



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:Cons 16-001

Agenda Date2/1/2016

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Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Observer Coverage on BSAI Trawl CVs - Final Action

STAFF CONTACT: Sam Cunningham

ACTION REQUIRED:

Select Preferred Alternative

BACKGROUND:

Since 2013, NMFS has had a policy of allowing trawl catcher vessels to voluntarily carry full coverage observers for all of their BSAI activity. That policy is responsive to owners of American Fisheries Act (AFA) vessel owners who want to provide better accounting of the halibut prohibited species catch that accrues to their AFA cooperative, and also desire the ability to transition between targeting pollock and Pacific cod without having to return to port to pick up a different observer. Under the existing policy, these "volunteer" vessels technically remain part of the Observer Program's partial coverage category. In effect, these vessels pay not only a daily rate for a full coverage observer, but also the partial coverage fee liability that is leveled based on a percentage of the value of their ex-vessel revenues.

The present range of alternatives was defined by the Council at its June 2015 meeting and modified in October 2015. The Council is considering alternatives that would either recategorize all AFA-eligible trawl CVs as "full coverage" when they are fishing in the BSAI, or would allow owners to annually choose the observer coverage category under which their vessel would operate. If the Council recommends a choice-model, the Council would then select an option that defines whether an owner must make a one-time decision about future coverage levels, or whether he or she could select the vessel's coverage category on an annual basis (either by July 1 or by October 15). The Council has identified a preliminary preferred alternative that would provide the owner of any trawl CV whose vessel is currently assigned to the partial coverage category with the opportunity to annually select full coverage for all of the vessel's fishing activity in the BSAI. Those vessel owners would need to communicate their choice to NMFS by July 1 of the year preceding the year in which the decision would take effect.

Ultimately, the Council seeks to balance the objectives of providing relief to CVs that are bearing excess observer costs, avoiding the imposition of additional costs on vessels that do not desire full coverage, preserving the essential functionality of the Observer Program, and minimizing additional management costs for NMFS.