



COUNCIL COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING

VIDEO CONFERENCE CALL

September 23-24, 2020

Council Communications Group Report

Social-distancing restrictions, travel bans, work-at-home orders and other requirements related to COVID-19 have had a substantial impact on the communication activities of the eight regional fishery management councils. With the abolishment of most face-to-face meetings, closure of most Council offices and severe reduction of many fisheries, the Councils have had to find innovative ways to hold meetings, conduct elections, fill advisory positions and communicate with stakeholders. These solutions include increased emphasis on virtual meetings, social media and other electronic communications; the development of new training material; updating of websites; and escalated outreach to Council members, advisors and stakeholders.

Among the new procedures and products developed by the Councils are the following:

The **Caribbean Council** is converting its newsletter to a digital format and has made changes to its telephone lines so all incoming calls are transferred to the staff's cell phones since all staff members are mostly teleworking from home. The Caribbean Council has also updated its website to include information on how to participate at virtual meetings and how to use simultaneous interpretation services.

The **Gulf Council** has reverted to producing professional videos (with a production company) instead of hosting a series of outreach meetings to inform the for-hire fleet of new reporting requirements. The Gulf Council has also asked for public comments of impacts of COVID-19 on the fishery and is considering management measures to alleviate the issue. The Gulf Council uses Go-To-Webinar for all Advisory Panel and Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) meetings where both audio and video are both run through the webinar. Panel and Committee members are promoted to "panelists" and must control their own audio. The Gulf has begun using Adobe Connect for Council meetings. The webinar broadcasts video and sound, but Council members and presenters who wish to speak must use a separate call in phone number. During public testimony, the Gulf Council uses an operator assisted service in conjunction with Adobe Connect to allow members of the public to call in and speak.

The **Mid-Atlantic Council** uses Adobe Connect for all Council and advisory body meetings. To support the increased reliance on webinars, the Mid-Atlantic Council staff developed a webinar participation guide, designated staff members to be on hand to help with troubleshooting during meetings and offered a pre-meeting training session. Prior to COVID-19, Council and SSC meetings were broadcast via webinar with remote attendees in "listen only" mode and public participation limited to in-person attendees. Since moving to webinar-based meetings, all public attendees are able to ask questions and make comments. The "raise hand"

feature is used by both Council members and the public to indicate that they wish to speak. Advisory Panel meetings were often conducted by webinar prior to COVID-19, so the recent circumstances have not required significant changes in AP meeting procedures. The Mid-Atlantic Council held a series of five public hearings via webinar for an amendment to its Mackerel, Squid and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and scheduled an additional one-day Council meeting specifically for that action. The Mid-Atlantic Council used Survey Monkey to hold officer elections. Council staff considered several voting/survey platforms and ultimately selected Survey Monkey based on its ability to keep ballots anonymous while allowing staff to track who had submitted ballots.

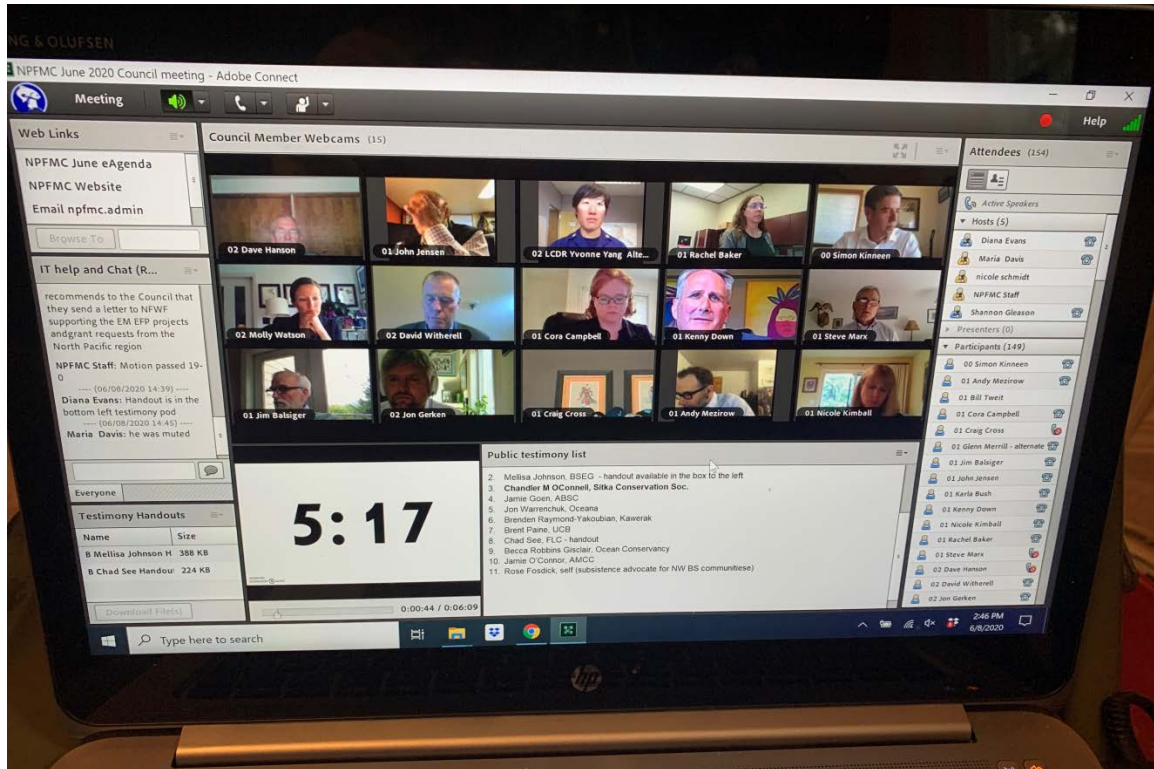
The **New England Council** has been using GoToWebinar and GoToMeeting for all of its virtual meetings. Over the spring and summer, the Council also held a series of public hearings on two important FMP amendments for groundfish and scallops. All were conducted by webinar except for the last groundfish hearing, which was held in person at the request of stakeholders and Council members. The in-person hearing, which was held outdoors under a large tent, took a considerable amount of time, effort and expense to carry out. Unlike some other regions, many of the fishermen in the New England region were not used to webinars before COVID-19. The New England Council has spent time training stakeholders, especially fishermen, on how to join webinars and how to talk on them, not just for the public hearings but for all Council and committee meetings. The New England Council developed a Remote Participation Guide, held several webinar public training sessions, and set up a Help Desk with designated staffers on hand by email and phone to help people deal with webinar problems during Council meetings. The New England Council, which does not do social media, sent additional press releases, Council roundups and targeted emails to keep everyone in the loop as much as possible.



New England Council pre-hearing photo for Groundfish Amendment 23.

The **North Pacific Council** has used Adobe Connect for its Council and advisory body meetings but is considering switching to a video-optimized platform, such as Zoom or

RingCentral. While Adobe Connect works well with smaller committee meetings, during the larger Council meeting the limited bandwidth of regular users can result in frozen screens, significant lag times and overall poor performance. The North Pacific Council holds multiple practice sessions for Council members and presenters before each meeting and has spent most of its outreach efforts on developing participation guides and connection instructions to post along with regular agenda items. The North Pacific Council is adding more features to its eAgenda, which is updated in real time and through which stakeholders can submit their comments and sign up for public testimony. The North Pacific Council does not have a social media presence but will be broadcasting its meetings on YouTube.



The North Pacific Council used video during its June meetings and will be limiting the use of video in future meetings due to the excessive bandwidth needs.

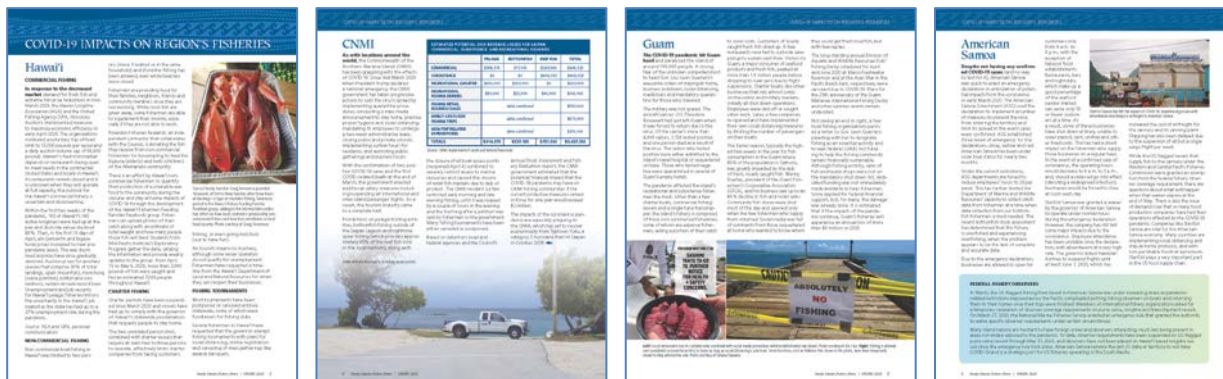
The **Pacific Council** uses Ring Central for its online Council and advisory body meetings. For the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and other participants who may be prohibited from using RingCentral or Zoom, a workaround has been developed. This solution includes live streaming of the meeting via YouTube, which allows anyone to listen in and see what is on the screen, without having to download an app. NMFS has approved participants to dial into the audio portion of the Council stream (via RingCentral) and to follow along on the screen via YouTube to see presentations. Since those who dial into the audio portion of the call do not have the “hand raise” function, G-Chat is used to notify a Council staff member of the virtual hand-raise gesture. Council actions are shared using Google docs. The Pacific Council has held multiple practice sessions for Council and advisory body members and presenters before each meeting and also created YouTube videos to explain how to participate.

While the **South Atlantic Council** office has remained open, the majority of Council staff has been telecommuting since March 17, 2020. Staff is using GoToWebinar and Microsoft Teams to communicate internally via webinar, and regular staff meetings are held each week. The Council uses GoToWebinar for its public meetings. The South Atlantic Council's first week-long meeting via webinar was held in June. Online public comment forms continue to be used, and the Council held an online formal public comment session during the meeting week. Staff developed an instructional PowerPoint presentation for using GoToWebinar and held practice sessions with Council members and staff prior to the June meeting. Staff also developed an in-house Process Agenda to outline specific staff responsibilities for each Council meeting held via webinar. Advisory Panel and SSC meetings have also been held via webinar. A page on the Council's website was created to provide information and resources relative to COVID-19 as needed. The spring 2020 issue of its *South Atlantic Update* newsletter was dedicated to COVID-19 impacts to data collection, Council operations and impacts to individual Advisory Panel members. Respecting the hardships of fishermen and others, the Council delayed appointments for open seats on its Advisory Panels initially scheduled for its June 2020 meeting. Social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) continues to be utilized for communicating with constituents.



Charter vessels sit idle in Hatteras, on the Outer Banks of North Carolina in March. One of the first coastal communities in the South Atlantic closed to all non-residents as COVID-19 spread, the Outer Banks are highly dependent on tourism and businesses have been severely impacted by the pandemic. The Council's Spring 2020 newsletter focused on such impacts. Photo by Capt. Andy Piland, South Atlantic Council Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel member and full-time charter captain.

The **Western Pacific Council** uses Webex for all of its public meetings and developed virtual meeting protocols for the Council chair, members and staff and to coordinate participation in other island areas. For Council meetings, the Webex Events feature is used, while the Webex Room platform is used for small advisory body meetings. For the advisory body meetings, a single link is available for the Room, which is noticed in the Federal Register, in newspaper ads, on the Council’s website, on the meeting agenda and on social media (Facebook and Twitter). The Western Pacific Council held its first virtual Fishers Form in August, which included a public scoping session. It also held a virtual international workshop on area-based management of blue water fisheries June 15-17, which included 34 experts from around the globe. The Western Pacific Council has created a new web page to provide COVID-19 updates to the fishing community and featured articles on the pandemic’s impacts to regional fisheries in the spring and summer issues of its *Pacific Islands Fishery News*, which is distributed electronically via Constant Contact, printed and direct mailed to select database, and made available on the Council website.



The spring 2020 issue of *Pacific Islands Fishery News* featured COVID-19 impacts to fisheries in the Western Pacific Region

The eight regional fishery management councils utilize nine different platforms to hold Council, advisory body, public and staff meetings (Attachment 1). They include AdobeConnect, GoToMeeting, GoToWebinar, Google Meets, Microsoft Team, RingCentral, Skype, Webex and Zoom. Each Council has also developed a variety of different outreach materials to inform its constituents and staff on procedures for its chosen virtual meeting platform(s) and about regional COVID-19 impacts and resources available to their fishing communities (Attachment 2).

The pros and cons of each virtual meeting platform and the effectiveness of the COVID-19 materials that have been developed along with pre-COVID communication topics (e.g., outreach to communities, outreach to possible new Administration, outreach to stakeholders on data collection and stock assessments) could be topics that members of the Council Communications Group could share and discuss at their next meeting. Pending the COVID-19 situation and the approval of the Council Coordination Committee (CCC), the Council Communications Group looks forward to a potential face-to-face meeting in conjunction with the fall 2021 CCC meeting, similar to the last Council Communications Group meeting held in conjunction with the May 2018 CCC meeting in Sitka, Alaska.

Attachment 1

Platforms Used to Hold Meetings during COVID-19

CM=Council meetings

AB=Advisory Bodies (e.g., SSC, advisory panel, plan team)

P=public hearing/scoping

S=staff meetings/communiques

	Caribbean	Gulf	Mid-Atlantic	New England	North Pacific	Pacific	South Atlantic	Western Pacific
Adobe Connect		CM	CM, AB, P		CM, AB			
GoToMeeting	CM, AB			CM, AB				
GoToWebinar		CM, AB		CM, AB, P			CM, AB	
Google Meets	CM, AB							S
Microsoft Team			S				S	
RingCentral					S	CM, AB		
Skype				S				
Webex								CM, AB, P
Zoom	CM, AB		S		S			
In-Person				P				

Attachment 2

Representative List of New Outreach Materials and Procedures Developed by Fishery Management Councils in Response to COVID-19

1. Virtual Meetings, Forums, Workshops

A. Public Instructions / Remote Participation Guides

- Caribbean FMC: <https://www.caribbeanfmc.com/>
- Gulf FMC Public Council Meeting Instructions: https://gulfcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Public_Council-Meeting-Instructions_Sep2020.pdf
- Mid-Atlantic FMC Webinar Participation Guide: https://www.mafmc.org/s/2020-05-11_MAFMC-Webinar-Guide.pdf
- New England FMC Remote Participation Guide: https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/NEFMC-meeting-remote-participation_generic.pdf
- Pacific FMC YouTube instructional videos:
- South Atlantic FMC Instructional PPT: Not posted online.

B. Webinar Help Desk

- New England FMC Help Desk Poster – Troubleshooting the Webinar: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/June-2020-Help-Desk.pdf>

C. In-House Process Agenda

- South Atlantic FMC: Not posted online.

D. Pre-meeting Training Sessions

- Mid-Atlantic, New England, North Pacific, Pacific and Western Pacific FMCs

E. YouTube Live Streaming and Posted Recordings

- North Pacific FMC:
- Pacific FMC: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeI9Xo8RRMOPKBYaASvYtvq>

https://www.pcouncil.org/council_meeting/september-10-17-2020-council-meeting/

F. Officer Elections

- Mid-Atlantic FMC: Survey Monkey

2. Outdoor In-Person Public Hearing

- New England FMC Press Release:
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/NEFMC-Plans-Outdoor-In-Person-Hearing-for-Groundfish-Monitoring-Amendment-23.pdf>

3. Webpages on COVID-19 Fishery Resources

- Pacific Council: Updates provided on landing page
- South Atlantic FMC: <https://safmc.net/covid-19-resources/>
- Western Pacific FMC: <http://www.wpcouncil.org/coronavirus/>

4. COVID-19 Focused Newsletter Issues

- South Atlantic FMC: *South Atlantic Update* spring 2020 issue
- Western Pacific FMC: *Pacific Islands Fishery News* summer and spring 2020 issues <http://www.wpcouncil.org/summer-2020-pacific-islands-fishery-news/> <http://www.wpcouncil.org/spring-2020-pacific-islands-fishery-news/>

5. Videos

- Gulf FMC Professionally developed videos in lieu of usual series of outreach meetings to inform for-hire fleet of new reporting requirements: Under professional development: Under development

6. Increased Outreach

- Multiple Councils to keep stakeholders in the loop: Press releases, social media, roundups, targeted emails, etc.