

Best Available Science Policy

Summary of Public Comments

FWC – Big Tent Committee

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Number of Public Comments

- 239 public comments (April 17 – May 26, 2024)
 - ❖ Opposed: 186 (78%)
 - ❖ Support: 15 (6%)
 - ❖ None responsive: 36 (15%)
 - ❖ Blank: 2



Tribal Comments

- Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians
- Snoqualmie Tribe
- Tulalip Tribes
- Upper Skagit Indian Tribe
- Squaxin Island Tribe
- Lummi Nation



General Public Comments

- Opposition to use of social science (SoSc)
 - ❖ Many people equated SoSc with commissioner's values and emotions
- Widespread distrust of FWC
 - ❖ Commissioner's use of professional experience as a surrogate for BAS
 - ❖ Concern for the use of SoSc, third parties, and selected rather than comprehensive review of references and information sources
 - ❖ Potential use of structured decision making
- Some distrust of agency scientists
 - ❖ Present only information that supports their policy preferences



Public Comment Categories

1. Best available science (BAS)
2. WDFW Scientists
3. Fish and Wildlife Commission
4. Sources of scientific information besides WDFW
5. Social science
6. Adaptive management, uncertainty, and decision-making
7. Definitions
8. Legal issues



Best Available Science

- Must include Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
- Peer review of science to inform commission decisions needs to include hunters, fishers, and administrators.
- BAS needs to be built on best available methods.
- The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is the only BAS needed.
- There is no BAS – science is changing all the time.
- BAS is fraught with misapplication.
- BAS is obstructed by the mixing of science with administrative and social considerations.
- BAS will end hunting and fishing, and cut hatchery production.
- BAS should rank science sources or information – certain types of information are better than others.



WDFW Scientists

- BAS is not needed because the best science is available from WDFW, Tribal, and NOAA.
- The draft policy squelches the independent opinions of WDFW scientists.
- Agency scientists are not independent from agency policies and selectively use science to support policies.
- Agency scientists are not the sole arbiters of “acceptable and sufficient” science.
- WDFW scientists want to control the commissioners’ access to information.
- Agency scientists don’t understand bias or wish to mislead commission about bias.
- Commission is informed by science from only a small number of “administrators.”



Fish and Wildlife Commission

- Policy should include a process for commission to challenge agency science.
- Commission ignores or does not trust (agency) science.
- Commission is not authorized to oversee agency science.
- Some commissioners discredit agency scientists when the science doesn't match their narrative.
- Commission is biased and will use the concept of BAS to justify their own values.
- Policy will allow commissioners to abuse and expand their responsibilities.
- The policy undermines FWC statutory authority over fish and wildlife management.
- Professional experience of commissioners is given too much weight and does not replace BAS.
- Commission is anti-consumptive use - liberal bias.
- Commission doesn't understand BAS.



Sources of Scientific Information Besides WDFW

- Washington State Academy of Science (WSAS) was not universally accepted as an objective third party because it is assumed to be focused on Puget Sound issues and anti-hatcheries, and not far-removed from being an advocacy group.
- University of Washington should evaluate WDFW science with funding from legislature.
- Many third-party groups are advocacy groups and cherry-pick information – “Science for Hire.”
- Information sources should include federal scientists, Tribes, and fishers and hunters in addition to WSAS.



Social Science

- Inclusion of social science in BAS policy undermines objectivity.
- Allows decision makers to ignore data, is biased, and is not BAS.
- Is about emotions, is soft science and is woke, and is not the same as biological sciences.
- Is not relevant to fish and wildlife management.
- Social science should be included in the policy, but the policy needs a discussion of social science methods and professional standards, and should not be subjective.



Adaptive Management, Uncertainty, and Decision-making – Part 1

- Management requires common sense, not science. Hunters and fishers can provide the necessary information.
- Policy is biased because it allows for decisions to be made using beliefs, emotions, politics, third parties, and special interests.
- Regular and independent assessment as to how well WDFW is applying BAS to management decisions, including social and economic effects of the policy should be included as part of the policy.
- Precautionary principle must be included explicitly in policy – when there is uncertainty err on the side of conservation.
- Hunting and fishing shouldn't be limited by uncertainty or undefined risks.



Adaptive Management, Uncertainty, and Decision-making – Part 2

- Decision-making must be grounded in credible and unbiased science.
- Structured Decision Making (SDM) allows decision makers to avoid making hard decisions.
- SDM is less rigorous than Statistical Decision Theory when dealing with tradeoff in resource management decisions.
- Uncertainty must be expressed as a probability distribution of possible outcomes.
- Agency doesn't have experts to assess tradeoffs, to define scientific integrity, or to design protocols for evaluating methods.



Policy Requires Definitions of the Following Terms

- Best available science, including definition of “best” and “available.”
- Decision-critical, tradeoffs, structured decision making
- Social science, scientific integrity

Legal Issues

- Policy changes the relationship between agency and FWC – violation of RCW.



Questions?

