



March 28, 2024

Ms. Janet Coit
Assistant Administrator, NOAA Fisheries
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Via email: janet.coit@noaa.gov

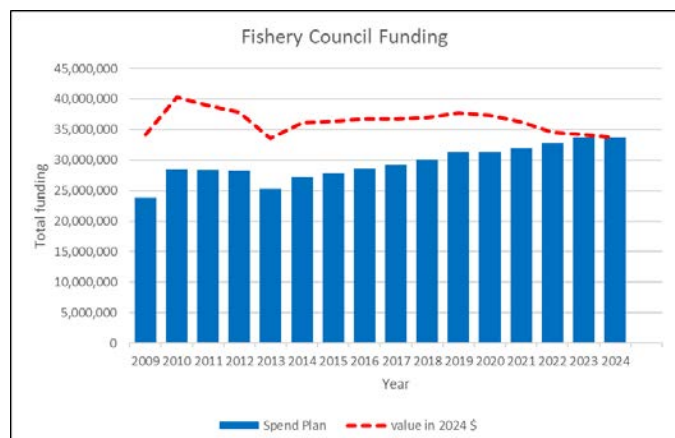
Dear Ms. Coit,

Thank you for your continued support of the Regional Fishery Management Councils and our work to manage the nation's marine fishery resources under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

On behalf of all eight regional fishery management councils, we want to make you aware of our financial situation, and concerns with the next grant period in CY2025-2028. Meeting our current obligations mandated under the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, much less addressing new initiatives to improve our conservation and management programs to maintain sustainable fisheries in the face of unprecedented environmental change, will be extremely challenging without additional resources as the current long-term funding trajectory leaves us with ever-diminishing resources. Our assessment of the extent of this problem is informed by our experience to date with adapting to climate change; our universal experience is that it increases complexity and requires more resources in order to maintain healthy populations and sustainable fisheries. It is clear now that our resources will not be adequate. Already several Councils have regular annual costs that exceed annual income and have only been able to sustain activities in recent years as the result of a temporary budget pattern due to delays in spending that occurred during the COVID pandemic. Continuing this spending pattern into the future is not sustainable. Other Councils have initiated changes in operations and policies to restrain spending and may find it difficult to further adapt to future inflation.

The Councils acknowledge that recent annual awards have provided a modest 0-3% (1.5% average) increase in annual funding allocations. However, annual costs for the councils have increased substantially in recent years. We have experienced greater than 5% increases in Federal salary rates, greater than 10% annual increases in travel costs, hotel and meeting space, and insurance, and in some cases greater than 20% annual increases in health care costs. These overall cost increases sharply contrast with the modest increases in Council funding in recent years. It is highly unlikely that these recent cost increases will decrease in the future, even if inflation rates drop.

To examine the real impact of inflation, we can look at the history of funding for the Councils



since 2009 relative to the value of those funds compared to the current value of the current U.S. Dollar. In terms of current dollar value, for example, the 2010 funding was 19% higher, and the 2019 funding was 12% higher than in 2024. In other words, the Councils purchasing power has shrunk by 12% over the last 5 years.

Some of the Councils have already been required to take drastic actions to reduce spending, including scaling back on development of needed conservation and management measures, reducing the number of staff, reducing the number of council meetings, increasing use of virtual meetings, reducing the number of advisory body meetings, and reducing or eliminating any in-person committee meetings. Even with these savings, costs are projected to exceed grant revenue in the next grant period for most councils, assuming we continue to receive only modest increases in funding.

Clearly, we cannot continue with the status quo when costs are higher across the board, and inflation rates exceed our annual grant allocation increases, which have typically been less than 3%. The Councils are having to adapt by doing less with less at a time when there are an increasing number of conservation and management matters to address, requiring we do more not less.

Climate ready fisheries management and climate resilient fisheries require more timely and responsive fisheries management. It requires that we be able to respond to an influx of new species into Council jurisdictions while considering the loss of others; it requires that we set new and potentially dynamic management targets; it requires that we consider expanded ranges of some stocks and complex, multi-Council governance agreements; and it requires that we consider all of these things through a lens of equity, fairness, and environmental justice. Without additional funding, these goals are not achievable.

We request further discussions with you regarding our funding allocations at the May 2024 Council Coordination Committee meeting. We look forward to collaborating with you to identify specific approaches to alleviate our emerging fiscal issues.

Thank you for your consideration.

Signed,
Council Executive Directors:



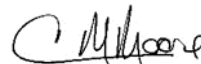
David Witherell, NPFMC



Cate O'Keefe, NEFMC



Miguel Rolon, CFMC



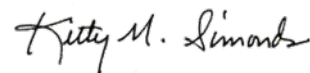
Chris Moore, MAFMC



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