

North Pacific Research Board – Advisory Panel  
September 16-18, 2014  
Anchorage, Alaska

The Advisory Panel (AP) met on September 16-18 in Anchorage, Alaska. In attendance were Jeff Stephan, Edward Poulsen, Gary Freitag, Nagruk Harcharek, Helen Aderman, Steve Reifensstuhl, and Phil Zavadil. Dan Falvey attended on the first and second days and Vera Metcalf attended only the second day of the meeting. Not in attendance: Michael Macrander and Gay Sheffield. The meeting was staffed by Denby Lloyd, Matt Baker, Danielle Dickson, Susan Dixon, Carrie Eischens, and Abigail Enghirst.

**Tuesday, September 16, 2014**

1. Call to Order/Approve Agenda

The Chair called the meeting to order at 8:30 am on Tuesday, September 16, 2014. Staff provided a safety briefing.

New AP members Nagruk Harcharek and Chris Krenz were introduced.

Staff announced that Carrie Eischens and Abigail Enghirst are leaving NPRB later this fall. The AP recognized their contributions to the organization and thanked them for supporting the activities of the panel.

The agenda was approved with the addition of discussion of the AP proposal review process under item 5 (2015 Request for Proposals).

The meeting summary from the spring 2014 meeting was approved.

**MOTION: Accept minutes from the April 2014 AP meeting.**

**Maker: Ed Poulsen**

**Second: Gary Freitag**

**Motion passed.**

2. Conflict of Interest Policy

Staff reported that the board amended the panel conflict of interest (COI) policy to require disclosure and not recusal in the event that an AP member's organization writes a letter of support for a proposal.

Staff explained that the board conflict of interest policy was amended to allow the representatives of Department of Commerce, Department of Interior, and State of Alaska Department of Fish & Game to remain in the room during discussion of proposals that would otherwise require recusal. The rationale for this was the recognition that the Secretary of the Department of Commerce is required to approve all NPRB funding decisions and the board member representing the Secretary should hear the deliberations in order to provide pertinent information. The board decided that the other two representatives of agencies with management authority (Department of Interior and State of Alaska Department of Fish & Game) should be extended the same consideration and amended the policy accordingly.

New AP members were asked to sign a form stating that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by the COI policy. All other members signed the form during the spring meeting.

### 3. Budget Review

Staff provided an overview of the NPRB budget, noting that the outlook for funding available for science in future years is positive.

### 4. Summary of Previously Funded Projects

Staff provided a summary of the projects funded by NPRB in spring 2014. Twenty-four proposals totaling \$4.7 million were funded through the annual program and three proposals totaling \$1.86 million were funded through the long-term monitoring program.

Beginning in 2012, the advisory panel has provided recommendations to the board by flagging proposals that have significant societal relevance. Since that time, 59% of the proposals flagged by the advisory panel have been approved for funding by the board. These flagged proposals represent approximately 50% of the total number of proposals approved for funding since 2012.

Staff explained that NPRB annually receives proposals asking for 4.5 times more than what is offered in the RFP. Overall (all RFP categories combined) the success rate of reviewed proposals has ranged between 20-35% over the last 9 years (average 29%).

Staff presented an analysis of the number of “new” researchers (i.e., first time applicants) that submitted proposals in response to the 2013 and 2014 RFP to assess the degree to which NPRB is drawing new participants. New applicants, defined as principle investigators and co-investigators, represented 42% and 33% of applicants in 2013 and 2014, respectively. Of these new applicants, 24% in 2013 and 19% in 2014 were successful in securing funding.

Staff provided metrics of NPRB funding distribution since 2002 by large marine ecosystem (Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea, and Arctic), institution, and research theme. To date, 263 projects (\$41.7M) funded through the annual research program have been completed and another 87 projects (\$16.2M) are currently ongoing. Updates on the status of data and metadata, as well as publication of peer-reviewed papers produced by NPRB projects were also provided.

### 5. 2015 Request for Proposals

Staff summarized the process for developing the annual RFP and pointed panel members to supporting documents detailing recommendations received from a variety of agencies and organizations. At the May 2014 meeting, the board decided to continue the cyclical approach to funding for the 2015 and 2016 RFP cycle of the annual research program. The 2015 RFP will be developed with a projected funding allocation of \$4.5 million and will emphasize Oceanography and Lower Trophic Levels, Marine Mammals, and Human Dimensions. Research areas deemphasized in 2015 are Seabirds and Other Prominent Issues.

Staff summarized the recommendations of the science panel that were used to develop the draft 2015 RFP that the AP discussed, including SP recommendations for restructuring the human dimensions sections of the RFP and topical recommendations for the focus section.

The AP briefly discussed how the annual program process might be adjusted to allow the budget of that program to be mobilized to respond to immediate and critical needs with societal relevance that may arise at any time. The AP recognized that the standard RFP development process does allow the AP to make recommendations to the board.

Staff presented the draft RFP category by category and the AP made specific recommendations for edits throughout. Under the Human Dimensions category, the AP recommended strongly encouraging proposers to communicate with stakeholders during proposal development and to include community members in the research, and under the Local and Traditional Knowledge (LTK) topic the AP recommended that this be required. The AP raised a concern that including LTK in the Human Dimensions category may result in LTK projects being approached from a social science perspective and may consequently include reduced participation by community members during the analysis phase. The RFP draft strongly encouraged participation by communities and does not require it, and this diverges from the language in the NPRB science plan. The AP further suggested that in future years the Human Dimensions category include more directive topics to better communicate to proposers the types of projects that the board is interested in funding.

Under the Marine Mammals category, the AP noted that research in the Bering Sea and Arctic was emphasized and there was little opportunity for work in the Gulf of Alaska beyond the "Other" category. The AP recommended inserting a marine mammal-fisheries interaction topic that could capture projects in the Gulf of Alaska.

The AP suggested that the budget cap for the Community Involvement category be increased to \$150 K and that language be added to state that NPRB intends to fund more than one project in this category. The panel recommended that \$50 K be moved from the focus section to accommodate this change.

The AP suggested that an "Other" topic be added under the Cooperative Research with Industry category. Staff noted that the language underneath the sub-category for cooperative research with other maritime industries will be broadened because it was originally written specifically for cooperation with the oil and gas industry. The title of topic iv. "Toxicity of oil, dispersants, and industry-associated discharges" should be changed to "Toxicity of industry-associated discharges and dispersants" and the language broadened to allow projects related to mining and vessel effluent to be considered.

The AP recommended adding a topic under the Technology Development category for marine tagging and marking technology development. This might include research related to distribution and seasonal migration, marking, tracking spatial distribution for assessment, life history parameters, population size, mortality rates, or monitoring environmental conditions, for example. Tags could be applied to marine mammals, seabirds, fish or invertebrate species.

During discussion of the focus section, the AP noted that the results of projects on Arctic cod would not be available in time to inform the Arctic program and it may be better to solicit and fund Arctic cod projects as integrated components within the Arctic program. The AP recognized a critical need for information about Arctic cod, and some panel members felt that an additional pulse of funds would be valuable, however it was noted that projects on Arctic cod would be responsive under the Fishes and Invertebrates category. Panel members also recognized the value in addressing information needs in the Aleutian Islands region, noting that the science panel suggested this category last year as well. The AP consensus recommendation for the focus section was the Aleutian Islands synthesis, which could set the stage for a future IERP in the region and would be relevant to current management issues.

**MOTION: Accept the changes to the RFP as detailed in the track changes version of the draft. AP recommends increasing the budget for the community involvement**

**section by \$50 K to allow funding more than one project in this category and recommended decreasing the budget for the focus section by \$50 K to accommodate this change.**

**Maker: Dan Falvey**

**Second: Steve Reifentstahl**

**Motion passed.**

**MOTION: The AP recommends the Aleutian Islands focus section. The AP noted that both this and the Arctic cod focus section have merit, yet determined that the timing of the Arctic cod project was unlikely to inform the development of the Arctic program.**

**Maker: Dan Falvey**

**Second: Ed Poulsen**

**Motion passed.**

The AP discussed their proposal review process and one panel member suggested that perhaps the AP should highlight more proposals for significant stakeholder relevance (perhaps in the past the panel has erred on the side of highlighting too few proposals). This recommendation was based on the metrics of board concordance with AP recommendations, and the AP asked that the board/staff provide additional metrics that would help the AP to determine if the panel's contribution to the process can be improved. The panel suggested that staff develop metrics that estimate the odds of a proposal being funded in a given category if it has been flagged by the AP.

The AP Chair stated that panel members need to commit to doing the work associated with championing a proposal. It was noted that the COI policy is sometimes causing those who would be most capable of writing the justification for flagging a proposal to be recused due to institutional conflicts and perhaps this is a problem. To alleviate this, a panel member suggested that the AP could simply use a checklist of the six evaluation criteria to highlight a proposal instead of writing three sentences of justification. Other AP members felt that personalized statements specific to a given proposal are likely to carry more weight and the use of generic standardized language should be avoided. All agreed that AP members should be mindful of the six AP review criteria when writing justification statements, however. The panel suggested that one hour be set aside during the agenda of the spring meeting to formulate the justifications.

### **Wednesday, September 17, 2014**

#### **5. 2015 Request for Proposals (cont'd)**

Discussion of the AP proposal review process continued on the second day of the meeting. An AP member presented basic metrics from 2014 stating that among Tier 1 proposals, those flagged by the AP had a 93% success rate and others had only a 64% success rate, illustrating that the AP's input appears to have a significant impact on the funding decisions of the board. A lesser impact was evident for Tier 2 proposals, however, it seems that the board is generally reluctant to fund Tier 2 proposals because more Tier 1 proposals are available than can be funded.

Staff noted that in 2014 the board funded all Tier 1A proposals, including nine flagged by the AP. The AP input seemed to have an impact on the success of Tier 1B proposals. Eleven Tier 1B proposals were considered and three of the four proposals funded were flagged by the AP.

Proposals that articulate the societal relevance of the research have a higher likelihood of funding. The AP should consider making recommendations for improving the language in the guidelines to proposers to make this clearer.

#### *Experimental design award program*

The AP discussed the idea of developing an experimental design award program to support the development of strong proposals by private entities (e.g., non-profit, Alaska Native, and industry organizations). Proposals would be considered that propose ideas for research projects that could be conducted by private groups. Awards would be given to support the development of rigorous proposals that could be submitted to any funding entity, including NPRB. The majority of the money is intended to go towards contracting experts with technical and statistical expertise. One AP member suggested that these private groups should be encouraged to partner with agencies or other experts who could collaborate to bring rigor to the design of projects, and perhaps this process is unnecessary. Others felt that this approach would encourage academics and others to partner with these private groups to develop projects with societal relevance and could result in strong proposals. Perhaps this discussion could continue through the small grants working group or a new working group if the board endorses the idea. The AP suggests the board consider implementing this for the 2016 funding cycle and intends for the science panel to comment. The AP provided a one-page document outlining this idea in more detail (attached).

**MOTION: The AP recommends the board establish an experimental design award program and would like to move it forward as part of the annual RFP process.**

**Maker: Steve Reifentstahl**

**Second: Dan Falvey**

**Motion passed.**

The AP discussed the conflict of interest policy and expressed concern over the recusal of experts who might be best qualified to write justification statements about stakeholder relevance. The rationale for a request to change the COI policy is the limited resources of the AP and the recognition that the AP does not ultimately make any funding decisions.

**MOTION: The AP recommends the policy for conflict of interest maintain the existing requirements for disclosure. However, the AP recommends that recusal requirements for AP members be modified such that the organizational subunits triggering recusal for universities be narrowed to the divisional level. The rationale for this change is as follows:**

- a) **The Advisory Panel does not make final decisions, but instead makes recommendations to the Board.**
- b) **This modification will allow for better collaboration among Advisory Panel experts with negligible perceived conflict of interest.**
- c) **In the past, the recusal policy has resulted in circumstances where few volunteers are available to write up support for a specific proposal.**
- d) **Finally, by modifying the recusal policy for the Advisory Panel, the quality of work being presented to the Board will improve as more experts will be available in the room to draw expertise from.**

**Maker: Ed Poulsen**  
**Second: Phil Zavadil**  
**Motion passed.**

#### 6. Communications and Outreach Report

Staff provided an update on communications and outreach, including work in progress on a biennial report for 2013-14. AP members were asked to complete a form answering the question "How has NPRB-funded research benefited/been of value to your specific organization or helped to move the field forward?" A selection of these statements will be included in the report.

Staff presented a new strategic plan for communications for NPRB that includes improving communication of research results to stakeholders, agency managers and policy-makers. The plan includes "spotlight issues" that could be highlighted each month to raise awareness and staff solicited ideas from the AP. The AP suggested 1) the changing Arctic and NPRB's new collaborative program, 2) gear modification to improve the sustainability of fisheries (could select one of many examples to highlight), 3) Cape Constantine trawl fishery (Bristol Bay region) and impacts to marine mammal habitat and prey resources (suggest a visual approach), 4) how NPRB research is being used, 5) invasive species and interfacing with schoolkids (not related to any NPRB grants), 5) NPFMC will begin working on a Bering Sea fishery ecosystem plan soon and this could illustrate how BEST-BSIERP has informed that effort, 6) Bering Sea crabbers bio (Ed Poulsen), 7) pinniped Unusual Mortality Event, 8) avian cholera near St. Lawrence Island, and 9) oiled seals in Bering Strait region.

Staff explained that occasionally researchers funded through the annual program have good ideas for outreach but neglect to budget more than \$2000 to implement them. Staff would like to approach the board to ask for permission to earmark a portion of the outreach budget to supplement these projects instead of asking PIs to shift money away from science. Staff asked the panel to consider endorsing this idea. Also, in the past, despite adequate in-kind support provided by other institutions NPRB has mandated that \$2000 of NPRB funds support outreach. Staff suggested that as long as the NPRB brand and quality of the outreach does not suffer perhaps this requirement could be softened. The AP agreed with this as long as NPRB staff maintains oversight to ensure that the quality of products meets NPRB standards. The AP also endorsed the idea of earmarking a portion of the outreach budget as described above.

#### 7. Graduate Student Research Awards

Staff provided an update on the graduate student research award program, noting that in spring 2014 the board reviewed 57 applications (21 Master's and 36 PhD students) and selected six proposals for awards. Alaska SeaGrant would like to explore the possibility of funding an additional four students by routing their money through the NPRB process. The science panel asked staff to clarify whether or not these awards would be limited to University of Alaska students and staff have confirmed that Alaska SeaGrant would not impose any such restrictions. The AP endorsed partnering with Alaska SeaGrant on the GSRA program.

#### 8. Gulf of Alaska Integrated Ecosystem Research Program

One AP member was very pleased to see the synthesis proposal, particularly the salmon aspect. Currently hardly any data exist for salmon offshore in the Gulf of Alaska and this information is critical to fisheries management.

The panel noted that this proposal did not use the standard proposal template used for the annual program and consequently lacks some detail that the AP would have appreciated the opportunity to review. Staff responded that this proposal was treated differently as part of the IERP. The benefit of in-kind support from agencies was noted. The AP recommended that the proposers be asked to identify the participants for each theme so that the budget for workshop travel can perhaps be adjusted downward for those individuals working on more than one topic. The merit of the work is very high and it is relevant to stakeholders.

**MOTION: The AP endorsed the idea of the synthesis proposal and felt that the proposed work is critical. The AP raised concerns over the amount of funding requested and the rigor and review of the proposal. The AP suggested that future IERPs set aside money for synthesis.**

**Maker: Gary Freitag**

**Second: Chris Krenz**

**Motion passed.**

#### 9. Arctic Program

Staff presented an update on the Pacific Marine Arctic Regional Synthesis (PacMARS) project and explained that the final report will be publicly available later this year or in early 2015. The data portal developed through the project will become public when the final report is accepted. The project's dedicated Advisory Committee recommended edits to the draft final report that included characterization of the project as primarily a synthesis of biological oceanography because it fell short with respect to fish, seabirds, and marine mammals.

Staff reported that the board decided at their spring meeting to commit \$6 million towards the development of an Arctic program. Staff presented an update on progress made during the summer on developing research scenarios and establishing partnerships. An Arctic working group that includes 6 board members and one representative from each of the science and advisory panels worked closely with staff throughout the summer (the AP member is Vera Metcalf).

The panel commended staff on the scope and breadth of the research questions as well as the progress on developing partnerships. The panel recognized that collaboration is essential to getting quality research done in the Arctic due to the expense of logistics, and that will affect the region that is studied (most activity is centered in the northeast Chukchi Sea). However, this means that the Bering Strait region will continue to be missed, and it is an important corridor for marine mammal migration for many species and it remains one of least-studied areas. If this region is not emphasized now, NPRB should consider what they plan to do in the region in the future.

The panel recommended that as research questions are further developed the board should consider how the results could apply to management and policy. They also recommended that social science questions related to the economics of subsistence-based local economies be considered.

The panel endorsed the top-down approach suggested by the science panel and added that consideration should be given to the top-down effects of subsistence species on their prey (e.g., walrus grazing effects on clams).

With respect to physical forcing, weather patterns including feedbacks of storms on sea ice should be included. Models could consider how weather affects melt pond formation on sea ice and consequently how melt ponds affect ice stability and production cycles, for example.

Communication and outreach will be essential to the Arctic program and the panel encouraged staff to explore means of involving community members in research and effectively communicating research results, especially with respect to food security. Suggestions for communicating with the public included establishing an advisory board made up of village representatives so that NPRB is communicating directly and regularly with members of each community as opposed to relying on a central body like the North Slope Borough. Other outreach suggestions included publishing feature articles in the borough's quarterly newsletter and interviews on regional radio stations.

**Thursday, September 18, 2014**

9. Arctic Program (cont'd)

**MOTION: The AP commends the progress made and direction of the Arctic IERP RFP and is encouraged by the partnerships being established. The AP further appreciates the top-down structuring approach focusing on subsistence, subsistence species, upper trophic levels, and Arctic cod, especially as PacMARS resulted in a synthesis of primarily biological oceanography. The AP recommends:**

- a) **Continuing to have a geographic focus that includes the Bering Strait; the lack of partner interest in that region should not diminish the inclusion of the Bering Strait;**
- b) **Learning from BSIERP and GOAIERP, there should be an additional synthesis phase to the program with additional funds provided beyond the \$6 million already allocated;**
- c) **Communicating with the State Department about the Arctic IERP as the U.S. prepares to chair the Arctic Council and leveraging the U.S. chairmanship of the Arctic Council to the extent possible;**
- d) **Continuing to encourage NSF to become a major partner in the Arctic IERP;**
- e) **Ensuring that community involvement and LTK is part of the design, implementation process and analysis; ensure a strong outreach and communication program throughout the program.**

**Maker: Chris Krenz**

**Second: Gary Freitag**

**Motion passed.**

The AP discussed the fact that the U.S. will chair the Arctic Council during 2015 and 2016. The AP recognizes the beneficial opportunities that may emerge for NPRB as a result of the U.S. leadership role in the Arctic Council, especially with respect to the opportunities that are offered by this occasion to enhance the role, recognition, visibility, leadership, and responsibility of NPRB as a leader in making investments in planning, organizing and executing scientific studies with respect to the diversity of important and emerging challenges and needs of Arctic scientific knowledge. The AP recognizes that it is likely to be significantly beneficial for NPRB to engage at an early opportunity, and well in advance of that time at which the U.S. takes the role of Arctic Council Chair, to engage with the U.S. State Department Arctic Ambassador and the diversity of other U.S. governmental and non-governmental



entities and leaders for the purpose of communicating and advancing knowledge of NPRB's past activities, successes and leadership role in attentive and conscientious planning and funding of a broad variety of important and necessary scientific investments in the Arctic.

10. Other Matters

a) Bering Sea Integrated Ecosystem Research Program update

Staff reported that all projects associated with BSIERP are being closed out and final reports are under review. Reports will be available on the BSIERP page on the NPRB website as they are accepted. NPRB is working on outreach products through a grant from NSF.

b) Alaska Marine Science Symposium

Planning for the 2015 AMSS is underway. The AMSS website has been redesigned and abstract submission, registration, and payment may all be completed online. The plenary talks will begin on Mon., Jan. 19, and Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea, and Arctic presentations will be given on Jan. 20-22.

c) Outside meeting funding requests and process

NPRB provides up to \$50 K per year to support outside meetings. Staff will suggest that the board standardize the schedule for allocating these funds and do so based upon the date of the meeting and calendar year.

d) Meeting schedule for 2015 – 2016

The AP will meet Apr. 28-30, 2015 and Sep. 15-17, 2015.

**MOTION: In preparation for the next AP meeting NPRB should notify panel members that if they want a printed binder they must notify staff prior to the meeting, otherwise panel members will be expected to use the electronic agenda.**

**Maker: Steve Reifentstahl**

**Second: Ed Poulsen**

**Motion passed.**

**MOTION: to adjourn entered at 9:40 am.**

**Maker: Ed Poulsen**

**Second: Steve Reifentstahl**

**Motion passed.**