



COUNCIL COORDINATION COMMITTEE
Mauna Lani Bay Hotel
68-1400 Mauna Lani Drive, Kohala Coast Hawaii 96743
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SYNOPSIS

By-Catch, Cooperative Research, Habitat, Five-Year Research Priorities: Opportunities for Funding and Process

Funding opportunities are the main drivers for the long term existence of any federal programs. The level of output is dictated by the amount of funding that supports the different activities under these programs. These outputs and products are critical to support fishery management decisions in the different regions as required by national standard 2 (use of best available scientific information). Recent budget cutbacks and continuing resolutions present significant challenges for these programs to effectively generate much needed scientific information and maintain high level collaboration between the different stakeholders within each region. Broadening the horizon of funding sources will increase the chances of augmenting the management information needs not only by the respective Fisheries Science Centers but the constituents as well.

The National Bycatch Program, National Cooperative Research Program, Habitat Conservation Program of the National Marine Fisheries Service has potential to address fishery management issues. Each region utilizes these programs at different levels depending on the information needs and the ability to compete for funding. More crucial, especially in the Western Pacific region, is the awareness that these programs exist and whether the Science Center is maximizing the availability of these funds. Aside from the Science Centers, these programs are also critical for the stakeholders that need the information generated by these projects. It is important to be clear about the eligibility criteria and the transparency in the process in terms project selection and allocation of funding. It would also benefit the Council to determine what part of the process the Council can be involved as a representative of the fishing community.

A process needs to be determined on how the Council 5 year research priorities can be considered in developing the science center's research priorities and the region's budget for the Council. These priorities will have to be monitored whether the science centers are addressing

the issues and whether the regional offices are providing sufficient funding to address such priorities.

National Bycatch Program

The National Bycatch Program aims to implement conservation and management measures for living marine resources that will minimize bycatch and mortality that cannot be avoided. The Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program (BREP) aims to develop technological solutions and investigate changes in fishing practices designed to minimize bycatch fish as well as minimize bycatch injury and mortality. From the NOAA budget line item entitled “reducing Bycatch” certain apportionments are allocated to implement BREP. The overall NOAA budget line item on Reduction of Bycatch received increasing budget in the past 4 years (last 2 years at leveled funding) (Figure 1).

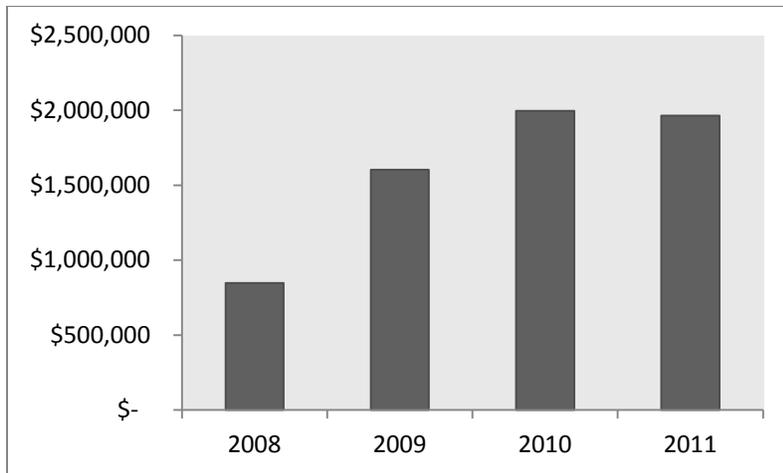


Figure 1. NOAA overall budget for BREP implementation from 2008-2011

The regional breakdowns of allocation are as follows from 2008-2011 (Figure 2).

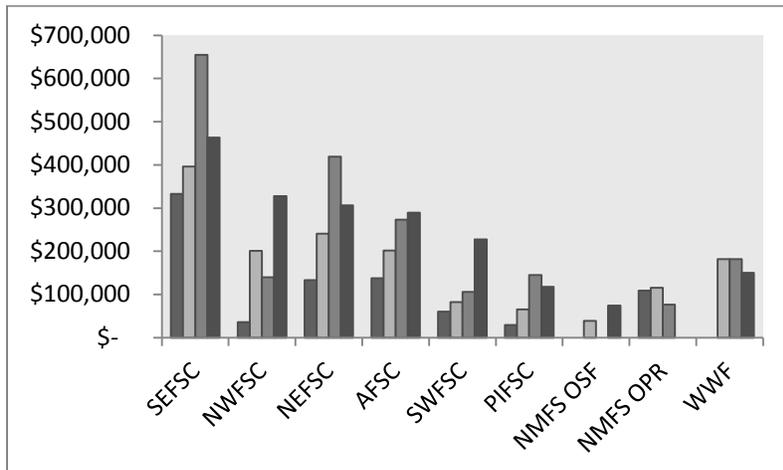


Figure 2. BREP implementation budget across the different regions and NMFS line office (with WWF as outside grantee)

The allocation however varied between regions depending on the extensiveness of bycatch issues inherent within the region and the respective Science Center's ability to secure the funds through competitive proposal. The Pacific Island region has consistently been receiving the smallest apportionment over the past 4 years that can be attributed to the Science Center's ability to compete for the funds where the Pacific Island projects was deemed to be low key or less important compared to the larger fishery bycatch issues in other regions. The criteria for evaluation should be equitable across the different regions.

National Cooperative Research Program

The National Cooperative Research Program (NCRP) provides a means for commercial and recreational fishermen to become involved in the collection of fundamental fisheries information to support the development and evaluation of management options. Through this program, the industry and stakeholders can partner with NMFS and scientists in all phases of the research program including research design, conduct of research, analysis of results, and more importantly communication of results thereby closing the information loop for all parties involved. Funds for the implementation of the regional cooperative research projects had relied heavily on Congressional earmarks over the years and recent cutback on the earmarks presented additional challenges for this program. Congressional funds through the National Cooperative Research Program provide overall coordination and supplemental funding for six NOAA Fisheries regional cooperative research programs. The Science Centers conduct cooperative research activities through their base funding.

All cooperative research projects are subject to competitive evaluation by the National Cooperative Research Working Group. The competitive evaluation has recently been developed and the evaluation process needs to be assessed with a goal of attaining equal funding opportunities for all the region as well as ensure feedback from the proponents are sought prior to final funding allocation. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council solicits cooperative research priorities from its various advisory bodies to maximize the utility of the information being generated and ensures its usefulness in fishery management. This process ensures fishermen involvement in the development of the cooperative research priorities and projects therefore the feedback mechanism in addressing the evaluation criteria and gaps in the criteria is critical.

Habitat Conservation and Research Program

The re-authorization of the Magnuson-Steven Act provided an option for Regional Fishery Management Councils to transition from species-based to ecosystem-based fishery management. This option increases the need for more habitat information. The role of habitat and associated species-specific interactions is becoming an important factor for stock assessments. Funding for habitat research as well as fishery independent sampling had been limited. The last NMFS Joint Habitat Assessment and Stock Assessment Workshop aims to provide leverage for the

improvement of habitat science and its subsequent contribution to stock assessment. The NMFS Habitat Assessment Improvement Plan published in 2010 establishes a framework to coordinate the diverse habitat research, monitoring, and assessments and guide the development of budget alternatives hoping to increase support for habitat science.

Council's Five Year Research Priorities

The re-authorization of the Magnuson-Steven Act in 2006 mandated the Council to “develop, in conjunction with the scientific and statistical committee, multi-year research priorities for fisheries, fisheries interactions, habitats, and other areas of research that are necessary for management purposes, that shall—

(A) establish priorities for 5-year periods;

(B) be updated as necessary; and

(C) be submitted to the Secretary and the regional science centers of the NMFS for their consideration in developing research priorities and budgets for the region of the Council”

There is currently no guidance from the NMFS on how these research priorities are going to be utilized by the Science Center and the region for budgeting purposes. The status of these priorities is being monitored by the WPFMC in collaboration with the PIFSC. The long term process incorporating such priorities in the Science Center research plans has yet to be developed. This would enhance the stability of funding if these priorities are included in the Science Center's base operation. So far the status of these Council research priorities is treated as “for information only” and tangible results, especially incorporation in the budget for the region of the Council has yet to materialize.