



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
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## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** August 1, 2019  
**To:** Council  
**From:** Mary Sabo and Michelle Duval  
**Subject:** 2020-2024 Strategic Plan Framework

As part of the development of the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, the Council will review a draft outline for the plan during its August 2019 meeting. The Council will be asked to provide input on alternatives for Vision, Mission, and Goal statements and to approve a preferred statement for each. The Stakeholder Input Report presented to the Council at its June 2019 meeting served as the reference document for suggested modifications to the Vision, Mission, and Goal statements. The report can be accessed [here](#).

The approved goal statements, as well as the Stakeholder Input Report, will guide the development of objectives designed to advance progress toward each goal. The Council will review these objectives as part of the draft 2020-2024 Strategic Plan during its October 2019 meeting. After review and approval, the draft will be posted for public input and comment.

### General Plan Organization

The 2020-2024 Strategic Plan will be structured in a similar manner as the 2014-2018 Strategic Plan. In addition to a brief Introduction, Vision, Mission, Core Values, Goals and Objectives, we propose to add a new section that describes external factors that may impact the ability of the Council to achieve its goals and objectives. There are several examples of natural resource management organizations that have included such sections, including some of the Council's management partners (see the [ASMFC 2019-2023 Strategic Plan](#) "Driving Forces" section on page 3 and the [USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Strategic Plan](#) "Risk Factors for Achieving Goals" on page 22). Describing these factors helps to place the Council's efforts within a larger landscape and to provide members of the public with a broader understanding of issues within the Council's purview.

A second suggested addition is a simple evaluation plan that provides checkpoints for determining progress towards goals and objectives. An evaluation plan does not have to be complicated (see the SAFMC Snapper Grouper Vision Blueprint [Evaluation Plan](#)). The intent is to have a regular assessment of progress for the Council, stakeholders, and the public.

### Vision, Mission, and Goals

The Council received feedback on its current Vision, Mission, and Goal statements from the online stakeholder survey conducted in early 2019. Respondents were asked to indicate if the current statements were still appropriate and were also provided an opportunity to comment on and suggest edits to each statement.

- Overall, the majority of survey respondents indicated that the current Vision, Mission, and Goal statements were still appropriate and did not need changes. This varied to some degree among stakeholder groups (see Stakeholder Input Report).

- Because most respondents offered comments rather than feedback on the language of the statements, the stakeholder-specific themes from the Stakeholder Input Report were also used when developing alternatives for consideration.
- While the Council received many constructive recommendations, most can be more appropriately handled in the development of objectives designed to address the detailed suggestions received.

Development of alternatives that balance suggestions and comments received with the feedback that the current statements do not need any changes, or only minor adjustments, is a challenge. Note that Vision statements should be broad, aspirational statements that describe a desired future state, while Mission statements should reflect what an organization actually does. Goal statements should be specific enough to understand their relationship to the Vision, but broad enough to include future activities that will advance progress towards the goal.

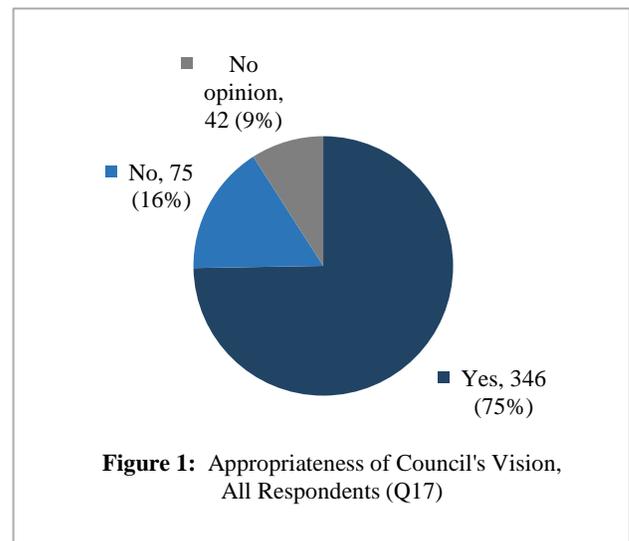
## Vision Statement

The Council’s 2014-2018 Strategic Plan included the following Vision statement:

***Healthy and productive marine ecosystems supporting thriving, sustainable marine fisheries that provide the greatest overall benefit to stakeholders.***

The majority of survey respondents (75%) indicated that this Vision statement is still appropriate (Figure 1; please see Question 17 of the Stakeholder Input Report for responses by stakeholder category). Survey respondents provided the following broad suggestions and feedback regarding the Council’s Vision statement:

- Maintain a strong focus on healthy ecosystems.
- Define the term “stakeholders” – are stakeholders commercial and recreational fishermen, all ocean users, the fish, all species in the ocean?
- Clarify “benefits” – are these long-term, short-term, social or economic benefits?
- The statement should include and support healthy fishing communities.
- The statement should reflect a balance of stakeholder needs and consideration of stakeholder input
- Other ocean uses, such as wind energy, could significantly impact the Council’s ability to achieve its vision.
- Improvements in the accuracy of data and science are necessary to achieve the Council’s Vision.
- The Vision statement does not need any changes; it just needs effective implementation.



Based on this feedback, staff developed the following **Vision Statement** alternatives for the Council’s consideration:

Alternative 1.1 (Staff Recommendation): Thriving, sustainable marine ecosystems, fisheries, and fishing communities that provide the greatest overall benefit to the nation.

Alternative 1.2: Thriving, sustainable marine ecosystems, fisheries, and fishing communities.

Alternative 1.3: Healthy and productive marine ecosystems supporting thriving, sustainable marine fisheries that provide the greatest overall benefit to the nation.

Given the number of comments and suggested edits that pertained to fishing communities and use of the term “stakeholders”, the alternatives primarily focus on addressing these two issues. With regard to the latter, replacement of “stakeholders” with “the nation” is reflective of the language within the Magnuson Act. Removal of the phrase “the greatest overall benefit to stakeholders” is an indirect means of addressing comments related to defining and/or clarifying the use of “stakeholders” as well as “benefits.”

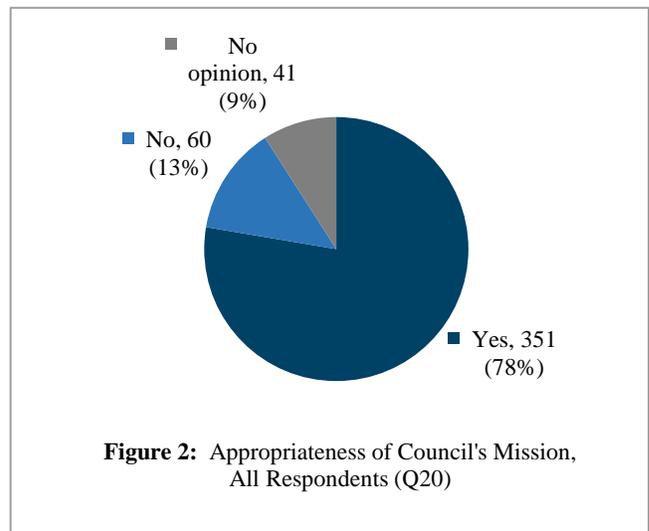
### Mission Statement

The Council’s 2014-2018 Strategic Plan included the following Mission statement:

*The Council manages fisheries in federal waters of the Mid-Atlantic region for their long-term sustainability and productivity consistent with the national standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is committed to the effective stewardship of these fisheries and associated habitats by incorporating scientific information and informed public input in transparent processes that produce fishery management plans and programs.*

The majority of survey respondents (78%) indicated that this Mission statement is still appropriate (Figure 2; please see Question 20 in the Stakeholder Input Report for responses by stakeholder category). Feedback on the Mission statement from survey respondents included the following broad themes:

- Focus on ecosystem and forage management.
- Management decisions should be based on science, and the science used for those decisions needs improvement.
- Council decisions should be transparent, free from external influence and political bias.
- Incorporate social and economic concerns into management decisions, as well as community stability.
- Increased fairness and balance of stakeholder interests (allocations, management measures, etc.)
- A more thorough consideration of the impacts of management approaches on commercial and recreational fisheries.



The following **Mission Statement** alternatives were developed based on this input:

*NOTE: The first sentence in gray text is identical in all three alternatives, as well as the current Mission statement, and is not proposed for revision.*

Alternative 2.1 (Staff Recommendation): The Council manages fisheries in federal waters of the Mid-Atlantic region for their long-term sustainability and productivity consistent with the national standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is committed to the stewardship of these fisheries, and associated ecosystems and communities, through the collaborative development of effective, science-based fishery management plans and policies,

Alternative 2.2: The Council manages fisheries in federal waters of the Mid-Atlantic region for their long-term sustainability and productivity consistent with the national standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is committed to the effective stewardship of these fisheries, and associated ecosystems and communities, through development of fishery management plans that incorporate accurate scientific information and public input in a collaborative, transparent process.

Alternative 2.3: The Council manages fisheries in federal waters of the Mid-Atlantic region for their long-term sustainability and productivity consistent with the national standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is committed to the effective stewardship of these fisheries for the continuing benefit of the American people.

Most suggested edits recommended inclusion of fishing communities and ecosystems, and questioned the meaning and/or use of the words “productivity” and “sustainability.” Comments received focused on transparency, data, stakeholder balance and management approaches. The alternatives are meant to address feedback regarding communities, science-based decision-making, and process transparency. The Mission statement should focus on the core of what the Council is charged with doing under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

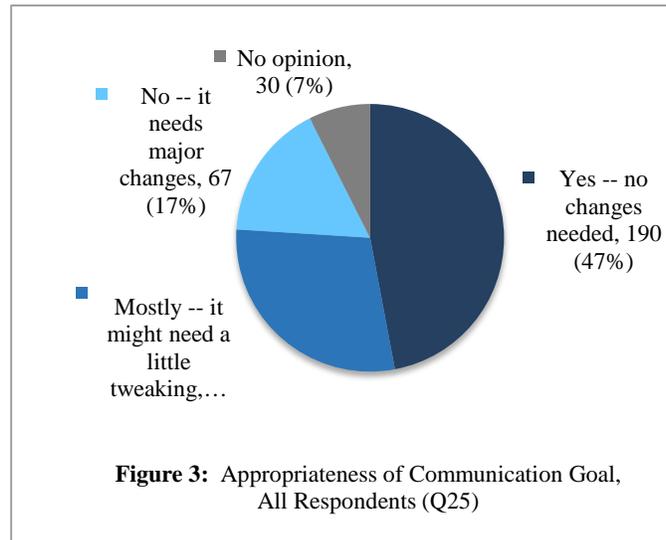
### Communication Goal

The Council’s 2014-2018 Strategic Plan included the following Communication Goal:

***Engage, inform, and educate stakeholders to promote public awareness and encourage constructive participation in the Council process.***

When asked about the appropriateness of this goal statement, 47% of respondents indicated that no changes are needed, and 29% responded that only minor changes are needed. (Figure 3; please see Question 25 in the Stakeholder Input Report for responses by stakeholder category). Comments and suggestions on the Council’s Communication goal generated the following broad themes:

- The current goal and objectives do not need modification, they simply need to be effectively executed.
- Stakeholders have concerns regarding the frequency, simplicity and clarity of the Council’s communications. Some already involved in the process would prefer to see fewer, more targeted communications. Others would like to see an increase in the frequency of the Council’s communications but are frustrated by the complexity of the language.
- Extend outreach to a broader constituency, such as high schools, universities, tourism groups, etc. to encourage participation.
- Listen to and engage in dialogue with its stakeholders. Communication is a two-way street, and many stakeholders feel that the Council hears them, but does not listen.
- Meetings are not accessible to the general, working public as they are held at times and in locations that prevent attendance.
- Communication and outreach tools should include greater use of social media (e.g. Facebook and YouTube) as well as outlets that fishermen themselves use – discussion forums, fishing clubs, fish houses, tackle shops, etc. The Council should also make more effort to get out to meet fishermen where they are.
- The Council should make more of an effort to respond to stakeholder input and explain how suggestions are considered. Lack of response contributes to lack of participation.



Based on these themes, staff developed the following **Communication Goal** alternatives for the Council’s consideration:

*Alternative 3.1 (Staff Recommendation):* Engage, inform, and educate stakeholders and the public to promote awareness and encourage constructive dialogue and participation in the Council process.

*Alternative 3.2:* Engage, inform, and educate the public to promote awareness and encourage constructive dialogue and participation in the Council process.

*Alternative 3.3:* Engage stakeholders and the public through education and outreach that promotes sustained participation in, and awareness of, the Council process.

Respondents offered very few specific language changes regarding the Council’s Communication goal statement. The majority of comments received referenced a need for increased outreach, and for the Council to listen and respond to stakeholders in order to encourage greater participation in the process. The alternatives include minor modifications to respond to this input, as well as previous input regarding use of the term “stakeholders.” As noted previously, many detailed comments can be better addressed in the development of objectives focused on those issues.

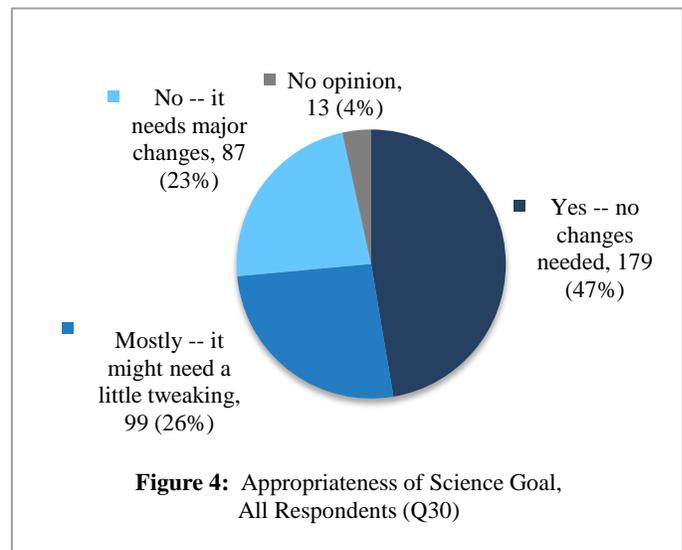
### Science Goal

The Council’s 2014-2018 Strategic Plan included the following Science Goal:

***Ensure that the Council’s management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific data that are analyzed and modeled in a manner that improves management performance and builds stakeholder confidence.***

When asked about the appropriateness of this goal statement, 47% of survey respondents indicated that no changes are needed, and 26% indicated that only minor changes are needed. (Figure 4; please see Question 30 in the Stakeholder Input Report for responses by stakeholder category). Feedback on the Science goal resulted in the following broad themes and suggestions:

- The accuracy of data and science used in decisions is still a significant cause for frustration and mistrust. This ranges from fishery-independent surveys to recreational harvest estimates.
- Integration of on-the-water observations from fishermen into decision-making, as well as collaborative research between fishermen and scientists should be higher priorities.
- Ecosystem, habitat, and climate science and modelling are needed to address management issues related to shifting species distributions and ecological catch limits for forage species.
- Improvements in both fishery-independent and fishery-dependent monitoring and reporting are needed.
- Focus on alternative methods and new technologies to collect data (e.g. smartphone apps).
- Better social and economic data and science are needed to inform decisions.
- The goal and objectives do not require change, they just require effective execution.



These themes and suggestions informed the development of the following **Science Goal** alternatives:

Alternative 4.1 (Staff Recommendation): Ensure that the Council's management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific information.

Alternative 4.2: Ensure that the Council's management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific information, including qualitative observations and collaborative research.

Alternative 4.3: Use the best available science, technology, and tools to inform management decisions.

Survey respondents provided edits to the goal statement that included suggestions to include the term “ecosystem”, expand data types, add cooperative research, and remove reference to stakeholders. The majority of comments were focused on data accuracy and credibility, followed by inclusion of on-the-water observations and use of collaborative research in the scientific and decision-making processes. This goal had the highest proportion of commercial and for-hire survey respondents who indicated major changes were needed. The alternatives try to address these issues by either broadening the scope of the statement or simplifying it to the core of the Council’s mandated science-based decision-making process. The Council also received 188 identical comments that provided five very specific items for consideration; these, as well as several of the above themes, are likely to be more effectively addressed via development of objectives.

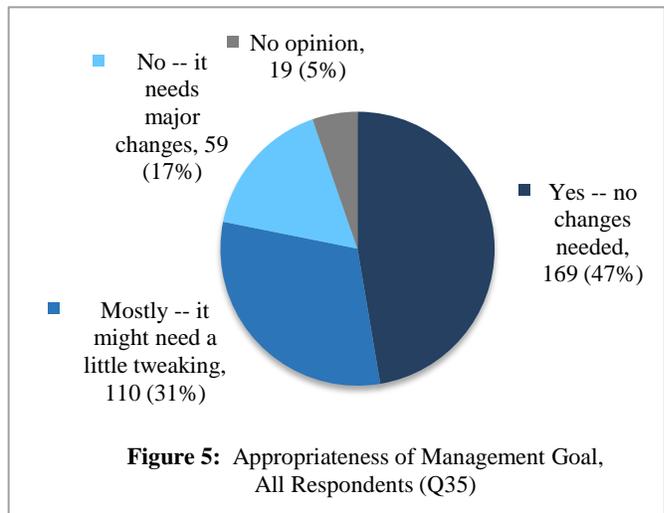
## Management Goal

The Council’s 2014-2018 Strategic Plan included the following Management Goal:

***Develop fishery management strategies that provide for productive, sustainable fisheries.***

When asked about the appropriateness of this goal statement, 47% of respondents indicated that no changes are needed, while 31% indicated that it was mostly appropriate and might need some tweaking (Figure 5; please see Question 35 of the Stakeholder Input Report for responses by stakeholder category). Suggestions and comments on the Management goal resulted in the following broad themes:

- Open ocean aquaculture has been ignored too long and needs to be included as a priority in the new strategic plan.
- The Council’s management approaches need to consider the sustainability of fishing businesses and communities.
- Management measures should result in a better balance of stakeholder interests.
- The Council needs to implement ecosystem-based management strategies that can also address forage fish protection.
- Greater consideration of the economic impact of all fishing sectors when developing management measures.
- The Council should try a different approach and manage fisheries for abundance rather than maximum yield.
- More emphasis on habitat assessment and protection is needed, with a focus on determining how habitat contributes to the productivity of various fish species.



The feedback and recommendations above informed development of the following **Management Goal** alternatives for the Council’s consideration:

*Alternative 5.1 (Staff Recommendation):* Develop effective management strategies that provide for sustainable fisheries and marine ecosystems and consider the social and economic needs of fishing communities and other resource users.

*Alternative 5.2:* Manage abundant, sustainable fisheries in a manner that considers the needs of fishing communities and other resource users.

*Alternative 5.3:* Develop management strategies that rebuild and maintain sustainable fishery resources and consider the social and economic needs of fishing communities.

Respondents provided specific edits to include the term "ecosystem", as well as to reference fishing communities, economic efficiency, climate change, and managing for abundance. Some respondents indicated this goal statement was simply too broad and vague. The Council also received 199 identical responses that provided specific language referencing ecosystem-based fishery management and recommended actions to achieve this. Similar to the comments and themes generated from feedback under other goal areas, several of the bulleted items above can be more specifically addressed in the development of objectives under this goal or possibly a new goal area. The alternatives provided respond to suggestions regarding communities and social/economic needs, as well as abundance.

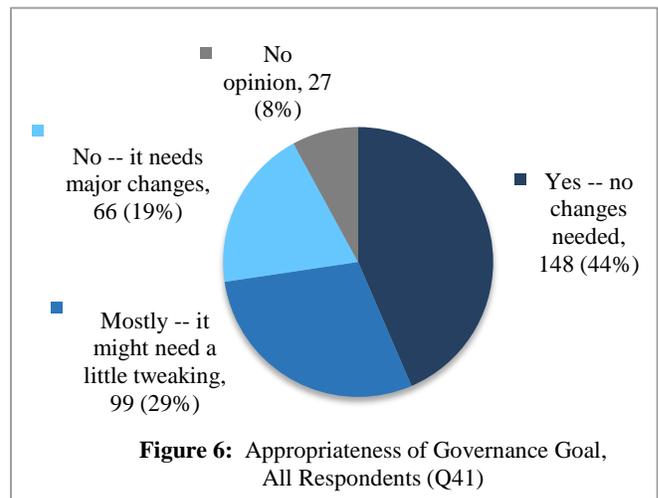
### Governance Goal

The Council’s 2014-2018 Strategic Plan included the following Governance Goal:

***Ensure that the Council's governance structures and practices fairly represent stakeholder interests, are coordinated with the Council's management partners, and include a clear and well-defined decision-making process.***

When asked about the appropriateness of this goal statement, 44% of respondents indicated that no changes are needed, while 29% indicated that some minor changes might be appropriate (Figure 6; please see Question 40 in the Stakeholder Input Report for responses by stakeholder category). Comments and suggestions regarding this goal generated the following themes across all stakeholder categories:

- A well-constructed goal that needs better execution and accountability
- The Council needs to make a greater effort to balance and consider stakeholder input and interests.
- Additional/alternative methods for stakeholders to participate in the process should be considered (e.g. participation on Fishery Management Action Teams), particularly for stakeholders who cannot attend meetings.
- More extensive coordination with management partners on climate change impacts to managed species is necessary.
- The Council needs to become more actively involved in the permitting of alternative ocean uses to ensure the interests of fishing communities and stakeholders are addressed.



- There is still a perceived lack of transparency and accountability in the Council’s decision-making process.
- Many stakeholders believe there is still an undue level of political and external influence on Council members’ decisions.

Based on these themes and recommendations, staff developed the following **Governance Goal** alternatives:

*Alternative 6.1 (Staff Recommendation):* Ensure that the Council's practices accurately represent and consider fishery, community, and public interests through a transparent and inclusive decision-making process.

*Alternative 6.2:* Ensure that stakeholder and public interests are accurately represented and considered through a transparent and inclusive decision-making process.

*Alternative 6.3:* Ensure that the Council accurately considers the full range of stakeholder and public interests through a transparent and inclusive decision-making process.

Specific edits offered by respondents on the goal statement focused on the definition and use of “stakeholder” and “fairly,” as well as transparency of the process and consideration of communities. The alternatives above attempt to respond to these suggestions, while several of the themes detailed above can be more effectively address through development of objectives under this goal or another goal. Coordination with management partners is an important component of all Council activities and can be addressed via an objective under all goal areas.

## **NEW – Ecosystem Goal**

The Council’s 2014-2018 Strategic Plan prioritized the development of, and transition to, an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM). In 2016, the Council approved an EAFM Guidance Document, which outlined a path toward more fully incorporating ecosystem considerations into fisheries management decisions. The stated goal of the EAFM Guidance Document is:

*To manage for ecologically sustainable utilization of living marine resources while maintaining ecosystem productivity, structure, and function.*

While the previous strategic plan included ecosystem-related objectives under several goal areas, staff recommends that these activities be organized under a new Ecosystem goal area in the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan. Adoption of a new Ecosystem goal will facilitate more effective implementation of the EAFM Guidance Document by consolidating the Council’s ecosystem objectives under a single goal area that serves as an umbrella for activities that overlap Management, Science, and Governance. This goal could address a wide range of issues, including climate change, forage stocks, fish habitat, species interactions, and other matters that impact the health of the marine ecosystem. The Council received considerable comment on a number of these topics, and a new Ecosystem goal could increase clarity and public understanding of how the Council plans to engage on these issues in the future.

The following alternatives for a new Ecosystem Goal have been developed for the Council’s consideration:

*Alternative 7.1 (Staff Recommendation):* Support the ecologically sustainable utilization of living marine resources in a manner that maintains ecosystem productivity, structure, and function.

*Alternative 7.2:* Manage, promote, and engage in activities that result in ecologically sustainable utilization of living marine resources while maintaining ecosystem productivity, structure, and function.

*Alternative 7.3:* Promote the protection and sustainable utilization of the marine ecosystem.