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## Title 50 –Wildlife and Fisheries

### Chapter VI –Fishery Conservation and Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce

#### Part 600 –Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions

#### Subpart C –Council Membership

**Authority:** 5 U.S.C. 561 and 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

**Source:** 61 FR 32540, June 24, 1996, unless otherwise noted.

**Editorial Note:** Nomenclature changes to part 600 appear at 90 FR 38003, Aug. 7, 2025.

#### § 600.235 Financial disclosure and recusal.

(a) **Definitions.** For purposes of § 600.235:

**Affected individual** means an individual who is—

- (1) Nominated by the Governor of a state or appointed by the Secretary of Commerce to serve as a voting member of a Council in accordance with section 302(b)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act; or
- (2) A representative of an Indian tribe appointed to the Pacific Council by the Secretary of Commerce under section 302(b)(5) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act who is not subject to disclosure and recusal requirements under the laws of an Indian tribal government.
- (3) A member of an SSC shall be treated as an affected individual for the purposes of paragraphs (b)(1), (b)(5) through (b)(7), and (i) of this section.

**Close causal link** means that a Council decision would reasonably be expected to directly impact or affect the financial interests of an affected individual.

**Council decision** means approval of a fishery management plan (FMP) or FMP amendment (including any proposed regulations); request for amendment to regulations implementing an FMP; finding that an emergency exists involving any fishery (including recommendations for responding to the emergency); and comments to the Secretary on FMPs or amendments developed by the Secretary. It does not include a vote by a committee of a Council.

**Designated official** means an attorney designated by the NOAA General Counsel.

**Expected and substantially disproportionate benefit** means a positive or negative impact with regard to a Council decision that is likely to affect a fishery or sector of a fishery in which the affected individual has a significant financial interest.

**Financial Interest Form** means NOAA Form 88-195, “STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS For Use By Voting Members of, and Nominees to, the Regional Fishery Management Councils, and Members of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)” or such other form as the Secretary may prescribe.

**Financial interest in harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing**

- (1) includes:

- (i) Stock, equity, or other ownership interests in, or employment with, any company, business, fishing vessel, or other entity or employment with any entity that has any percentage ownership in or by another entity engaging in any harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activity in any fishery under the jurisdiction of the Council concerned;
  - (ii) Stock, equity, or other ownership interests in, or employment with, any company or other entity or employment with any entity that has any percentage ownership in or by another entity that provides equipment or other services essential to harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activities in any fishery under the jurisdiction of the Council concerned, such as a Chandler or a dock operation;
  - (iii) Employment with, or service as an officer, director, or trustee of, an association whose members include companies, vessels, or other entities engaged in any harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activities, or companies or other entities providing services essential to harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activities in any fishery under the jurisdiction of the Council concerned; and
  - (iv) Employment with an entity that has any percentage ownership in or by another entity providing consulting, legal, or representational services to any entity engaging in, or providing equipment or services essential to harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activities in any fishery under the jurisdiction of the Council concerned, or to any association whose members include entities engaged in the activities described in paragraphs (1)(i) and (ii) of this definition;
- (2) Does not include stock, equity, or other ownership interests in, or employment with, an entity engaging in scientific fisheries research in any fishery under the jurisdiction of the Council concerned, unless it is covered under paragraph (1) of this definition. A financial interest in such entities is covered by 18 U.S.C. 208, the Federal conflict-of-interest statute.

**Significant financial interest** means:

- (1) A greater than 10-percent interest in the total harvest of the fishery or sector of the fishery affected by the Council decision;
- (2) A greater than 10-percent interest in the marketing or processing of the total harvest of the fishery or sector of the fishery affected by the Council decision; or
- (3) Full or partial ownership of more than 10 percent of the vessels using the same gear type within the fishery or sector of the fishery affected by the Council decision.

**(b) Reporting.**

- (1) The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the disclosure of any financial interest in harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing activity that is being, or will be, undertaken within any fishery over which the Council concerned has jurisdiction. An affected individual must disclose such financial interest held by that individual; the affected individual's spouse, minor child, partner; or any organization (other than the Council) in which that individual is serving as an officer, director, trustee, partner, or employee. The information required to be reported must be disclosed on the Financial Interest Form (as defined in paragraph (a) of this section), or such other form as the Secretary may prescribe.

- (2) The Financial Interest Form must be filed by each nominee for Secretarial appointment to the Council with the Assistant Administrator by April 15 or, if nominated after March 15, one month after nomination by the Governor. A seated voting member appointed by the Secretary must file a Financial Interest Form with the Executive Director of the appropriate Council within 45 days of taking office; must file an update of his or her statement with the Executive Director of the appropriate Council within 30 days of the time any such financial interest is acquired or substantially changed by the affected individual or the affected individual's spouse, minor child, partner, or any organization (other than the Council) in which that individual is serving as an officer, director, trustee, partner, or employee; and must update his or her form annually and file that update with the Executive Director of the appropriate Council by February 1 of each year, regardless of whether any information has changed on that form.
- (3) The Executive Director must, in a timely manner, provide copies of and updates to the Financial Interest Forms of appointed Council members to the NMFS Regional Administrator, the Regional Attorney who advises the Council, the Department of Commerce Assistant General Counsel for Administration, and the NMFS Office of Sustainable Fisheries. These completed Financial Interest Forms shall be kept on file in the office of the NMFS Regional Administrator and at the Council offices, and shall be made available for public inspection at such offices during normal office hours. In addition, the forms shall be made available at each Council meeting or hearing and shall be posted for download from the Internet on the Council's website.
- (4) Councils must retain the Financial Interest Form for a Council member for at least 5 years after the expiration of that individual's last term.
- (5) The Regional Administrator must retain the Financial Interest Form for a Council member for 20 years from the date the form is signed by the Council member or in accordance with the current NOAA records schedule.
- (6) An individual being considered for appointment to an SSC must file the Financial Interest Form with the Regional Administrator for the geographic area concerned within 45 days prior to appointment. A member of the SSC must file an update of his or her statement with the Regional Administrator for the geographic area concerned within 30 days of the time any such financial interest is acquired or substantially changed by the SSC member or the SSC member's spouse, minor child, partner, or any organization (other than the Council) in which that individual is serving as an officer, director, trustee, partner, or employee; and must update his or her form annually and file that update with the Regional Administrator by February 1 of each year.
- (7) An individual who serves as an SSC member to more than one Council shall file Financial Interest Forms with each Regional Administrator for the geographic areas concerned.
- (8) The Regional Administrator must retain the Financial Interest Forms of all SSC members for at least five years after the expiration of that individual's term on the SSC. Such forms are not subject to sections 302(j)(5)(B) and (C) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

**(c) Restrictions on voting.**

- (1) No affected individual may vote on any Council decision that would have a significant and predictable effect on a financial interest disclosed in his/her report filed under paragraph (b) of this section.

- (2) As used in this section, a Council decision will be considered to have a “significant and predictable effect on a financial interest” if there is a close causal link between the decision and an expected and substantially disproportionate benefit to the financial interest in harvesting, processing, lobbying, advocacy, or marketing of any affected individual or the affected individual's spouse, minor child, partner, or any organization (other than the Council) in which that individual is serving as an officer, director, trustee, partner, or employee, relative to the financial interests of other participants in the same gear type or sector of the fishery. The relative financial interests of the affected individual and other participants will be determined with reference to the most recent fishing year for which information is available. However, for fisheries in which IFQs are assigned, the percentage of IFQs assigned to the affected individual will be the determining factor.
- (3) In making a determination under paragraph (f) of this section as to whether a Council decision will have a significant and predictable effect on an affected individual's financial interests, the designated official will:
  - (i) Initially determine whether the action before the Council is a Council decision, and whether the affected individual has any financial interest in the fishery or sector of the fishery affected by the action.
  - (ii) If the designated official determines that the action is not a Council decision or that the affected individual does not have any financial interest in the fishery or sector of the fishery affected by the action, the designated official's inquiry ends and the designated official will determine that a voting recusal is not required under 50 CFR 600.235.
  - (iii) However, if the designated official determines that the action is a Council decision and that the affected individual has a financial interest in the fishery or sector of the fishery affected by the Council decision, a voting recusal is required under 50 CFR 600.235 if there is:
    - (A) An expected and substantially disproportionate benefit to the affected individual's financial interest (see paragraph (c)(5) of this section), and
    - (B) A close causal link (see paragraph (c)(4) of this section) between the Council decision and the expected and substantially disproportionate benefit to the affected individual's financial interest.
- (4) A close causal link for Council decisions that either require or do not require implementing regulations is determined as follows:
  - (i) For all Council decisions that require implementing regulations and that affect a fishery or sector of a fishery in which an affected individual has a financial interest, a close causal link exists unless:
    - (A) The chain of causation between the Council decision and the affected individual's financial interest is attenuated or is contingent on the occurrence of events that are speculative or that are independent of and unrelated to the Council decision; or
    - (B) There is no real, as opposed to speculative, possibility that the Council decision will affect the affected individual's financial interest.
  - (ii) For Council decisions that do not require implementing regulations, a close causal link exists if there is a real, as opposed to speculative, possibility that the Council decision will affect the affected individual's financial interest.

- (5) A designated official will determine that an expected and substantially disproportionate benefit exists if an affected individual has a significant financial interest (see paragraph (c)(6) of this section) in the fishery or sector of the fishery that is likely to be positively or negatively affected by the Council decision. The magnitude of the positive or negative impact is not determinative of whether there is an expected and substantially disproportionate benefit. The determining factor is the affected individual's significant financial interest in the fishery or sector of the fishery affected by the Council decision.
- (6) When calculating significant financial interest, the designated official will rely on certain information.
  - (i) The information to be used is as follows:
    - (A) The designated official will use the information included in the Financial Interest Form and any other reliable and probative information provided in writing.
    - (B) The designated official may contact an affected individual to better understand the reported financial interest or any information provided in writing.
    - (C) The designated official will presume that the information reported on the Financial Interest Form is true and correct and the designated official is not responsible for determining the veracity of the reported information when preparing a determination under paragraph (f) of this section.
    - (D) If an affected individual does not provide information concerning the specific percentage of ownership of a financial interest reported on his or her Financial Interest Form, the designated official will attribute all harvesting, processing, or marketing activity of, and vessels owned by, the financial interest to the affected individual.
  - (ii) The designated official will apply the following principles when calculating an affected individual's financial interests relative to the significant financial interest thresholds for the fishery or sector of the fishery affected by the action. For purposes of this paragraph, use of the term "company" includes any business, vessel, or other entity.
    - (A) For attributions concerning direct ownership (companies owned by or that employ an affected individual) the designated official will attribute to an affected individual all harvesting, processing, and marketing activity of, and all vessels owned by, a company when the affected individual owns 100 percent of that company. If an affected individual owns less than 100 percent of a company, the designated official will attribute to the affected individual the harvesting, processing, and marketing activity of, and vessels owned by, the company commensurate with the affected individual's percentage of ownership. The designated official will attribute to an affected individual all harvesting, processing, and marketing activity of, and all vessels owned by, a company that employs the affected individual.
    - (B) For attributions concerning indirect ownership (companies owned by an affected individual's company or employer) the designated official will attribute to the affected individual the harvesting, processing, and marketing activity of, and vessels owned by, a company that is owned by that affected individual's company or employer commensurate with the affected individual's percentage ownership in the directly owned company, and the directly owned company's ownership in the indirectly owned company.

- (C) For attributions concerning parent ownership (companies that own some percentage of an affected individual's company or employer) the designated official will attribute to an affected individual all harvesting, processing, and marketing activity of, and all vessels owned by, a company that owns fifty percent or more of a company that is owned by the affected individual or that employs the affected individual. The designated official will not attribute to an affected individual the harvesting, processing, or marketing activity of, or any vessels owned by, a company that owns less than fifty percent of a company that is owned by the affected individual or that employs the affected individual.
- (D) For attributions concerning employment or service with associations or organizations, an affected individual may be employed by or serve, either compensated or unpaid, as an officer, director, board member or trustee of an association or organization. The designated official will not attribute to the affected individual the vessels owned by, or the harvesting, processing, or marketing activity conducted by, the members of that association or organization if such organization or association, as an entity separate from its members, does not own any vessels and is not directly engaged in harvesting, processing or marketing. However, if such organization or association receives from NMFS an allocation of harvesting or processing privileges, owns vessels, or is directly engaged in harvesting, processing or marketing, the designated official will attribute to the affected individual the vessels owned by, and all harvesting, processing, and marketing activity of, that association or organization.
- (E) For the financial interests of a spouse, partner or minor child, the designated official will consider the following factors for ownership and employment.
  - (1) For the financial interests of a spouse, partner or minor child related to ownership, the designated official will attribute to an affected individual all harvesting, processing, and marketing activity of, and all vessels owned by, a company when the affected individual's spouse, partner or minor child owns 100 percent of that company. If an affected individual's spouse, partner or minor child owns less than 100 percent of a company, the designated official will attribute to the affected individual the harvesting, processing, and marketing activity of, and vessels owned by, the company commensurate with the spouse's, partner's or minor child's percentage of ownership.
  - (2) For the financial interests of a spouse, partner or minor child related to employment, the designated official will not attribute to an affected individual the harvesting, processing, or marketing activity of, or any vessels owned by, a company that employs the affected individual's spouse, partner or minor child when the spouse's, partner's or minor child's compensation are not influenced by, or fluctuate with, the financial performance of the company. The designated official will attribute to an affected individual all harvesting, processing, and marketing activity of, and all vessels owned by, a company that employs the Council member's spouse, partner or minor child when the spouse's, partner's or minor child's compensation are influenced by, or fluctuate with, the financial performance of the company.
- (7) A member of an SSC is not subject to the restrictions on voting under this section.

- (d) **Voluntary recusal.** An affected individual who believes that a Council decision would have a significant and predictable effect on that individual's financial interest disclosed under paragraph (b) of this section may, at any time before a vote is taken, announce to the Council an intent not to vote on the decision and identify the financial interest that would be affected.
- (e) **Participation in deliberations.** Notwithstanding paragraph (c) of this section, an affected individual who is recused from voting under this section may participate in Council and committee deliberations relating to the decision, after notifying the Council of the voting recusal and identifying the financial interest that would be affected.
- (f) **Process and procedure for determination.**
  - (1) At the request of an affected individual, and as provided under paragraphs (c)(3)-(6) of this section, the designated official shall determine for the record whether a Council decision would have a significant and predictable effect on that individual's financial interest. Unless subject to confidentiality requirements, all information considered will be made part of the public record for the decision. The affected individual may request a determination by notifying the designated official—
    - (i) Within a reasonable time before the Council meeting at which the Council decision will be made; or
    - (ii) During a Council meeting before a Council vote on the decision.
  - (2) The designated official may initiate a determination on the basis of—
    - (i) His or her knowledge of the fishery and the financial interests disclosed by an affected individual; or
    - (ii) Written and signed information received within a reasonable time before a Council meeting or, if the issue could not have been anticipated before the meeting, during a Council meeting before a Council vote on the decision.
  - (3) At the beginning of each Council meeting, or during a Council meeting at any time reliable and probative information is received, the designated official shall announce the receipt of information relevant to a determination concerning recusal, the nature of that information, and the identity of the submitter of such information.
  - (4) If the designated official determines that the affected individual may not vote, the individual may state for the record how he or she would have voted. A Council Chair may not allow such an individual to cast a vote.
  - (5) A reversal of a determination under paragraph (g) of this section may not be treated as cause for invalidation or reconsideration by the Secretary of a Council's decision.
  - (6) Regional Recusal Determination Procedure Handbooks shall be developed for each NMFS Region.
    - (i) Each NMFS Regional Office, in conjunction with NOAA Office of General Counsel, will publish and make available to the public its Regional Recusal Determination Procedure Handbook, which explains the process and procedure typically followed in preparing and issuing recusal determinations.
    - (ii) A Regional Recusal Determination Procedure Handbook must include:

- (A) A statement that the Regional Recusal Determination Procedure Handbook is intended as guidance to describe the recusal determination process and procedure typically followed within the region.
  - (B) Identification of the Council(s) to which the Regional Recusal Determination Procedure Handbook applies. If the Regional Recusal Determination Procedure Handbook applies to multiple Councils, any procedure that applies to a subset of those Councils should clearly identify the Council(s) to which the procedure applies.
  - (C) A description of the process for identifying the fishery or sector of the fishery affected by the action before the Council.
  - (D) A description of the process for preparing and issuing a recusal determination relative to the timing of a Council decision.
  - (E) A description of the process by which the Council, Council members, and the public will be made aware of recusal determinations.
  - (F) A description of the process for identifying the designated official(s) who will prepare recusal determinations and attend Council meetings.
- (iii) A Regional Recusal Determination Procedure Handbook may include additional material related to the region's process and procedure for recusal determinations not specifically identified in paragraph (f)(6)(ii) of this section. A Regional Recusal Determination Procedure Handbook may be revised at any time upon agreement by the NMFS Regional Office and NOAA Office of General Counsel.

(g) *Review of determinations.*

- (1) Any Council member may file a written request to the NOAA General Counsel for review of the designated official's determination. A request for review must be received within 10 days of the determination.
- (2) A Council member may request a review of any aspect of the recusal determination, including but not limited to, whether the action is a Council decision, the description of the fishery or sector of the fishery affected by the Council action, the calculation of an affected individual's financial interests or the finding of a significant financial interest, and the existence of a close causal link. A request for review must include a full statement in support of the review, including a concise statement as to why the Council member believes that the recusal determination is in error and why the designated official's determination should be reversed.
- (3) If the request for review is from a Council member other than the affected individual whose vote is at issue, the requester must provide a copy of the request to the affected individual at the same time it is submitted to the NOAA General Counsel. The affected individual may submit a response to the NOAA General Counsel within 10 days from the date of his/her receipt of the request for review.
- (4) The NOAA General Counsel must complete the review and issue a decision within 30 days from the date of receipt of the request for review. The NOAA General Counsel will limit the review to the record before the designated official at the time of the determination, the request, and any response.

- (h) The provisions of 18 U.S.C. 208 regarding conflicts of interest do not apply to an affected individual who is a voting member of a Council appointed by the Secretary, as described under section 302(j)(1)(A)(ii) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and who is in compliance with the requirements of this section for filing a

Financial Interest Form. The provisions of 18 U.S.C. 208 do not apply to a member of an SSC, unless that individual is an officer or employee of the United States or is otherwise covered by the requirements of 18 U.S.C. 208.

- (i) It is unlawful for an affected individual to knowingly and willfully fail to disclose, or to falsely disclose, any financial interest as required by this section, or to knowingly vote on a Council decision in violation of this section. In addition to the penalties applicable under § 600.735, a violation of this provision may result in removal of the affected individual from Council or SSC membership.

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