

New England Fishery Management Council Guidelines for Providing Public Comments

Council Meetings

Public comments will be accepted at Council meetings on all major agenda items to the extent practicable, in particular on those items requiring final action. The Chairman or presiding officer will schedule comments at an appropriate time during the meeting that is consistent with the orderly conduct of business. This opportunity may occur after the Council has discussed the items under consideration and/or once motions have been made and are under consideration. Council members may ask questions of individuals offering comments.

Individuals offering oral comments must provide their name, affiliation, if any, and may be asked to provide other details that could enhance Council understanding of their testimony. Each person will be asked to speak for or against the motion under consideration and provide rationale with his or her comments. In addition, it would be helpful for speakers to comment on whether, in their view, the action will achieve the necessary conservation objectives, whether the proposal is fair and equitable, how communities might be affected, how best to avoid undesirable bycatch, and discuss whether there are any safety issues involved. Public speakers should be aware that the meeting is recorded and, consistent with 16 USC 1852 of Federal law, copies of the recording are available upon request.

Limits on Comments

The Chairman may limit public comment on Council meeting agenda items on which no final action is being taken or defer comments to future oversight committee meetings, public hearings, and/or to the Council meeting at which final action will be taken. Where constrained by the available time, the Chairman or the presiding officer may limit public testimony in a reasonable manner by: a) requesting that individuals avoid duplication of prior testimony; b) requiring persons with similar concerns to select a spokesman; and/or c) setting a time limit on individual comments, which, in general, will be three minutes.

Additional Time for Public Comments at Council Meetings

An additional opportunity for public comments will be made available at each Council meeting at a designated time for items not listed on the agenda. Any interested party may address the Council during this period concerning future directions, issues, or any initiatives that are relevant to Council business. The Chairman will determine time available for this purpose on a case-by-case basis, generally limiting remarks to three-to-five minutes.

Submission of Written Materials

Written comments received at the Council office by 8:00 a.m. three business days before the Council meeting date will be copied and distributed to the Council prior to the meeting.

Under most circumstances, anyone who is unable to provide written comments within this timeframe and wishing Council members to have paper copies of the information should provide 35 copies to the staff for distribution to Council members. If distribution to the Council is not essential, submission of a single copy is sufficient for the record, and the material will be electronically distributed to Council members following the meeting.

All written information submitted to the Council must include a statement of the source and date of such information. Written statements also must include the author's name, affiliation, and background. All written comments received are part of the administrative record and available to the public.

Public Input at Other Types of Council Meetings

The extent of public comment taken at meetings of the Council's oversight committees or other working groups will be at the discretion of the Chairman or presiding officer.