

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)  
Science Advisory Board (SAB)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA or agency) [Science Advisory Board](#) (SAB) is a [Federal Advisory Committee](#) (FAC) subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), 5 U.S.C. App., and the FACA implementing regulations, 41 C.F.R. Part 102-3. It advises the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere (Under Secretary)/ [NOAA Administrator](#) (Administrator) on strategies for research, education, and application of science to operations and information services, so as to better understand and predict changes in Earth's environment and conserve and manage coastal and marine resources to meet the Nation's economic, social and environmental needs. Established on August 15, 1997 the SAB operates under a [Charter](#) that is reviewed and approved every two years.

This Concept of Operations (ConOps) is a living document that (i) outlines the operations of the SAB, (ii) defines the roles and responsibilities of SAB members and NOAA personnel that work with and support the SAB, and (iii) provides guidance to ensure that the SAB operates effectively and within the bounds of the FACA. General procedures and requirements governing the operation of the SAB are provided in FACA, its implementing regulations, the SAB's Charter, and additional FAC operating policies and procedures issued by NOAA or the Department of Commerce (DoC).

## 2. FRAMEWORK

**2.1. Organizational Structure** – The SAB, which reports directly to the Administrator, is comprised of approximately 15 members. Financial and administrative support for the SAB is provided by NOAA and coordinated through the SAB Office, which is located within the NOAA [Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research](#) (OAR) and led by the SAB Executive Director (*see* Sec. 6.6.1). FACA requires the agency head (i.e., Administrator) to appoint a designated federal officer (DFO) for each federal advisory committee; for the NOAA SAB, the SAB Executive Director serves as the DFO.

**2.2. Subcommittees** – Subcommittees are intended to serve as principal sources of consultative knowledge on issues related to the focus of the SAB, and to aid the SAB in investigating specific issues. The policies and procedures governing the SAB subcommittees are set forth in the SAB Working Groups Concept of Operations (WG ConOps). Briefly, subcommittees, as defined in 41 CFR § 102-3.25, may be established by the SAB, with the Administrator's approval. These subcommittees report directly and only to the SAB. Based on the nature and scope of the issue, the SAB is responsible for determining whether a proposed subcommittee will be established as either a [task force](#) (i.e., short term groups that exist for 1-2 yrs.) or a [standing working group](#) (i.e., long-term groups that do not have a specified termination date). Both "task forces" and "working groups" are subcommittees for purposes of FACA. Each subcommittee must have at

least one SAB member who serves as a liaison between the subcommittee and the SAB and each task force should be chaired by an SAB member. Upon renewal of the SAB Charter, any extant SAB working groups and task forces must be reviewed and either terminated or renewed at that point. If the SAB Charter is not renewed, the task forces and working groups will be disestablished promptly.

**2.3 Advice** – Consensus advice of the SAB will be communicated to NOAA/the Administrator either at a public meeting of the SAB (unless such meeting is closed in accordance with FACA procedures) or through a report that will be made available for public inspection, as set forth in the FACA regulations. However, NOAA staff may meet with individual SAB members to discuss certain SAB-related matters such as administrative, technical, or logistical issues, or to provide informational briefings, as set forth below.

### **3. MEETINGS**

The SAB meets in person three times each year; however, under extraordinary circumstances, meetings may be conducted by teleconference. However, additional meetings may be called at the discretion of the Administrator. These meetings may be in person or virtual. The DFO (i.e., SAB Executive Director) is responsible for calling, attending, and adjourning all SAB meetings. As per the Charter, SAB members are expected to attend all SAB meetings; they must receive permission from the SAB Chair to miss more than two consecutive meetings. The NOAA SAB office is responsible for providing logistical, travel, and administrative support for all SAB meetings (*see* Sec. 5).

**3.1. Agenda** – SAB meetings are conducted in accordance with an agenda that is developed by the SAB Executive Director in collaboration with SAB members. All meeting agendas must be approved by the SAB Chair, NOAA Chief Scientist, and Administrator.

**3.2. Strategic Guidance** – At each in-person meeting, the SAB is encouraged to invite eminent external thought leaders from relevant disciplines to speak about key themes, issues, and challenges relevant to NOAA. Invited speakers should help kindle provocative/creative dialogue amongst the SAB and NOAA leadership, with the intent to stimulate strategic direction for the SAB. When planning these events, the SAB is encouraged to work closely with NOAA leadership to identify and vet topical areas and speakers.

**3.3. NOAA Informational Briefings** – The SAB will be kept apprised of the Science and Technology (S&T) activities, advancements, and priorities of the agency through informational briefings provided at each in person meeting by the NOAA Chief Scientist, or a NOAA designee selected by the Administrator. Additionally, the SAB is expected to actively communicate with

NOAA leadership and, as needed, ask for information or briefings in regard to NOAA's S&T portfolio.

#### **4. MEMBERSHIP**

The policies and procedures governing the solicitation, review, and appointment of SAB members are set forth in the NOAA SAB Membership Balance Plan. As per the Charter, SAB members are appointed by the Administrator for a term of three years, renewable once. In addition, members whose terms (i.e., 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>) have expired are eligible to receive an extension of up to 1 year beyond the original termination date of their term, amounting to a maximum term length of seven years' consecutive SAB service. At the conclusion of their first and second terms, SAB members are reviewed by the Administrator based on their involvement in the SAB and performance in relation to the roles and responsibilities defined in the SAB Charter and herein (*see* Secs. 4.1, 4.2). The Administrator will also appoint a Chair of the SAB to serve a suggested term length of two years, renewable twice, for a maximum Chair term length of six years, not to exceed the maximum duration of a member's term of service (i.e., up to 7 years). All SAB members serve as special government employees (SGEs).

**4.1. Responsibilities** – As defined in section 3 of the SAB charter, the responsibilities of the SAB are as follows:

- Advise the Administrator on strategies for research, education, and application of science to operations and information services, so as to advance the Agency's capability to understand and predict changes in Earth's environment and conserve and manage coastal and marine resources to meet the Nation's economic, social, and environmental needs.
- Advise the Administrator on matters upon request.
- Submit reports to the Administrator.
- Conduct laboratory, cooperative institute, and program reviews, as requested.

In addition, to the responsibilities above:

- In accordance with the policies and procedures set forth in the SAB Membership Balance Plan, each SAB member, prior to the conclusion of their final term of service, should provide the SAB Chair with a list of suggested nominees to fill their seat.

**4.2 Roles** – SAB members are expected to serve in one or more of the following roles:

- ***Chair of the SAB*** – The Chair is expected to preside over all SAB meetings and serve as the primary point of contact between the SAB and NOAA. Between meetings the Chair is expected to dedicate significant time to actively work with the SAB Executive Director and NOAA leadership to assist with the development of meeting agendas, including suggesting invited thought leaders and requesting briefings from NOAA programs. The Chair should also play an integral role in helping the Administrator with the process of selecting new SAB members, including soliciting suggestions for nominees from outgoing members and appropriate organizations, as specified in the NOAA SAB Membership Balance Plan. For subcommittees, the Chair is expected to work closely with subcommittee leadership to track progress and activities as well as review and suggest new members (*see* Sec 2.2). Per the charter, the SAB Chair should work with the SAB Office to track the attendance of members at meetings and ensure that members do not miss more than two meetings without permission of the Chair.
- ***Subcommittee Liaison*** – All SAB subcommittees must have at least one SAB member who serves as a liaison between the subcommittee and the SAB. The liaison should participate in all subcommittee meetings and help facilitate and drive the efforts of the subcommittee, including the development of the yearly work plan for all standing working groups. The liaison is responsible for providing recommendations to the SAB stemming from products and/or reports produced by their respective subcommittee. The liaison should also assist the SAB Chair with the process of suggesting new subcommittee members. For task forces, an SAB member should also serve as the Chair. For additional information refer to the SAB Working Groups ConOps; this Working Group ConOps document covers policies and procedures for all subcommittees of the SAB, regardless of whether such subcommittees are termed working groups or task forces. Importantly, all products of the subcommittees are considered input to the SAB and not to NOAA. Hence, recommendations stemming from the work of a subcommittee must be transmitted to the SAB for deliberation by the SAB at a FACA-compliant meeting before the SAB submits any recommendations based on the subcommittees work to the Administrator.
- ***Chair/ member of Cooperative Institute (CI) science review panel*** – NOAA supports 16 cooperative institutes (CIs) that conduct research to support NOAA’s mission. CIs enter into an initial five-year cooperative agreement. During the fourth year of the agreement CIs are subject to scientific and administrative renewal reviews that evaluate their performance using a panel of internal and external experts. For the scientific reviews, the SAB serves as the official reviewing authority. Each science review panel should include at least one SAB member, who serves as the review Chair. All other panelists, which may include SAB members, are approved and invited by the SAB, in coordination with the responsible LO (for additional

information refer to the [NOAA CI Handbook](#)). Cooperative Institute science review panels operate as *Ad-Hoc* SAB working groups and are subject to the relevant policies and procedures set forth in the Working Groups ConOps. In particular, Cooperative Institute science review panels must transmit any recommendations to the SAB for deliberation by the SAB at a FACA-compliant meeting before the SAB submits any such recommendations to the Administrator.

**4.3 Work Products** –SAB members may be asked by the Administrator or the Chair to lead or assist with the formulation of the work products listed below:

- **Biennial Work Plan** – Developed every two years, the SAB, led by the Chair, and with input from SAB subcommittees, is expected to produce a work plan that is informed by the current state of NOAA science, the trajectory of relevant scientific disciplines, and the needs of NOAA moving forward. Specifically, the work plan should establish a sense of the focus of the SAB, including measurable objectives and specific undertakings that the SAB plans to carry out within the next two years. Work plans should be reviewed and, if necessary, updated by the SAB on an annual basis. The biennial work plan must be approved by the Administrator.
- **Cooperative Institute (CI) Science Reviews** – The policies and procedures governing the roles and responsibilities of the SAB in regards to conducting CI Science Reviews are set forth in Section 5 of the [NOAA CI Handbook](#). Of particular note, as *Ad-Hoc* SAB working groups, CI science review panels must first transmit their findings in the form of a report to the SAB. Upon receiving the report, the SAB must deliberate on the report at a FACA-compliant meeting, and may make amendments or changes to the report. If upon deliberation the SAB deems the report ready for transmittal, the SAB as the official reviewing authority, is responsible for the following: (i) sharing the draft report with the responsible LO who will request factual corrections from the CI; (ii) scheduling a decisional briefing at an upcoming SAB meeting to be delivered by the review Chair; and (iii) accepting and transmitting the final report to the NOAA Administrator and responsible LO Assistant Administrator (AA).
- **Issue Papers** – The SAB may be asked by the Administrator or NOAA Chief Scientist to develop issue papers that address extant or emerging issues/challenges that are relevant to NOAA’s mission.
- **Line Office Consultations** – NOAA LOs represent the operating branches of NOAA and are responsible for developing and managing the delivery of products and services. LO’s are encouraged and expected to regularly communicate with the SAB and, as needed, should solicit the help of the SAB, via the SAB Office and NOAA

Chief Scientist, to review ongoing or proposed S&T projects and activities. The Chief Scientist and the SAB Office, as available, must be copied on all such communications between NOAA staff and the SAB or its subcommittees.

- ***Internal Science Reviews*** – The complex, transdisciplinary, and long-term research and development essential to accomplishing NOAA’s mission depends on a robust and diverse workforce, and sophisticated research facilities. To promote excellence in these areas, NOAA may seek assistance from the SAB to conduct laboratory, science center, or program reviews.

**4.4 *Ethics and Conflict of Interest*** – SAB members serve as SGEs and are subject to the ethical standards, and conflict of interest rules, applicable to SGEs. All SAB members will receive an annual ethics briefing from an appropriate official. For additional information refer to the [DoC Summary of Ethics Rules for SGEs](#).

## **5. SUPPORT**

**5.1 *Staffing*** – Logistical, travel, and administrative staff support for the SAB is provided by the SAB office. All questions or requests of this manner should be directed to the SAB office. The NOAA Deputy Under Secretary for Operations (DUS-O) will provide administrative oversight and guidance to the SAB Office to ensure efficient operations of the SAB.

**5.2. *Technical Guidance*** – As needed, the SAB or its subcommittees may request information from NOAA pertaining to programs or S&T activities. All such requests must be directed to the SAB Office and NOAA Chief Scientist, who serves as the Administrator’s technical advisor for dealings with the SAB. Pursuant to this role, the NOAA Chief Scientist will provide technical oversight and guidance to the SAB Office to ensure appropriate and timely responses to all questions and requests from the SAB.

**5.3 *FACA Guidance*** – The SAB will operate at all times in a manner that is compliant with the rules and regulations of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, any other relevant laws and statutes, and established DoC policies and procedures. The SAB Executive Director and DFO, in coordination with NOAA General Counsel, DOC General Counsel, and the Committee Liaison Officer (CLO), shall ensure compliance with these laws and regulations. All questions or concerns about FACA should be directed to the SAB Executive Director, who will make decisions upon the advice of the NOAA General Counsel

## **6. NOAA PERSONNEL/PROGRAMS**

**6.1 *Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans & Atmosphere*** – The Under Secretary serves as the NOAA Administrator and formulates agency-wide policies and programs for achieving the

objectives of NOAA and has the authority for program execution. The SAB reports directly to the Administrator. The Administrator is responsible for appointing new SAB members, as well as the SAB Chair, approving all meeting agendas, and approving the selection of subcommittee Chairs and members. Periodically - but at least once each year - the Administrator will provide an informational briefing to the SAB about agency-wide policies and programs. Additionally, the Administrator may call upon the SAB to provide advice on matters of importance to NOAA, which may include convening the SAB outside of regularly scheduled meetings. Any such meetings will be subject to FACA's public notice and open meeting requirements (unless such meetings are closed in accordance with the procedures in the FACA regulations). Finally, the Administrator is responsible for approving the SAB biennial work plan/

**6.2. NOAA Chief Scientist** – Under the direct supervision of the Administrator, the NOAA Chief Scientist provides agency-wide policy and program direction with regard to S&T priorities. The Chief Scientist serves as the Administrator's technical advisor for dealings with the SAB and provides guidance and counsel to support the work of the SAB. The Chief Scientist is responsible for approving meeting agendas, and will provide an informational briefing at each in-person meeting about key S&T priorities, advancements, and activities. Additionally, the Chief Scientist will provide technical oversight and guidance to the SAB Office as well as mentor and advise the SAB Executive Director.

**6.3. Assistant Secretary for Conservation and Management (ASCM)** – Under the direct supervision of the Administrator, the ASCM provides agency-wide direction with regard to fisheries and coastal programs consistent with Administration priorities. The ASCM is expected participate in all in-person SAB meetings and encouraged to provide input to the agenda. Periodically, or at the request of the SAB, the ASCM should provide an informational briefing to the SAB about portfolio specific S&T priorities, advancements, and activities.

**6.4. Assistant Secretary for Environmental Observation and Prediction (ASEOP)** – Under the direct supervision of the Administrator, the ASEOP provides agency-wide direction with regard to weather, water, climate, and ocean observations and forecasts consistent with Administration priorities. The ASEOP is expected participate in all in-person SAB meetings and encouraged to provide input to the agenda. Periodically, or at the request of the SAB, the ASEOP should provide an informational briefing to the SAB about portfolio specific S&T priorities, advancements, and activities.

**6.5. Deputy Under Secretary for Operations (DUS-O)** – Under the direct supervision of the Administrator, the DUS-O manages and directs the daily operations of NOAA through oversight of NOAA's line and staff offices and is responsible for ensuring the implementation of directives from the Administrator. The DUS-O is expected to participate in all SAB meetings and is responsible for providing administrative based oversight of the SAB Office.



**6.6. SAB Office** – The SAB Office, led by the SAB Executive Director (*see* below), is located within OAR and falls under the leadership of the OAR Deputy Assistant Administrator for Labs and Cooperative Institutes. The SAB Office oversees the activities of the SAB and provides logistical, travel, and administrative support for the SAB.

**6.6.1 SAB Executive Director** – The SAB Executive Director, in addition to managing the SAB office, serves as the designated federal officer (DFO). Per FACA, as the DFO, the SAB Executive Director is responsible for: (i) ensuring compliance with FACA, and any other applicable laws and regulations, in consultation with NOAA and DoC General Counsels; (ii) calling, attending, and adjourning committee meetings; (iii) developing and approving all meeting agendas; (iv) chairing meetings when directed to do so by the Administrator; (v) maintaining records on expenses and membership; (vi) ensuring efficient operations of the SAB; (vii) maintaining records for availability to the public; (viii) and providing copies of committee reports to the Committee Management Officer. In addition to the responsibilities required by FACA, the SAB Executive Director is also responsible for: preparing minutes following the meeting; and providing information for or preparing Federal Register Notices. Finally, the SAB Executive Director, as DFO, is expected to make a significant effort to attend all subcommittee meetings.

**6.7. Committee Liaison Officer (CLO)** – An agency sponsoring a Federal Advisory Committee must appoint a Committee Liaison Officer to oversee the administration of FACA requirements and to coordinate with the Committee Management Officer of the DoC. The NOAA CLO is located within the Office of NOAA Administrative Issuances, which falls under the auspices of the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer. The responsibilities of the CLO include: (i) receiving and conveying messages from the DoC Committee Management Officer (CMO) to the DFO; (ii) coordinating, compiling, and submitting information required for the annual comprehensive review; (iii) compiling and submitting information required for the annual closed meeting reports; and (iv) other appropriate functions.

**6.8. NOAA Line Offices** – All LO's (*see* below) are expected to have a senior executive-level representative (i.e., AA or DAA) attend and participate in each SAB meeting. On an annual basis, LO's should provide an informational briefing to the SAB about LO specific S&T priorities, advancements, and activities. In response to a request from the SAB, LO's may also be asked to provide a subject-matter specific briefing to the SAB. As appropriate, LO's provide financial and administrative support to SAB working groups and task forces. However, as noted previously (*see* Sec. 2.3), working groups and task forces may not provide direct advice to NOAA programs (*see* Working Group ConOps).

- [National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service \(NESDIS\)](#)

- [National Marine Fisheries Service \(NMFS\)](#)
- [National Ocean Service \(NOS\)](#)
- [National Weather Service \(NWS\)](#)
- [Oceanic and Atmospheric Research \(OAR\)](#)
- [Office of Marine and Aviation Operations \(OMAO\)](#)

**6.9. NOAA Research Council** – Chaired by the NOAA Chief Scientist, the NOAA Research Council is an internal body composed of senior scientific personnel from every NOAA line office that provides corporate oversight of NOAA’s research and development enterprise. Specific to the SAB, the NOAA Research Council, on behalf of the Administrator, is responsible for providing the SAB Chair and NOAA with a list of nominees for subcommittees when vacancies arise.