- (b) For placement with the employee of a son or daughter for adoption or foster care;
- (c) To care for an immediate family member (spouse, child, parent) with a serious health condition; or
- (d) To take medical leave when the employee is unable to work because of a serious health condition.

4.5.8 Post-Severance Payment for Unused Leave

When a salaried full-time employee of the Council permanently severs from employment, he or she is, or may become, entitled to a payment for unused leave as stated below.

4.5.8.1 Retirees

- (a) If a full-time employee of the Council has completed at least 20 years of service or attains age 60 and permanently severs from employment, he or she is entitled to receive payment for unused annual leave days and unused sick days credited under the Council's practices

and procedures that remained credited as of the Eligible Retiree's severance from employment. There is no payment regarding unused family-and-medical leave, parental-absence leave, or other leave.

- (b) The amount to be paid is equal to the number of credited unused days described above multiplied by a daily wage rate. That rate is the Eligible Retiree's highest salary that was in effect at least 90 days before his or her retirement divided by 260.
- (c) Upon retirement, an Eligible Retiree may choose to receive payment for unused leave as either a lump sum payment or as annual installments over a period of up to five years.
- (d) If the Eligible Retiree dies before full payment is made, the Council shall pay the duly appointed and currently serving personal representative of the Eligible Retiree's estate.

4.5.8.2 *Non-Retirees*

- (a) If a full-time employee of the Council permanently severs from employment before attaining eligibility for retirement, he or she is entitled to receive a lump sum payment for unused annual leave upon separation. There is no payment regarding sick leave, unused family and medical leave, parental-absence leave, or other leave.
- (b) Payment for unused annual leave shall not exceed 30 days plus current year earnings. Employees authorized to carry over 40 days of unused leave are entitled to receive lump sum reimbursements not to exceed 40 days carryover plus current year earnings of unused leave.
- (c) The payment amount for unused leave is calculated by multiplying the number of unused annual leave days by a daily wage rate. That rate is the employee's highest salary that was in effect at least 90 days before the end of his or her employment divided by 260.
- (d) In the case of the death of an employee, the employee's estate shall be paid in cash for any accumulated annual leave.

4.5.9 **Leave and Retiree Health Insurance Accounts**

Accounts shall be maintained to pay for unused sick or annual leave and retiree health benefits as authorized. The accounts will be funded from the Council's annual operating allowances. Funds will be deposited into these accounts each year based on an actuarial report of future insurance needs for retirees and the availability of funds. Interest earned on this account will be maintained in the account, along with the principal, for the purpose of payment of unused annual and sick leave only. This account, including interest, may be carried over from year to year. Budgeting for accrued leave will be identified in the "Other" object class categories section of the SF-424A.

4.6 **Employee Benefits**

4.6.1 **Health Insurance**

4.6.1.1 *Employee Health Insurance*

- (a) The Council will pay the basic rate for the employee and his family under the plan chosen, including the blood bank.
- (b) Surviving spouses of employees will be considered eligible to participate in group health benefits at their own expense and at no cost to the Council for a period of up to one year.

4.6.1.2 *Retiree Health Coverage*

- (a) If a full-time Employee of the Council has completed at least 20 years of service or attains age 60 and permanently severs from employment [an "Eligible Retiree"], he or she is, or may become, entitled to health insurance coverage as stated below ["Retiree Health Coverage"].

- (b) This Plan does not cover any active employee. This Plan is separate from every plan that covers or could cover an active employee.
- (c) Retiree Health Coverage may include the Eligible Retiree and his or her spouse. Retiree Health Coverage does not include a dependent who is not the Eligible Retiree's spouse.
- (d) Retiree Health Coverage meets 75% of the premium cost of the coverage provided under this Plan. Any coverage otherwise provided by this Plan is not provided if the Eligible Retiree has not paid his or her portion of the premium cost for the coverage.
- (e) For an Eligible Retiree who attained age 60 on or before his or her retirement, his or her Retiree Health Coverage begins with the first month for which the Retiree is no longer covered as an employee. For an Eligible Retiree who had not attained age 60 on or before his or her retirement, Retiree Health Coverage begins with the first month that begins after the Retiree attains age 60.
- (f) If an Eligible Retiree's coverage has begun under the preceding paragraph, Retiree Health Coverage for his or her spouse begins with the first month that begins after the spouse attains age 60.
- (g) Retiree Health Coverage for a Retiree ends with (the earliest of): (1) the Retiree's death, (2) age 65, (3) eligibility for Medicare, or (4) eligibility for Medicaid. However, for a Retiree covered by Medicare who is not covered by Medicaid, Retiree Health Coverage is 75% of the premium cost of Medicare Supplement Insurance Part D and either Plan F or G.
- (h) Retiree Health Coverage for a Retiree's spouse ends with (the earliest of) (1) the Spouse's death, (2) attainment of age 65, (3) eligibility for Medicare, (4) eligibility for Medicaid, or (5) the Retiree's death. However, for a Retiree's spouse covered by Medicare who is not covered by Medicaid, Retiree Health Coverage (if it has not ended under the preceding sentence) is 75% of the premium cost of Medicare Supplement Insurance Part D and either Plan F or G.

4.6.2 Life Insurance

The Council will pay for employee life insurance coverage at the rate of one times salary, with a minimum coverage of \$50,000.

4.6.3 Retirement

- (a) The Council will pay a base of ten (10) percent of an employee's salary into a deferred compensation plan.
- (b) Depending on availability of funding, the Council will contribute an additional match of up to four (4) percent beginning January 1, 2012.
- (c) Vesting will be 100 percent. In the case of the death or disability of an employee, the employee or the employee's estate or beneficiary shall be paid in cash for 100% of the employee's deferred compensation plan.

4.6.4 Long Term Disability Insurance

The staff is eligible for coverage by a disability plan similar to that provided by the Federal Government to its employees.

4.7 Experts and Consultants

- (a) As long as funding is available in the Council's budget, the Executive Director may, in consultation with the Council Chair, contract with experts and consultants as needed to

provide technical assistance not available from NOAA at a rate that does not exceed the first step of GS 15 plus travel.

- (b) A Council must notify the NOAA Office of General Counsel before seeking outside legal advice, which may only be for technical assistance not available from NOAA. If the Council is seeking legal services in connection with an employment practices question, the Council must first notify the Department of Commerce's Office of the Assistant General Counsel for Administration, Employment and Labor Law Division. A Council may not contract for the provision of legal services on a continuing basis.

5.0 TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

5.1 General

- (a) The Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), found at 41 CFR Part 301, apply to all travel.
- (b) Detailed procedures covering processing reimbursement claims for travel expenses are described in the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Travel Guidelines available at www.mafmc.org/travel or by contacting the Council office. These procedures are updated regularly but are consistent with the following guidelines and other matters in this SOPP document.
- (c) All non-federal members of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council), the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee, Advisory Panels, technical teams, work groups, ad hoc committees, staff, special consultants, and other individuals with specific invitation to travel are eligible to receive reimbursement for permissible travel expenses when away from home or their work location. Payment for NOAA personnel from Council funds is not authorized.
- (d) Travel status begins when the traveler leaves their home/office and ends upon their return. For travel that extends beyond 24 hours, a new travel day begins at 12:00 a.m. each day.

5.2 Reimbursement

5.2.1 Procedures

- (a) All travel must be authorized and approved in advance by a Travel Authorization (TA) before any travel reimbursements are issued. Points of travel are indicated on the TA, and deviations from these points of travel must have prior approval for payment or reimbursement.
- (b) The Council will reimburse the method of transportation which results in the greatest financial advantage to the Council, considering cost, travel time, convenience, and other factors.
- (c) All claims for reimbursement, other than those expenses covered by M&IE, must be supported with receipts (other than meals) except those expenses that individually amount to less than \$50.
- (d) Travel expense claim forms must be submitted within 60 days from the last day of travel.

5.2.2 Allowable Expenses

- (a) Travel expenses for which reimbursement is allowable will be confined to those expenses essential to transacting official Council business, including:
 - (1) transportation by common carrier (air coach, rail coach, bus), privately owned vehicle (reimbursed on a per mile basis), rental car, or other means;
 - (2) lodging in accordance with the GSA's established lodging per diem rate
 - (3) meals and incidental expenses (M&IE) in accordance with the GSA's established M&IE per diem rate; and
 - (4) incidental expenses such as taxi fares, parking, and telephone calls on official business.
- (b) M&IE and lodging will be reimbursed in accordance with GSA's current M&IE and lodging rates unless prior approval is granted by the Executive Director for costs above the limit for the area.
- (c) The Executive Director shall be housed at the same hotel as the Council during Council and committee functions unless exempted by the Council Chair. Council staff attending a

meeting shall be housed at the same hotel as the Council during Council and committee functions unless exempted by the Executive Director.

- (d) The per diem limits and expense requirements described above also are applicable to non-Council personnel traveling at Council expense.

5.3 Foreign Travel

- (a) Foreign travel must be approved, in advance, by the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries or designee and by the Grants Officer. Requests for foreign travel approval should be submitted, in writing, at least 30 days in advance to the Assistant Administrator, through the NMFS Office of Management and Budget and the Grants Officer. Routine across the border travel to Canada is exempt.
- (b) The Council Chairman, or his or her authorized representative(s), may approve routine travel to Canada for Council members and employees within specified Federal rates.
- (c) Foreign invitational travel must be approved as described in paragraph (a) of this section.

5.4 Invitational Travel

The Executive Director may accept in-kind and/or actual invitational funds for Council staff travel (including his/her own), only after (1) notifying the NMFS Regional Administrator of the origin and purpose of such funding, and (2) directing such gifts to the Administrator. 50 CFR § 600.125(c). Domestic invitational travel for non-Council personnel may be approved by the Council Chairman or his/her authorized representative.

6.0 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The Council's grant activities are governed by 2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards), 2 CFR Part 215, and 2 CFR Part 230, which prescribe standards for financial management systems, procurement, property management, financial reporting, cash depositories, and grant close out procedures. The Council is required to comply with the provisions of the regulations, Circulars, DOC pre-award notification requirements, and terms and conditions of the cooperative agreement.

6.1 Cooperative Agreements

The Council receives funds through cooperative agreements for two basic types of expenditures: administrative (or operations) funds to cover general operating expenses, such as salaries, office space, utilities, travel, State liaison activities, etc., and programmatic funds primarily designed to fund subawards generated by the Council for development of FMPs (including amendments) or FMP oriented information.

6.1.1 Administrative

- (a) The funding for the administrative and technical support of Council operations is included in the budget of the Department of Commerce and, through the Department, in the budgets of NOAA and NMFS. The funding requirements for the Council are subject to regular budgetary review procedures. Five year cooperative agreements will provide such Federal funds as the Secretary determines are necessary to the performance of the functions of the Council and consistent with budgetary limitations. Requirements for periodic reports for purposes of NOAA budgetary control are described in individual grants and cooperative agreements issued to the Council.
- (b) *Application for cooperative agreement.* The Council must submit a formal application (Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance) to the Northeast Regional Administrator. This application includes a Budget Data Form, a Program Narrative Statement supporting the application, and a Statement of General Assurances. As backup to the Budget Data Form, each Council must prepare a Budget Summary Worksheet. The Budget Data Form must reflect the amounts in lines A1 through A8 of the Worksheet. The Program Narrative Statement should describe in appropriate detail the purpose for which funds are sought, *e.g.*, operational expenses, FMP oriented contracts, State liaison support.
- (c) *Accounting.* A Cash Receipts and Disbursement Journal with a monthly Summary of Accounts is required as a minimum bookkeeping system. A Statement of Income and Expenses for the Council must be prepared monthly for the Council membership. Each cash disbursement must be approved by the Council Executive Director or Administrative Officer, except that the Council may set a level above which checks must be signed by the Council Executive Director or Administrative Officer and the Chair or Vice Chair. When budget estimates are submitted to the Assistant Administrator, the uniform account classification titles should be used.
- (d) *Advance of funds.* Drawdowns from the Treasury will be made in accordance with provisions established by the cooperative agreement.

6.1.2 Programmatic

- (a) Prior to preparing a programmatic application, the Executive Director shall survey appropriate academic institutions to determine if the desired results of the programmatic project have already been achieved or are being worked on and can be obtained at no cost by the Council.
- (b) *Receipt of Funds.* The Council may not independently enter into agreements, including grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements, whereby they will receive funds for services rendered. All such agreements must be approved and entered into by NOAA on behalf of the Council. Additionally, the Council is not authorized to accept gifts or contributions directly. All such donations must be directed to the NOAA Administrator in accordance with applicable Department of Commerce regulations.
- (c) *Criteria.* NOAA has established the following criteria to guide each year's decisions on programmatic funding:
 - (1) Proposed projects must be directly related to the formulation of an FMP, amendment, or emergency action (including data collection necessary to determine whether an FMP should be formulated); necessary to evaluate an FMP already in place; or necessary to obtain information for use in framework FMP management actions.
 - (2) Proposed projects must be short term, preferably one year or less but generally not longer than two years.
 - (3) Proposed projects must avoid duplication of effort and operate as cost efficiently as possible in order to maximize benefits for Federal expenditures. When a Council has identified data needs for a particular fishery, available resources from NOAA, the States, Office of Sea Grant, academic institutions, and other established sources of information should be utilized to avoid duplication of effort. If certain biological, ecological, economic, or social data is needed on a high priority basis which cannot readily be supplied free of charge by NMFS or other institutions, the Council may be authorized to contract for the information collection and analysis. The SSC of each Council should assist in identifying immediate and longer range research and data needs.
- (d) Procedure
 - (1) Requests for programmatic funding may be submitted at the same time as the Council's administrative budget, or at other times as requested by the Assistant Administrator. Documentation should include a cover letter explaining the need for the project, how it contributes to an FMP (proposed, developing or existing), and how it meets criteria outlined in this section.
 - (2) Competing project proposals which meet the above criteria may be funded based on an evaluation of urgency of problem to be addressed, impact of failing to fund, impact of delay in funding, and importance and size of fishery.
 - (3) Programmatic contract services always must be described in the context of overall Council plans in a particular programmatic area. The relationship of individual contracts to past and projected goals must be reflected in all Council applications for contract funds.

6.2 Procurement

- (a) The procurement system of the Council will be the direct responsibility of the Executive Director. The terms and conditions of the award and 2 CFR Parts 200, 215 and 230 will be

adhered to in procurement and a clear audit trail for all Council expenditures will be maintained. The cost and financial management principles outlined in 2 CFR Parts 200, 215 and 230 apply to all Council procurement actions.

- (b) To avoid duplication of work, efforts must be made to use existing support sources (Federal, State, other Councils, etc.) before commercial sources are sought.
- (c) Competition must be held for all commercial purchases over \$100,000 unless the unique nature of the procurement, unforeseen time constraints, and/or substantiated overall savings (administrative plus contractual) clearly dictate otherwise. Proposed sole-source contracts over \$100,000 must be approved in writing by the Regional Administrator and the Grants Officer. Final copies of all contracts awarded will be filed with the appropriate Grants Officer. All sole source procurements under \$100,000 with individuals and commercial vendors will be documented. Internal Council evaluations may be made on procurements in excess of \$100,000 to ensure their legality, economy, and viability, or the Council may delegate such authorization to its Executive Director or Chair.
- (d) Efforts must be made to utilize small businesses, minority-owned firms, and women's business enterprises for Council procurements, and to purchase American made equipment and products. The Commerce Business Daily (CBD) should be considered as a means of publicizing contemplated contracts.
- (e) The purchase or lease of ADP equipment by the Council and its subcontractors requires prior approval by the Regional Administrator and the Grants Officer. Such approval will be made only after a cost benefit analysis (system life cost, lease vs. purchase, compatibility, etc.) by the Council demonstrates the economy of the proposed action.
- (f) The Council is authorized to purchase supplies and services from GSA directly.

6.3 Property Management System

- (a) It is the responsibility of the Executive Director to develop and implement property management procedures that ensure adequate control and protection of Council property at all times.
- (b) An annual inventory report will be submitted to the NOAA Grants Officer. Theft of Council property should be reported promptly to local law enforcement personnel, including the FBI, the Grants Officer, and to the Regional Office.
- (c) Property management procedures must ensure adequate control and protection of Council property at all times. Such procedures must include as a minimum:
 - (1) A perpetual inventory system for all non-expendable items (office equipment, furniture, etc.).
 - (2) Procedures for marking such items as Council property.
 - (3) Provision or safeguarding sensitive items such as cameras and biological equipment.
 - (4) Procedures to be followed in disposing of surplus items. Surplus property with a current per-unit fair market value of greater than \$5,000 will be disposed of in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200. Equipment with a current per-unit fair market value of less than or equal to \$5,000 may be disposed of in the following manner:
 - i) Property which is determined to be surplus to the Council needs may be transferred, traded, sold, or discarded.
 - ii) Items may be transferred to another Council, Federal, State, or local agency.
 - iii) Items may be traded for needed supplies, equipment, or for other considerations with another Council, Federal, State, or local agency.

- iv) Items may be sold to another Council, Federal, State, or local agency, or commercial vendor at a fair market value.
 - v) Any item that is no longer functional may be discarded in any appropriate manner.
- (5) A summary of all personnel authorized to have access to Council property (to include consultants, if appropriate).

6.4 Space Management

- (a) Economy should be exercised regarding the amount and cost of space acquired.
- (b) When acquiring office space, the Council may avail itself of the following:
 - (c) General Services Administration leasing assistance;
 - (d) Regional Office assistance; and
 - (e) Direct negotiations within the guidelines stated above.
- (f) The leasing, renting, and acquisition of real property and space will be performed in a manner consistent with 2 CFR Part 200 or 2 CFR Part 230, as applicable.

6.5 Accounting System

- (a) The Executive Director shall have the authority to adopt and install an accounting procedure consistent with and within Federal guidelines.
 - (1) The accounting system must be a document oriented, obligation accounting system (with accruals, as necessary, for budget projection purposes).
 - (2) Actual journals and ledgers must be maintained either manually or on an automated system; in either case, however, all obligations must be clearly documented and organized in order to provide quick access and verification by professional auditors.
 - (3) The actual composition (chart of accounts) of the system as a minimum must provide fiscal control over expenditures in line with those object classes depicted in the Council budget submission. This will allow not only timely submission of the periodic financial status reports, but it will also ensure close coordination between actual spending rates and budgeted amounts so that comparisons and changes can be made at any time.
 - (4) All financial records must be handled in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200.
- (b) The Executive Director may contract with a Certified Public Accountant to assist in the establishment, operation, maintenance, audit, and control of such system.
- (c) The Council shall bond its employees in an amount adequate to safeguard the Council's interests. The total funds, on deposit and cash on hand, shall not, at any time, exceed the amount of the bond unless specifically authorized by the Council.
- (d) Checks may be drawn on the sole signature of the Executive Director or Administrative Officer, except that checks greater than \$30,000, which must be signed by the Executive Director and also the Council Chair or the Vice Chair.
- (e) Year-end Expenditures and Carry Overs. It shall be the policy of the Council not to expend funds at the end of a fiscal year in anticipation of needs which may arise in subsequent fiscal years.

6.6 Audits

- (a) An independent audit is required at least biennially by DOC Office of the Inspector General auditors or an independent public accountant (IPA). The Council is subject to audit by the DOC Office of the Inspector General and the General Accounting Office.

- (b) The scope of the audit may include:
 - (1) conduct of financial operations;
 - (2) compliance with applicable laws and regulations;
 - (3) economy and efficiency of administrative procedures;
 - (4) and achievement of results.
- (c) If an IPA is to perform the audit, the request for proposals and contract must comply with 2 CFR Part 200.
- (d) As part of the IPA's examination of Council records, it is requested that they comment on whether efforts have been made by the Council to include small, minority, and women owned businesses as sources of supplies and services.
- (e) In order to provide guidance or provide additional information to the auditors and the Council on audit related matters, it is suggested that the following personnel be invited to participate in the audit exit conference:
 - (1) The Grants Officer;
 - (2) The Assistant Administrator's staff and/or a representative of the Regional Office; and
 - (3) The Council Chair.

6.7 Financial Reports

Reports are required which summarize total expenditures made and Federal funds unexpended for each award, and the status of Federal cash received. Guidance for the preparation of these reports and other financial reporting procedures is contained in 2 CFR Part 200 and Special Award Conditions of the Cooperative Agreement.

7.0 RECORD KEEPING

7.1 Definitions

- (a) *Records*: documentary items that are made or received by an agency of the United States in connection with the transaction of public business. Agencies are legally required to keep these records as evidence of their actions, and they must be maintained in accordance with your agency's records retention schedule or one of the government's general records retention schedules. They can be in any format (i.e. text documents, photos, computer codes, electronic files, CD-ROMS, disks, USB keys, magnetic tapes).
- (b) *Non-records*: items made or acquired solely for reference, extra copies of documents kept for reference/personal convenience (even if it's a copy of something that is a record—only the original is the record), notes taken during a meeting which aren't shared with others, drafts.
- (c) *Personal papers*: materials pertaining solely to your private affairs, for example the telephone bill that you brought in to pay during your lunch break or your personal appointment calendar.

7.2 Administrative Records for FMPs

- (a) Councils and NMFS Headquarters, Regions and Centers collectively are responsible for maintaining records pertaining to the development of FMPs and amendments within their geographic area of authority. In the event of litigation, compilation of an administrative record for a court case will be under the direction of the NOAA General Counsel.
- (b) Categories of documents which generally constitute an administrative record include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - (1) Council meeting agendas
 - (2) Minutes of Council meetings
 - (3) Plan Team reports
 - (4) SSC reports
 - (5) AP reports
 - (6) Hearing reports
 - (7) Council reports/recommendations
 - (8) Correspondence relating to the FMP
 - (9) Scoping comments
 - (10) Work plan
 - (11) Discussion papers
 - (12) NEPA documents
 - (13) Regulatory analyses
 - (14) PRA justification
 - (15) Proposed regulations
 - (16) Final regulations
 - (17) Emergency regulations
 - (18) Notices of meetings (Council, SSC, AP, Team)

7.3 Disposition of Records

- (a) Council records must be handled in accordance with Department of Commerce and NOAA records management office procedures. The Council will abide by the terms of the NOAA Records Management Guide; the NOAA Records Disposition Handbook, and the following records management authorities: NAO 205-1 *NOAA Records Management Program*; DAO 205-1 *Program for Records Management*; Federal Records Act of 1950; 44 U.S.C. Chapter 31 *Records Management by Agency Heads*; 44 U.S.C. Chapter 33 *Disposal of Records*; and 44 U.S.C. § 101 *Federal Management and Promotion of Electronic Government Services*.
- (b) The goal of an effective disposition program is annually to destroy unneeded records that are not required to be retained, while preserving records having long term or enduring value because of administrative, legal, scientific, or historical importance.
- (c) The Council must consult with NOAA before destroying Council records. Financial records (including time and attendance records) should be handled according to the stipulations of 2 CFR Part 200. The Council must send records associated with FMPs to the appropriate Region for disposition.
- (d) All records and documents created or received by Council employees while in active duty status, or while conducting Council business, belong to the Federal Government. When employees leave the Council, they cannot take the original or file copies of records with them; to do so violates Federal law.

7.4 Permanent Records

The designation of a file as "permanent" means that the records are appropriate for offer to the National Archives when 20 years old, unless otherwise specified. Destruction of permanent records is not authorized. The following are examples of permanent files:

- (a) EIS Files - Documents relating EIS's or environmental assessments. Cut off at end of calendar year when created. Permanent retention; no approved disposition at this time.
- (b) Annual Report Files - Input for the DOC Annual Reports and related correspondence. Cut off at end of calendar year when created; permanent.
- (c) Meeting Files - Including agendas, minutes, reports, studies and related correspondence. Cut off at end of calendar year; permanent.

7.5 Privacy Act (PA) Records

Each Council will maintain in its office, under appropriate safeguards in accordance with the PA, personnel files on employees, experts and consultants under contract, and advisory group members. Records will be maintained in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act and Department of Commerce regulations.

7.6 Freedom of Information ACT (FOIA) Requests

All FOIA requests must be submitted in writing.

- (a) FOIA requests received by the Council must be coordinated promptly with the appropriate NMFS Regional Office. The Regional Office will forward the request to the NMFS FOIA Officer so that the request can be logged into a centralized database and assigned a tracking number. The FOIA Officer will execute a CD-244, "FOIA Request and Action Record," which will include the tracking number and the due date. A search for responsive documents must

begin immediately upon receipt of the search tasker from the FOIA office. All responsive documents must be reviewed for disclosure on a line-by-line basis, and segregable portions must be released. Council members may make recommendations regarding potential exemptions to be asserted; however, only a Federal employee can make a disclosure determination. The original documents must be retained by the originating office. Copies of the responsive records must be provided to the FOIA office, in accordance with the instructions on the tasker, and redacted and unredacted versions will be maintained by that office in accordance with DOC policy.

- (b) The Region will obtain clearance from the NOAA General Counsel's Office concerning the initial denial of requested information. In the event the Regional Office determines that requested information is exempt from disclosure, in full or in part, under the FOIA, the denial letter prepared for the Assistant Administrator's signature and a list of the documents to be withheld must be cleared through the NMFS FOIA Officer. Upon completion, a copy of the signed CD-244 and cover letter transmitting the information should be provided to the NMFS FOIA Officer and the NOAA FOIA Officer. Any fees collected from requesters are transferred to the U.S. Treasury, and the Council does not recover its costs.

7.7 Confidentiality of Data

In order to comply with 50 CFR Part 600 Subpart E, the Council adopts its Confidentiality of Data Policy by reference into this SOPPs.

7.8 Information Quality

The Council agrees to abide by the NOAA Information Quality Guidelines for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information which it disseminates. The NOAA guidelines also establish an administrative mechanism allowing affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information that does not comply with Office of Management and Budget or NOAA applicable guidelines.

8.0 AMENDMENTS TO STATEMENT OF ORGANIZATION, PRACTICES, AND PROCEDURES

8.1 Amendments

This Statement of Organization, Practices, and Procedures may be amended from time to time by majority vote of the voting members present and voting provided notice of the specific proposed change has been sent in writing to all members of the Council at least ten (10) days in advance of the meeting in which the matter shall be presented. Amendments to current SOPPs must be consistent with the guidelines in 50 CFR Part 600 Subpart C, the terms and conditions of the cooperative agreement (the funding agreement between the Council and NOAA that established Council funding and mandates specific requirements regarding the use of those funds), the statutory requirements of the Act, and other applicable law. Upon approval of a Council's SOPP amendment by the Secretary, a notice of availability must be published in the Federal Register that includes an Internet address from which the amended SOPP may be read and downloaded and a mailing address to which the public may write to request copies.

ATTACHMENT 1: Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Policy on Addressing Allegations of Harassment of Council Employees

SECTION 1. PURPOSE.

The purpose of this policy is to protect Council employees and provide guidance for Councils on taking action related to incidents or allegations of harassment **experienced by Council employees** prohibited by Federal law (i.e., harassment based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, color, national origin, age, religion, disability, or reprisal). **The Council will not tolerate harassment or retaliation against those who report harassment.** Preventing harassment is everyone's responsibility and individuals who experience or observe harassment are strongly encouraged to come forward to ensure a safe working environment for everyone involved in the Council process. This policy provides a framework for procedures to encourage employees to come forward with harassment allegations without fear of retaliation. This policy outlines an expedited process for reviewing allegations of harassment, ending actual incidents of harassment, and taking disciplinary actions as appropriate. The procedures established in this policy are distinct from the NOAA equal employment opportunity (EEO) complaint process, which is also available to Council employees to pursue allegations of – and seek remedies for – discrimination or harassment.

SECTION 2. BACKGROUND.

Definition of Unlawful Harassment:

Harassment is a form of discrimination. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defines harassment as: “unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, older age (beginning at age 40), disability, or genetic information (including family medical history). Harassment becomes unlawful where 1) enduring the offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, or 2) the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive.”¹

2.01 The Council is responsible for maintaining a workplace free of harassment. As part of this responsibility, supervisors are responsible for addressing and correcting misconduct that constitutes harassment.

2.02 Employees can pursue allegations of harassment to several forums. The allegations or incidents covered in this policy are such that immediate appropriate action by the appropriate supervisor to resolve such matters is mandatory regardless of which forum an employee selects in pursuing an allegation. Employees have recourse when supervisors fail to address allegations of harassment, which could result in serious consequences for the Council.

SECTION 3. SCOPE.

¹ See the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission website for more information:
<https://www.eeoc.gov/harassment>.

This policy covers incidents or allegations of harassment prohibited by Federal law,² experienced by a Council employee, whether the alleged harassment is ongoing or occurred in the past. The conduct covered by this policy involves:

- a. the targeting of an employee for harassment because of his/her sex (this includes harassment which is not necessarily sexual in nature) or other protected status;
- b. a pattern of pervasive harassment in the work unit including unwelcome behavior towards an individual or individuals which has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment; or
- c. a single incident of harassment of such a serious nature that the continued effective functioning of the unit will be impacted.

SECTION 4. PROCEDURES.

4.01 Reporting Allegations of Harassment

- a. The preferred point of contact to coordinate responses to harassment allegations is the Executive Director. The Executive Director will identify a second point of contact to coordinate responses to harassment allegations.
- b. Employees are strongly encouraged to report any incident they perceive to be harassment, to include incidents personally experienced and those witnessed. They may report it to any Council supervisor or the designated point of contact, as soon as the incident occurs.
- c. Any Council process participants (e.g., Council Member, NOAA employee, or others participating in the Regional Fishery Management Council process, aside from Council employees) who observe or receive a report of harassment of a Council employee should report the incident to the Council Executive Director, chair, or vice-chair as soon as possible.
- d. To the extent possible, the Council will protect the confidentiality of individuals who make harassment reports. However, the Council cannot guarantee complete confidentiality, since it cannot always conduct an effective inquiry without revealing certain information to the alleged harasser and potential witnesses. The Council is

² This policy covers allegations of unlawful harassment, which is a form of discrimination. See the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission website for more information: <https://www.eeoc.gov/harassment>. Allegations of incivility or other inappropriate behavior not based on a protected characteristic are outside the scope of this policy. However, this policy is not intended to limit in any way the Council's ability to address incivility, inappropriate behavior, or other issues in an appropriate manner.

committed to ensuring that the allegation of harassment is shared only with those who have a need to know and in a respectful and sensitive manner.

- e. Employees who make reports of harassment or provide information related to such reports will be protected from retaliation.
- f. All reports of harassment when received by the designated point of contact will be promptly evaluated (typically within one week, absent extenuating circumstances, but in some cases more quickly if warranted under the circumstances) to determine if they come within the scope of this policy. Reports that fall within the scope of this policy will be reviewed thoroughly and impartially in accordance with the procedures in this policy.

4.02 Taking Action on Reported Allegations of Harassment.

- a. A supervisor who receives an allegation that a Council employee has been harassed (whether the allegation is received from the employee or from another person on their behalf) must immediately³ report the allegation, in writing, to the designated point of contact. Failure by the supervisor to report the allegation could result in disciplinary or adverse action against the supervisor for failure to adhere to the provisions of this Policy.
- b. In all cases, the supervisor, or designated point of contact to whom the incident is reported, must inform the employee of his or her right to seek counseling from an Equal Employment Opportunity counselor in NOAA's Office of Inclusion and Civil Rights.⁴ The employee must be informed that all counseling contacts must occur within 45 days from the date of the alleged harassing event.
- c. In some instances, an employee may request that a supervisor keep the employee's allegations of harassment confidential.
 - 1. In such an instance, the supervisor is obligated to inform the designated point of contact of the allegations and of the request for confidentiality, and must inform the employee of this obligation.
 - 2. Where the employee requests confidentiality, the responsible supervisor must provide a written statement to the employee indicating that any inquiry and action will be very limited if anonymity is required. Any such statement should be coordinated with the designated point of contact.

³ Absent extenuating circumstances, for purposes of the required report, "immediately" means within 24 hours of receipt of allegations.

⁴ <https://www.noaa.gov/organization/inclusion-and-civil-rights/eo-counseling-complaints>

4.03 Incidents Where Facts Are Known and Not in Dispute. Employees may allege, or supervisors may become aware of, incidents of harassment where the facts are not in dispute, i.e., where all parties admit the allegations are true. In such situations, corrective action, including stopping any ongoing harassment and initiating disciplinary or adverse action, if appropriate, should be taken immediately in consultation with the designated point of contact. If disciplinary or adverse action is taken against a Council employee, it must proceed in accordance with established Council policy and practice. Corrective actions may include an oral warning or written reprimand if the misconduct was isolated and minor. If the misconduct by a Council employee was severe or pervasive, then reassignment, suspension, demotion or removal may be appropriate.

4.04 Incidents Where Facts Are in Dispute. If the validity of the allegations of harassment is in dispute, or not enough facts are known to proceed with corrective action, the responsible supervisor must provide, in writing to the designated point of contact, a summary of the allegations of harassment initially communicated to them within [5] days. The designated point of contact, where appropriate, will select someone authorized by the Council to conduct an inquiry. The designated point of contact will provide advice and assistance to the official conducting the inquiry. Such inquiries should be completed within [45] days, absent extenuating circumstances. While the inquiry is pending, consideration should be given to undertaking immediate measures before completing the inquiry to ensure that the opportunity for additional actual or perceived harassment does not occur. Examples of such measures are:

- a. Making scheduling changes so as to avoid contact between the parties; and using all available tools to separate the parties. Granting telework flexibility could be a solution for either the employee experiencing harassment or the accused.
- b. Where the allegations concern the employee's supervisor or a co-worker in the unit, temporary transfers of the supervisor or coworker or placing the supervisor or coworker on non-disciplinary leave with pay pending the conclusion of the inquiry; or having the employee report to an alternative supervisor while the inquiry is being conducted, if the employee agrees that this should be done.

4.05 Incidents where the allegations concern another Council process participant are highly fact-specific. It is important for Council management to take appropriate measures, which will differ depending on the alleged harasser.

4.06 Procedures for conducting an Inquiry. The inquiry must result in a record sufficient to support any corrective and/or disciplinary action taken, or to indicate that there is not sufficient evidence to support corrective and/or disciplinary action.

- a. The person selected to perform the inquiry must be authorized by the Council to conduct the inquiry and shall take signed, sworn statements from the employee who has alleged harassment, from the employee against whom the allegations are made, and from all principal witnesses.

- b. The person conducting the inquiry shall coordinate with the designated point of contact to ensure all obligations are met in conducting the inquiry.
- c. The following process should be followed in the course of the inquiry:
 1. Confirm the name, position and supervisory chain of the employee.
 2. Identify the alleged misconduct and the names of those parties allegedly responsible for the conduct.
 3. Obtain from the employee a detailed account of the alleged harassing actions/comments including, a description of the alleged actions/comments, the dates, times and locations of the alleged actions/comments as well as the names, contact information, and affiliations of any witnesses to, or persons with knowledge of, the alleged actions/comments.
 4. With regard to allegations of sexual harassment, determine specifically whether the employee is claiming that someone has made and/or carried out any threats or promises regarding the employee's terms and conditions of employment.
 5. Obtain from those accused of the misconduct a detailed response to each of the employee's allegations, as well as the names of witnesses who can corroborate the accused's account of events.
 6. Obtain statements from all witnesses listed by the employee and the accused of what they witnessed with regard to the alleged misconduct. If available, obtain supporting evidence (e.g. meeting recordings).
 7. Inform all interviewees about the prohibition forbidding retaliation against the employee who reported the alleged harassment.
 8. When the inquiry is completed, the findings should be shared with the designated point of contact, and the person conducting the inquiry will determine, if possible, whether the alleged actions occurred. The designated point of contact will share these findings with appropriate management officials in the organizations to which the alleged harasser and the employee who is the subject of the alleged harassment are assigned. The designated point of contact may also share the findings with the Department of Commerce Office of the General Counsel in order to receive their guidance on appropriate resolution of the matter.
 9. In all instances, upon completion of the inquiry the conclusions will be communicated to the employee who was the target of the alleged harassment. If the inquiry establishes that immediate and appropriate

corrective action is warranted, the Council will follow its policies including its disciplinary policy, as appropriate.

4.07 The Council shall maintain appropriate documentation for any disciplinary measures and corrective actions that may result from the findings of the inquiry.

SECTION 5. EFFECT OF THIS POLICY IN RELATION TO EEO COUNSELING AND FORMAL EEO COMPLAINTS.

A Council employee, at any time, has access to a NOAA EEO Counselor and may file a formal complaint of harassment – including allegations covered by this policy – and/or any other allegations of discrimination not covered by this policy.⁵ Sometimes supervisors are not aware of an allegation of harassment until approached by an EEO Counselor or investigator. Once informed by an EEO Counselor or investigator that there is an allegation of harassment by an employee, the supervisor must immediately inform the designated point of contact under this policy about the allegations. The designated point of contact will then promptly evaluate the allegation pursuant to this policy. The EEO Counselor will assist management and employees in resolving allegations but is not authorized to conduct inquiries into employee misconduct, and the existence of an EEO investigation does not alter the Council's duty to conduct its own inquiry. Where an employee files a formal EEO complaint regarding harassment, a copy of any inquiry done by the Council, pursuant to this Policy, will be forwarded to the Office of Civil Rights for inclusion in the Report of Investigation.

⁵ To file a complaint with a NOAA EEO Counselor go to: <https://www.noaa.gov/organization/inclusion-and-civil-rights/contact-us>.

ATTACHMENT 2: Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Policy on Addressing Allegations of Harassment of Process Participants Other Than Council Employees

SECTION 1. PURPOSE.

The purpose of this policy is to protect Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) process participants and provide guidance on taking action related to incidents or allegations of harassment **experienced by Council process participants. The Council will not tolerate harassment or retaliation against those who report harassment.** Preventing harassment⁶ is everyone's responsibility and individuals who experience or observe harassment are strongly encouraged to come forward to ensure a safe working environment for everyone involved in the Council process. Council members, including chairs and vice chairs, hold positions of trust and responsibility and it is incumbent upon them, together with the Council Executive Directors, to make every reasonable effort to establish an environment free of harassment and to implement this policy fully. This policy provides a framework for procedures to encourage Council process participants to come forward with harassment allegations without fear of retaliation and outlines a process for reporting and reviewing allegations of harassment and taking action as appropriate.

SECTION 2. BACKGROUND.

The Council process involves a complex and dynamic relationship among federal and state employees, Council professional staff, appointed Council members, and members of the public. These individuals frequently meet and interact at various worksites and temporary meeting locations for extended meetings amid challenging issues, which can sometimes lead to interpersonal conflict. The Council process should operate in an atmosphere of respect, collaboration, openness, safety, and equality and every individual who participates in the Council process should be treated with dignity and respect and should be free from abusive conduct and harassment.

SECTION 3. SCOPE.

The reporting and response provisions described in this policy apply to "Council Process Participants." In this document, that term includes all persons who participate in the Council process in any setting, with the exception of individuals employed by the Council, who are covered under a separate policy. Council Process Participants include all individuals present under the context of Council business regardless of location, whether in a Council office, at a Council meeting, or at offsite meetings, hearings and events sponsored by a Council. For example, Council Process Participants may include Council members, Advisory Panel or Scientific and Statistical Committee members, external consultants, etc.

⁶ For purposes of this policy covers a harassment includes unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, older age (beginning at age 40), disability, or genetic information (including family medical history). This policy does not cover allegations of incivility not based on a protected characteristic. However, this policy is not intended to limit in any way the Council's ability to address incivility, inappropriate behavior, or other issues in an appropriate manner for the context.

SECTION 4. PROCEDURES.

Reporting

Council Process Participants who observe, experience, or receive a report of harassment, including but not limited to sexual harassment or assault, should report the matter as soon as possible to an appropriate official. Swift reporting allows appropriate law enforcement authorities, the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), or the Council, as appropriate, to take measures to ensure that offensive behavior stops, the harassee's needs are addressed, and action is taken against the offender.

Council Process Participants who observe or are subject to harassment by any Council member, Council employee, or other Council Process Participants may report incidents in a variety of ways, including but not limited to:

- The Council Executive Director;
- The Council chair or vice-chair;
- Appropriate law enforcement authorities, as needed.

Council Response to Reports

Unless the particular circumstances require otherwise, any Council Member, Council employee, or NOAA employee who receives a report of harassment of a Council process participant should communicate the details of that report, in writing, to the Council Executive Director for appropriate action under this policy. In the event of a reported incident, a response team should be convened consisting of, as appropriate depending upon the context, the Council Executive Director, other designated Council points of contact, and the Council Chair. The response team will determine appropriate follow-up, including whether to engage the NMFS Regional Administrator in the response to the incident, based on the allegations raised and the parties involved.⁷ The Council shall maintain a record of each allegation received under this policy, which shall be made available to NMFS upon request.

NMFS Role

The Councils are primarily responsible for addressing issues that arise within the Council environment. NMFS will, in consultation with NOAA and the Department of Commerce, provide such support and advice to the Councils as may be appropriate under the circumstances. Any Council that receives a report of harassment against or by a Council member **must** inform the NMFS Regional Administrator of the nature of the incident and any steps taken to address the incident.

Related Processes

This policy does not apply to allegations of harassment experienced by employees of a Council. Instead, in the event an individual employed by the Council is alleged to have experienced

⁷ If the person alleged to have experienced harassment is a current federal employee, including but not limited to a NMFS employee, the NMFS Regional Administrator must be notified.

harassment, the Council must follow the steps outlined in the *Model Fishery Management Council Policy on Addressing Allegations of Harassment of Council Employees*.

Individuals who are federal employees (including but not limited to NOAA employees) or employed by state agencies, academic institutions or other organizations should report any concerns and seek assistance or action through their supervisor and/or within their own organization, as appropriate, but are encouraged to also report incidents to a Council official described above so that prompt action can be taken by the Council, as needed.

Individuals who are employed by the Councils or the federal government, including but not limited to NOAA, also have the right to file an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaint with their employing federal agency's EEO office within 45 days of the matter alleged to be discriminatory.