



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901

Phone: 302-674-2331 | FAX: 302-674-5399 | www.mafmc.org

Michael P. Luisi, Chairman | P. Weston Townsend, Vice Chairman

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 26, 2022
To: Council
From: José Montañez, Council Staff
Subject: NOAA Fisheries Draft Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy

NOAA Fisheries is currently soliciting public comments on a Draft Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy. During the June Council Meeting, the Council will receive a presentation on the draft strategy from Ms. Sharon Benjamin (NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office). The following briefing materials are enclosed behind this tab:

- Announcement: NOAA Fisheries Invites Public Comment on New Draft Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy (5/4/22)
- Draft Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy – Executive Summary (the full report is available online [here](#))
- Frequently Asked Questions – Equity and Environmental Justice

Comments on the draft strategy will be accepted [online](#) through August 19, 2022.



NOAA Fisheries Invites Public Comment on New Draft Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy

May 04, 2022

Comments will be accepted online until August 19 as well as at national webinars and in-person meetings.



NOAA Fisheries shared its first-ever draft [Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy](#) and invited public comments through August 19. In addition to accepting [written comments](#), we will host four webinars on the strategy, where comments will be accepted. Additional in-person meetings and opportunities to comment via phone will be announced on a rolling basis, once those plans are finalized.

“NOAA Fisheries is focused on serving all communities more equitably and effectively, and this strategy will provide the framework to do just that,” said Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries and NOAA’s Acting Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere, Janet Coit.

“We are committed to advancing equity and environmental justice, including equal treatment, opportunities, and environmental benefits for all people and communities, while building on continuing efforts and partnerships with underserved and underrepresented communities,” she added.

Goals and Objectives

The agency identified three overarching, long-term goals in the strategy. They are:

- Prioritize identification, equitable treatment, and meaningful involvement of underserved communities
- Provide equitable delivery of services
- Prioritize equity and environmental justice in our mandated and mission work

The agency also identified six short-term objectives in the strategy. They are:

- Provide an empowering environment within the agency to support multiple equity and environmental justice approaches at NOAA Fisheries
- Incorporate equity and environmental justice in agency policies and plans
- Achieve equity in research and researching equity
- Outreach and engage equitably
- Equitably distribute benefits
- Ensure inclusive governance

This national strategy is the result of guidance from recent Executive Orders, the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council, the Department of Commerce’s Equity Action Plan, NOAA’s Climate Council and agency leadership, enthusiastic staff participation, and a clear and growing need indicated by underserved communities. The strategy also builds on our previous equity and environmental justice efforts to provide guidance for incorporating and prioritizing EEJ in ongoing and future activities in support of our mission.

“While we are making progress in addressing equity and environmental justice, we know that we have much more work to do to embed EEJ into our day-to-day efforts,” said NOAA Fisheries Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, Sam Rauch, who also convened and led the agency’s EEJ Working Group. “By focusing on these goals and objectives we will provide more equitable stewardship of the nation’s ocean resources and their habitat.”

How You Can Help

NOAA Fisheries’ science, conservation, and management activities serve a diverse array of communities across the United States and territories. However, not all communities have

equal opportunities and access to agency-led services. Through this call for public comment, we seek assistance in several areas, including help to identify:

- Who the agency's underserved communities are
- How the agency can reduce barriers to underserved communities
- How the agency can better incorporate equity and environmental justice into our daily activities
- How we can improve equity in our programs and policies now, with our current resources, and in the future
- Help evaluating whether the draft recommendations for action are on target

How to Provide Comment

You can [provide comments online](#). You can also comment at webinars, by phone, and at in-person meetings. The webinars will be held on:

May 24, 2022 4 pm Eastern

[Register for May 24 webinar](#)

June 21, 2022 at 6 pm Eastern

[Register for June 21 webinar](#)

June 30, 2022 at 7 pm Eastern

[Register for June 30 webinar](#)

July 19, 2022 at 4 pm Eastern

[Register for July 19 webinar](#)

Achieving Our Goals

To achieve our initial equity and environmental justice goals, each of the agency's national program offices and geographic regions will incorporate EEJ into a step-down implementation plan. These plans will be specific and responsive to the needs of underserved communities and allows for the input of underserved communities. Each program, science center, and regional office will set equity and environmental justice as a Priority Area or milestone in annual strategic planning starting in 2023. And, the agency's step-down implementation plans will include metrics describing equity and environmental justice actions. Our progress will be publicly reported annually in an EEJ Scorecard.

"To be clear, this strategy does not endorse business as usual and is not a rebranding of existing activities. Rather, this national strategy describes the path that NOAA Fisheries will take to incorporate EEJ into the vital services we provide to all stakeholders," said Coit.



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NOAA Fisheries

Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy

Executive Summary

NOAA Fisheries endeavors to serve stakeholders equitably by engaging underserved communities in the science, conservation, and management of the nation's ocean resources and their habitat. This national strategy builds on NOAA Fisheries' previous equity and environmental justice efforts to provide guidance for incorporating and prioritizing EEJ in ongoing and future activities in support of NOAA Fisheries' mission.

NOAA Fisheries' science, conservation, and management activities serve a diverse array of communities across the United States and Territories. Recognizing that not all communities have equal opportunities and access to NOAA Fisheries' services, we identified three overarching goals (Table 1). This national strategy requires step-down implementation plans and annual progress reports to ensure improvements in five core areas: Policy, Research, Outreach, Benefits, and Governance. A sixth core area, Empowering Environment, provides agency staff with the support and tools necessary to implement changes (Table 1).

Identifying and recognizing underserved communities, as well as addressing access barriers they face, will allow NOAA Fisheries to more equitably and effectively serve all communities. Focusing on these six core objectives will provide more equitable stewardship of the nation's ocean resources and their habitat.

This national strategy is the result of guidance from recent Executive Orders, the Department of Commerce's Equity Action Plan, NOAA's Climate Council and NOAA Fisheries' leadership, as well as enthusiastic staff participation and a clear and growing need indicated by underserved communities. To be clear, it does not condone business as usual and is not a rebranding of existing activities. Rather, this national strategy describes the path that NOAA Fisheries will take to incorporate EEJ into the vital services we provide to all stakeholders.

Table 1. NOAA Fisheries’ three overarching goals and six core EEJ objectives

NOAA Fisheries’ Equity and Environmental Justice Goals				
Prioritize identification, equitable treatment, and meaningful involvement of underserved communities.	Provide equitable delivery of services.	Prioritize EEJ in our mandated and mission work.		
Objectives				
<p>Empowering Environment: Provide the institutional support, including training and resources, needed to implement multiple EEJ approaches at NOAA Fisheries. Internal leadership and management will identify EEJ as priorities and encourage staff to consider EEJ in every aspect of their work.</p>				
<p>Incorporate Equity and Environmental Justice in Policy and Plans: Ensure that our policies promote equal opportunities for all and do not create unintended inequities or unequal burdens for underserved communities.</p>	<p>Equity in Research and Researching Equity: Identify underserved communities, address their needs, and assess impacts of management decisions.</p>	<p>Outreach and Engage Equitably: Build relationships with underserved communities to better understand their needs, and improve information sharing with all stakeholders.</p>	<p>Equitably Distribute Benefits: Distribute benefits equitably among stakeholders by increasing the access to opportunities for underserved communities.</p>	<p>Inclusive Governance: Provide for the meaningful involvement of underserved communities in the decision-making processes.</p>

The full report is available online at the link below.

[NOAA Fisheries Draft Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy \(PDF, 39 pages\)](#)

NOAA Fisheries' Draft Strategy for Advancing Equity and Environmental Justice

NOAA Fisheries invites feedback on our draft [Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy](#). Comments are due August 19, 2022.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is NOAA Fisheries' draft Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) Strategy?

NOAA Fisheries' draft EEJ Strategy provides a framework to incorporate EEJ into our daily activities. It identifies step-down implementation plans at the regional level; seeks to remove barriers to EEJ; and seeks to promote equity in all we do at NOAA Fisheries.

Who/what are the driving forces behind the development of this draft strategy?

NOAA Fisheries' draft EEJ Strategy builds on executive orders promoting equity, recommendations from the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council, action items from the Department of Commerce Equity Action Plan, and guidance from the NOAA Climate Council. In addition, this strategy is driven by strong support from NOAA Fisheries' leadership, enthusiastic staff participation, and a clear and growing need from underserved communities.

Is this strategy a new effort within NOAA Fisheries?

No, this strategy builds on NOAA Fisheries' previous equity and environmental justice efforts to provide guidance for incorporating and prioritizing EEJ in ongoing and future activities in support of the NOAA Fisheries' mission.

Have Tribal Nations been consulted?

Yes, early in the process, we held two consultation webinars open to members of Tribal Nations.

Does NOAA Fisheries' have the budget resources to support implementation of this strategy?

Many of the actions contained in this strategy can be accomplished within current resources. Some cannot be. That is why the President included a specific request for additional funding for NOAA Fisheries for Equity and Environmental Justice work in both his FY 2022 and FY 2023 proposed budgets. So while some actions can be taken immediately, others will depend on Congressional funding of the President's FY 2023 budget and may not be implementable in the near term. Some would take even longer to implement. The actions we are able to take immediately will be identified in the implementation plans.

What's NOAA Fisheries EEJ Working Group and what's its focus?

To advance our commitment to EEJ, NOAA Fisheries convened the Equity and Environmental Justice Working Group (EEJ WG). This group includes members from Headquarters, Regional Offices, and Science Centers. The EEJ WG's charge is to:

- Provide input on Fisheries' responses to executive orders and NOAA requests focused on equity, environmental justice, and support for underserved communities;
- Share information about Fisheries' efforts to embed EEJ into our external and programmatic work; and
- Create a strategy that identifies current initiatives, envisions a more equitable future, and outlines a roadmap to that goal.

What are NOAA Fisheries' current EEJ initiatives?

Within NOAA Fisheries, at least 167 programs or initiatives promote EEJ. These efforts include:

- **Empowering Environment:** Activities that provide the institutional support, including training and resources, needed to implement multiple EEJ approaches at NOAA Fisheries.
- **Policy & Plans:** Activities that ensure that our policies promote equal opportunities for all and do not create unintended inequities or unequal burdens for underserved communities.
- **Research & Monitoring:** Activities that identify underserved communities, address their needs, and assess impacts of management decisions.
- **Outreach & Engagement:** Activities that build relationships with underserved communities to better understand their needs, and improve information sharing with all stakeholders.
- **Benefits:** Activities that distribute benefits equitably among stakeholders by increasing the access to opportunities for underserved communities.
- **Inclusive Governance:** Activities that support the meaningful involvement of underserved communities in the decision-making processes.

What are the Executive Orders that promoted NOAA Fisheries to form the EEJ working group?

There are 4 Executive Orders we are responding to:

- EO 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government
- EO 14008: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad
- EO 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations
- EO 13175: Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments

How are you defining ‘equity’?

As defined in Executive Order 13985, equity means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

How are you defining ‘environmental justice’?

Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, gender, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies including but not limited to:

- Equitable protection from environmental and health hazards;
- Equitable access to decision-making processes;
- Equitable opportunity for disadvantaged communities that have been historically marginalized.

How are you defining ‘underserved communities’?

Underserved communities have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. These include geographic communities as well as populations sharing a particular characteristic such as: women and girls; Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; persons facing discrimination or barriers related to gender identity; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons

who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

Is this effort just a re-branding of existing activities?

No, this national strategy describes the path that NOAA Fisheries will take to incorporate EEJ into the vital services we provide to all stakeholders.

The Draft Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy may be found online at the NOAA Fisheries website at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/noaa-fisheries-invites-public-comment-new-draft-equity-and-environmental-justice>.