


M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Council, SSC, and AP members

FROM: Clarence Pautzke   
Executive Director

DATE: September 21, 1988

SUBJECT: Pilot Domestic Observer Program

ACTION REQUIRED

Status report.

BACKGROUND

The Council's pilot domestic observer program, which has been in operation since fall of 1987 will soon begin its second season. The Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center prepared excellent summaries of the information collected during the fall and last spring's program. They were sent to you on September 2.

Ron Dearborn, Director of Alaska Sea Grant and manager for our pilot program, will report on progress to date and plans for the coming season.

**Report to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
on the Pilot Domestic Observer Program**

by

**The University of Alaska  
Alaska Sea Grant College Program**

**September 26, 1988**

## **Summary**

In the fall of 1987 the University of Alaska Sea Grant College Program initiated a pilot domestic observer program under contract to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and in cooperation with the industry, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the NMFS NW&AFC and Alaska Region. To date three segments of observer coverage have been undertaken by the program; the fall of 1987 during which many of the initial concerns for the pilot program were worked out, especially those related to insurance, the spring of 1988 during which the program provided observer coverage to many vessel types and fisheries, and the summer of 1988 during which time the program began to focus on more specific scientific objectives. Two additional periods of coverage are anticipated by the program and its partners; coverage of Pacific cod longline operations in the Gulf of Alaska in the fall of 1988 primarily under the leadership of ADF&G, and coverage in the spring of 1989 in the Bering Sea, especially for rock sole and other flatfish fisheries.

## **Activity for Summer 1988**

Observer coverage provided since the report to the Council on June 17, 1988 was on board rockfish vessels in the Gulf of Alaska. Between June 21 and August 6 one observer had two trips on different vessels out of different ports and spent a total of 47 days on the vessels.

The decision to focus the observer program on specific fishery management data needs rather than to continue a pilot program of broad coverage which collected limited data from throughout the fishery was made at the last council meeting. Because the rockfish fishery in the Gulf of Alaska was already underway at that time the NMFS Regional Office had the identity of the vessels conducting the fishery but were not able to provide the university with that confidential information. Therefore, NMFS NW&AFC agreed to contact the vessels and pave the way for the observers. Initial contacts looked promising so it was decided to train three former foreign fisheries observers for the domestic program. Training was conducted by NW&AFC for two female and one male observer the week of June 13. Unfortunately only two vessels agreed to participate in the program and both specified they must have a male observer. Fortunately, because of the schedules of the two vessels we were able to accommodate their request. The observer returned to Seward from his first trip the day before he had to be in Dutch Harbor to meet the second vessel.

## **Observations**

Although there were few vessels participating in the rockfish fishery, many fewer than expected were willing to participate in the domestic observer program.

## **Observer Coverage to Date**

Total observer employment since September 1987 has been 21.5 man-months, about 59% of the total 36 man-months anticipated by the pilot program. Total costs to date are \$124,868 or 63% of the contract funds.

## **Safety**

As the employer of observers, the University and its Sea Grant program is increasingly concerned for the safety of its employees. In reviewing observer reports, we find that at least one observer took a trip on a vessel with no life raft and another rode a vessel with a complement of eight carrying a life raft to hold three. Observers carry their own survival suit, but we feel that an adequate life raft is an important piece of safety equipment. It is our intent not to allow observers on vessels that don't provide a life raft able to hold the number of persons on the vessel. In addition, it has been brought to our attention that all vessels do not carry EPIRBs. We will see that all future university observers are equipped with personal EPIRBs. The new safety legislation will require vessel EPIRBs when it takes effect next year. In addition, the University will provide additional safety training to observers before deploying them to vessels.

Comments from observers include the following:

"...A refresher survival suit training should be mandatory for observers at the start of the program."

"...supply the observers with waterproof EPIRBs. Many boats don't carry them at all."

"...(skipper) didn't really want to go fishing in the filthy weather we had going. But the owners were pressuring him...and (processor) ran tight delivery schedules, so out there we were."

"...had an EPIRB within easy reach on the bridge. There is a life raft on the roof and everyone has a survival suit. (Skipper) is a safety conscious man and made sure I knew where everything was. Some of the crew keep survival suits on the deck since that's where they spend most of their time. (Skipper) told me if anything went wrong we were all to gather up on the bow as soon as possible."

"When I hopped out of bed and landed on the starboard wall instead of the floor, I realized something was very wrong...I woke up the skipper and gave him my flashlight."

## **Continuing Activity**

Council, NMFS, and ADF&G scientists have identified fisheries with critical data needs. In response to those identified needs the program will focus on the Pacific cod longline fishery in the Gulf of Alaska this fall. Much of the confirmed longline fishery in the Gulf this fall will be based out of Kodiak. With the considerable progress between NMFS and ADF&G in removing obstacles to sharing data, and with ADF&G willing to provide coverage for this fall, ADF&G will take the lead in covering this fishery. It had been the intent of the University to cover vessels delivering to plants at locations other than Kodiak such as King Cove, Port Bailey, and Chignik, but calls to those plants indicate that few, if any longliners will be delivering to those locations. The approximately 13 man-months remaining in the program will be reserved for Bering Sea fisheries in the spring.

**Pilot Domestic Observer Program**  
**Expenditures through September 23, 1988**

	Fall '87	Spring '88	Summer '88	Total
Salaries	\$19,585	\$49,276	\$ 7,645	\$ 76,506
Travel*	13,614	23,605	2,298	39,517
Services	1,506	3,859	-	5,365
Administrative Fee	736	2,416	328	3,480
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$35,441</b>	<b>\$79,156</b>	<b>\$10,271</b>	<b>\$124,868</b>
<b>% of total \$196,600</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>63</b>
<hr/>				
Man-months of coverage	7	13	1.5	21.5
<b>% of total 36 man-months</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>59</b>

**\* includes transportation, lodging and meals**



# Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference

*Putting Resources to Work For People*

1007 West 3rd Avenue, Suite 201 • Anchorage, Alaska 99501 • (907) 274-7555

## RESOLUTION NO. 88-31

A RESOLUTION OF THE SWAMC IN SUPPORT OF STATE FUNDING FOR OBSERVERS ABOARD COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSELS.

WHEREAS, the State of Alaska legislature has, for the past two years, appropriated \$200,000 for an observer program onboard groundfish vessels; and

WHEREAS, this amount allows only 2 to 3 percent of the catch taken out of the Westward Region to be observed; and

WHEREAS, observers are the only method for gathering information on bycatch, at sea discards and other information necessary to maintain the stocks on which coastal communities depend; and

WHEREAS, because Alaskan coastal communities are becoming increasingly dependent on groundfish stocks and increasingly concerned about stock status and bycatch, groundfish research is an appropriate function for the State of Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the State of Alaska can only be effective within the federal management system if it is actively carrying on its own research and formulating its own policies in the interest of its citizens and communities; and

WHEREAS, an adequate observer effort should cover at least 20% of the groundfish catch; and

WHEREAS, training and work as groundfish observers can assist in educating Alaskan residents in the methods of harvesting groundfish.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the SWAMC urges the Governor of Alaska and the Alaska State Legislature to increase the funding for the State groundfish observer program to \$1 million.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the State of Alaska make every effort to train and hire observers from rural and coastal communities in Alaska.

PASSED AND APPROVED THIS 23TH DAY OF AUGUST 1988.

*James M. Sully*  
President

*Mary Ann Wideman*  
Attest



# Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference

*Putting Resources to Work For People*

1007 West 3rd Avenue, Suite 201 • Anchorage, Alaska 99501 • (907) 274-7555

## RESOLUTION NO. 38-32

A RESOLUTION OF THE SWAMC URGING A JOINT STATE-FEDERAL DATA BASE FOR FISHERIES.

WHEREAS, both the State of Alaska and the federal National Marine Fisheries Service collect fishery data; and

WHEREAS, under the current system the state and federal catch and observer data bases cannot be combined for use by both state and federal agencies; and

WHEREAS, the failure of the two agencies to share data hinders analysis, research and information necessary for management of Alaska's fisheries; and

WHEREAS, failure to have a joint data base easily accessible by both agencies is inefficient; and


WHEREAS, it is in the interest of the State of Alaska to have access to the federal data base; and

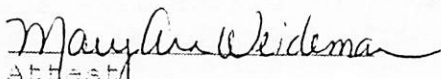
WHEREAS, it is possible to have a shared data base and still protect confidentiality.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the SWAMC urges National Marine Fisheries Services and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to remove all barriers to a joint, cooperative data base which gives both agencies total access to all catch and observer information;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that should implementing legislation be needed that the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference urges immediate action from the State of Alaska legislature.

PASSED AND APPROVED THIS 28TH DAY OF AUGUST 1983.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
President

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Attest