

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council and AP Members
FROM: Chris Oliver *Chris*
Executive Director
DATE: September 25, 2013
SUBJECT: Observer Program

ESTIMATED TIME
8 HOURS

ACTION REQUIRED

- (a) Report from NMFS on information requests *Martin, Craig, Favron*
- (b) Observer program: 2014 annual deployment plan
- (c) Receive OAC report and take action as necessary *Diana; Dan Hull*
- (d) EM discussion ~~and possible review of EFP~~ *Dan Hull/work group*

BACKGROUND

- (a, b) Report from NMFS on information requests, and 2014 Annual Deployment Plan for Observers in the Groundfish and Halibut Fisheries off Alaska

At this meeting, the Council will review the draft 2014 Annual Deployment Plan (ADP), and provide recommendations to NMFS for the final 2014 ADP. During the Council's first performance review of the restructured observer program in June 2013, the Council made six specific recommendations and requests for the development of the 2014 ADP. The agency published a draft 2014 ADP in early September, which was distributed to the Council. The first chapter, which contains the draft 2014 deployment plan, is attached as Item C-1(a)(1). The agency also wrote a letter to the Council responding directly to the six information requests, which is attached as Item C-1(a)(2).

In June 2013, the Council also requested that NMFS provide additional information on three specific issues for review at this meeting, separate from the ADP. This information comprised 1) more detailed information on program costs and potential for cost savings; 2) revisions to allow the Council and public to better understand coverage changes by fisheries between 2012 and 2013; and 3) an evaluation of the reliability of indices of Chinook salmon genetic information in the GOA. The first two items will be addressed in the agency's presentation to the Council, and the last has been included in an appendix to the 2014 ADP, along with a proposed alternative approach to salmon genetic sampling in the GOA.

Finally, the Joint Groundfish Plan Teams also reviewed the 2014 ADP, and the relevant section of their minutes is excerpted as Item C-1(a)(3).

(c) Receive OAC report and take action as necessary

The Observer Advisory Committee (OAC) met in Seattle on September 18-19, to review the 2014 ADP. The meeting report is attached as **Item C-1(c)**, and includes comments and recommendations on the NMFS ADP letter, the 2014 ADP, and NMFS' letter on the 2014 EM pilot project (see (d), below).

(d) EM discussions ~~and possible review of EFP~~

In April, the Council approved formation of an Electronic Monitoring (EM) Working Group to evaluate alternative EM approaches, with a consideration of tradeoffs among achieving monitoring objectives, timelines, and other factors (e.g., costs, disruption to fishing practices). Only two people responded to the solicitation for appointment to the working group. The Council Chair and the working group's Chair deferred a further decision on how to proceed with the working group to a full Council discussion.

The Council has also received further information from NMFS on next year's proposed EM pilot project under the restructured program (**Item C-1(d)**), whereby the agency proposes to encourage participation in the pilot program by moving 14 vessels that volunteer into the zero selection category. The agency is looking for guidance from the Council as to whether to limit this opportunity exclusively to vessels in the vessel selection pool, or to include all vessels in the partial coverage category.

Finally, the Council has been informed that an EM experimental fishing permit (EFP) application is being developed by the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association. Support for EM development in 2014 through such an EFP process has been referenced in the Senate's markup of the appropriations bill, however this bill has not yet been approved. In the meantime, under our regulated EFP process, the application will undergo the standard NMFS regional office and AFSC review process, which includes development of an appropriate NEPA analysis to support the EFP. Once this review is complete, the agency will bring the EFP to the Council for consultation.