

Policy Governing Public Participation in the Pacific Scientific Advice Review Committee

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RMEC Working Group (1999)

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to describe the policy governing public participation in the Pacific Scientific Advice Review Committee (PSARC) process. PSARC is the Pacific Regional body responsible for review and evaluation of all scientific information on the status of living aquatic resources and their ecosystems, and on biological aspects of stock management.

PSARC provides internal and external clients with scientific information and advice that is reliable, relevant, timely and comprehensive.

PSARC advises the Resource Management Executive Committee (RMEC) of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and other bodies on stock and habitat status and potential biological consequences of fisheries management actions and natural events.

PSARC responsibility is to provide consensus interpretation of each agenda item wherever possible. Where a consensus cannot be reached, the merits and short-comings of alternative interpretations are specified in the Advisory Document.

PSARC includes a Chairperson's Committee, a Secretariat, five Subcommittees (Groundfish, Pelagic, Invertebrates, Salmon, and Habitat) and a provision for special PSARC meetings for cross-cutting and high profile issues that transcend the subcommittees. PSARC serves as the primary Pacific Region forum for peer review and evaluation of scientific research and literature as well as local/traditional knowledge.

The five subcommittees provide the scientific basis for advice on salmon, herring, invertebrate and groundfish stocks in the Pacific Region harvested presently, or with potential to be harvested, and on fish habitats and fisheries ecosystems.

PSARC recognizes two groups that may attend meetings:

- Participants – Any interested party who is interested in participating in PSARC meetings. Participants are invited by the meeting chair. All Participants invited to meetings have full rights in the discussion, formulation of advice and wording of Advisory Documents. Participants include internal Fisheries and Oceans staff and external experts including individuals from academia, consultants, scientists from other government agencies, individuals from First Nations, stakeholder groups, and members or delegates of the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (PFRCC).
- Observers – Any interested party attending meetings as an observer at the confirmation of the meeting chair.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PEER REVIEW SESSIONS

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is committed to open and transparent peer review and advisory processes, including the participation of individuals from outside the Department.

1 Principles of Participation

- PSARC meetings are open to individuals not employed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada including individuals from academia, First Nations, stakeholders, other government departments, and the general public.
- PSARC recognizes two groups that may attend meetings -- invited participants, and observers.
- Participants agree to not assume an advocacy role for any sector, organization or geographic area.
- Participants have access to documents associated with the meeting.
- Participants have full opportunity to participate in discussions, formulation of advice and the wording of advisory products.
- The purpose of PSARC meetings is solely for scientific peer review of the status of stocks, habitat, and other biological questions on the agenda. Concerns regarding other non-scientific issues, including fisheries management policies and allocations, for example are discussed in other fora.
- Participants and observers must adhere to the provision of non-disclosure. Information received from PSARC must not be disclosed until the information is publicly released.
- In the case where participants or observers hold commercial fishing licenses or individual quota, the participant must agree, in writing, to neither buy nor sell licenses and/or quota shares until PSARC information is publicly released.

2 Practices to Follow For Participants

- Invited participants have a significant role in reviewing the technical content of the scientific work.
- Invitations should be made in writing by the PSARC Subcommittee chair.
- When selecting participants, the PSARC Subcommittee chair will normally consult with the assessment biologists, and other Fisheries and Oceans Canada staff most knowledgeable of the stocks, the habitats (or other scientific questions) being reviewed.
- Desirable characteristics of participants who are technical experts include:
 - Technical knowledge of agenda items;
 - Stature and respect in the eyes of peers;
 - Ability to communicate clearly and effectively; and
 - Understanding of the goals and procedures of the review process.

- The written invitation states clearly that:
 - The individual is invited on the basis of his or her personal scientific qualifications, and not as a representative of any group, sector or geographical area; and
 - Documents distributed before and at the meeting are DRAFTS and MUST be treated as confidential (see provision for non-disclosure above).
- Travel costs of participants who are technical experts may be paid, but other remuneration is not offered.

2.1 Participants

- Selected external participants are notified in writing by the PSARC Subcommittee chair.
- When selecting external participants (normally 3-10), the PSARC Subcommittee chair will normally consult with the assessment biologists, fishermen, managers and other Fisheries and Oceans Canada staff most knowledgeable of the stocks, the habitats (or other scientific questions) being reviewed.
- Desirable characteristics of external participants include:
 - Knowledge (habitat, fishery or traditional) of agenda items;
 - Stature and respect in the eyes of peers;
 - Ability to communicate clearly and effectively; and
 - Understanding of the goals and procedures of the review process.
- Notwithstanding the important requirement that external participants are not acting as representatives of specific sectors, interest groups or geographic areas, care will be taken to ensure external participants reflect a diversity of perspectives.
- The written notification states clearly that:
 - The individual is participating on the basis of his or her personal qualifications, and not as a representative of any group, sector or geographical area;
 - Scientific peer review includes the use of local/traditional knowledge, and external participants are encouraged to contribute their knowledge in written or verbal presentations;
 - Documents distributed before and at the meeting are DRAFTS and MUST be treated as confidential (see provision for non-disclosure above); and
 - If the agenda includes stocks managed under limited entry or Individual Quota, external participants are asked to return a letter agreeing not to sell licenses or trade quota shares nor disclose confidential information between receipt of documentation and public release of the relevant Advisory Document and/or Science Advisory Report.

- Individuals must agree to adhere to accepted scientific principles of objectivity and impartiality.
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada does not reimburse travel costs for external participants.

2.1.1 Selection Process For External Participants

- There will be advance notice of PSARC Subcommittee meetings (e.g., posted on PSARC Internet site) including the name and phone number of the meeting Chair and instructions informing individuals wishing to participate to contact the PSARC Secretariat.
- Individuals will have an opportunity to request an invitation as an external participant.
- Requests from potential external participants should be received by the PSARC office 30 days prior to the meeting.
- External participants must provide a statement of qualifications that is relevant to the topics discussed at the meeting.
- The PSARC Chair and meeting Chair will review the list of potential external participants and determine eligibility in a manner that is consistent with the above selection criteria.

2.2 Observers

- PSARC meetings are open to any interested party.
- Observers must understand the goals and procedure of the review process.
- Observers must adhere to the provisions of non-disclosure outlined in Section 1 *Principles of Participation*.
- Observers are requested to notify the PSARC Secretariat or meeting Chair 15 days before the meeting of their intention to attend.
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada does not reimburse travel costs for observers.