North Pacific Research Board
Science Panel Meeting
Seattle, Washington
March 3-4, 2003

The Science Panel met at the NOAA/NMFS Alaska Fisheries Science Center in Seattle on March 3-4, 2003 to review proposals received by NPRB in response to the 2003 Request for Proposals. The meeting was chaired by interim chairman Rich Marasco and the following other panel members were in attendance: Vera Alexander, Shannon Atkinson, Dick Beamish, Jim Berner, Don Bowen, Dan Goodman, Anne Hollowed, Ed Houde, Gordon Kruse, Tom Royer, Pat Tester, Dave Witherell, and Doug Woodby. The meeting was staffed by Clarence Pautzke and Paula Banks.

Conflict of Interest Procedures

The panel reviewed draft conflict of interest and recusal procedures that had been circulated to the Board and panel members in January. They agreed to the procedures, in the Board notebooks under Tab 2 as item 2(a), and during the meeting, panel members identified proposals with which they had a potential conflict and then did not participate in discussions of those proposals. Panel members left the room during discussion and decision if listed as a principal investigator, or listed as a collaborator and their curriculum vitae was included in the proposal. They recognized that the Board still needed to consider approving the revised policy.

Review of Proposals

The panel then received an overview of the Board's research priorities and legislative criteria and the overall RFP process for 2003. The Board's executive director explained how various proposals were scored and how they fit into categories of similar research: marine mammals, seabirds, salmon, other fish, fish management and socioeconomics, habitat, contaminants, and marine ecosystems.

Each panel member had been assigned 11-12 primary and 11-12 secondary proposals for review. Members were given the technical reviews for their assigned proposals and requested to develop a synthesis of the reviews and a funding recommendation. During the meeting, the panel focused mainly on proposals in the green and yellow bins for each category, but also considered whether any of those should be downgraded, or proposals in the red bin upgraded. Over two days of discussions, the panel developed a list of proposals and funding levels for Board consideration that added up to $14 million based on the funding ceiling listed in the request for proposals. These proposals have been color-coded as bright green in Tables 3-10 under Tab 3 in the Board meeting notebooks and are shown in the summary table in the notebooks. In all the panel recommended funding for 45 proposals, though some were funded for less than requested as shown in the table. The panel developed a summary (available at Board meeting time) for each proposal based on technical reviews, and panel expertise and discussion.

The following is an explanation of the recommended changes made to enable support for as many good research initiatives as possible given the funding constraints:

Marine Mammals

#88 Winter foraging behavior of juvenile Steller sea lions: This is only a one-year study and the panel thought it should be funded at a reduced level of $200,000 (rather than $270,000) to first assess the practicalities of successfully tracking an individual sea lion for this period of time.

#49 Historical ecology of Northern Pacific marine mammals: This a complex proposal of five different parts and the panel felt it should be scaled back. The panel felt the work should be done, but there were some reservations about how conclusive the interpretations would be. Scaling it back to $546,000 from the requested $913,000 would allow much of the work to proceed while freeing up funds for other projects.

#92 Sea Otter declines and health near Kodiak: This proposal got high scores from two reviewers and a low score from a third. The panel felt this proposed research should proceed, but at a lower level of $338,000 vs the requested $389,000, and that the work would complement other research being done in the Kodiak area under proposal #58.

Seabirds

111 Emperor Geese: The science panel had reservations about the selenium contaminants part of the proposal but felt that the field study portion of the research could be completed in about 2 years for $170,000, down from the $519,000 originally requested.

#81 and 136: Both these studies would focus on seabirds in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands and Pribilofs and their energetics and relationship to the surrounding prey fields and oceanic environment. The panel recommended that the two investigators work closely together and through efficiencies, do the combined research for $1 million, down from the over $1.65 million requested by the two proposals combined.

Salmon

#15, 43, and 113 BASIS offshore salmon research in Bering Sea: These three BASIS related proposals requested just over $1.4 million combined. The panel believes that BASIS research addresses important needs of integrated salmon research across the North Pacific and the Board should provide some funding for the proposals, with possibly the weakest being #43. As indicated in the write-up for #15, the Board needs to decide how much of a role it is going to take in funding BASIS over the years. The panel recommended setting aside $500,000 this time around and letting BASIS determine how to allocate it within its program, recognizing that the Board already supported roughly $190,000 for BASIS research in the request for proposals in spring 2002.

Fish Management and Socioeconomics

#74 Community profiles: The panel supports this pilot study, but based on an offer of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to partially fund the research because of its importance to NEPA analysis, recommends funding of $45,000, and the Council picking up the other $48,000.

Contaminants

#84 Chlorinated fatty acids in pollock: The panel felt it would be best to start out with just a small pilot project and only recommended funding this for one year at $110,000.

Other Discussion Items and Comments

Data Policy. The panel discussed the need for data standards. The Board will need to develop a data policy so all researchers know that data has to be submitted. Such a requirement is in the request for proposals under general conditions and a part of contracts for research, but a policy needs to be developed

for panel consideration. It could be patterned after GLOBEC or GEM. The NRC Report for GEM suggests that ~ 20% of the total available funds should go toward this aspect.

Role of NPRB in Salmon Research. Should the NPRB adopt a clear role with respect to salmon, e.g., funding research for marine versus fresh water life history stages? One recommendation was that salmon research should take a holistic approach (i.e., must include all life history stages and habitats), which requires a team of scientists from many disciplines. The Kvichak River sockeye population provides an ideal example of where the team approach should be applied. To foster this approach, the Panel will identify issues that are best suited for a team approach and craft a statement that encapsulates it for inclusion in the next Request For Proposals.

Ocean Circulation Modeling. Questions arose regarding whether there should be an NPRB policy on ocean circulation modeling or a focus on a given topic (e.g., Steller sea lions). The recommendation was that the Science Panel should craft the RFP in a manner that reflects a particular focus.

Recommended Improvements to the RFP/Selection Process:

1. Add a Section to the proposal format on sources of current and pending funding, including an explicit statement of present collaborations and commitments.

2. Explicitly add Education and Outreach to the NPRB's list of priorities, and ensure that review of such proposals is on a different basis than the scientific proposals.

3. CV's should be limited to 5 recent publications and 5 other publications as appropriate and five most important contributions in the past 6 years.

4. Proposals that deal with native communities and/or traditional Alaskan Native foods must have a letter of support from the appropriate community governing body. For further information regarding guidelines, proposer should see ANSC.org.

5. Technical reviewers of proposals should be given 30 days, with a reminder in 3 weeks.

Future Activities

1. The science panel will meet this spring by teleconference to review draft research priorities.

2. The panel will want to meet with the NRC committee.

3. The panel will meet in Seward at the Alaska SeaLife Center in late August to make recommendations on the next request for proposals.