

DI OBSERVER PROGRAM UPDATE JUNE 2020 COUNCIL MEETING

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OBSERVER UPDATE WITH RESPECT TO COVID-19 RESPONSE

- Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee met virtually on May 19, 2020 with a redesigned agenda to discuss current challenges and responses to observer deployment and data collection in the full and partial coverage fleets, as well as the related implications for management and decision-making.
- AFSC's Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division re-engineered most observer logistics processes, taking significant resources.
- Staff resources were redirected away from the 2019 Annual Report which is delayed.



CHANGES AFFECTING BOTH FULL AND PARTIAL COVERAGE

- FMA's mission is to deploy observers in a way that protected lives and livelihoods
- Redesigned most aspects of the Observer Program:
 - Training new observers
 - Briefing experienced observers
 - Debriefing
 - Waiving some regulations (e.g., deployment durations)



EXPECTED DATA IMPACTS ON FULL AND PARTIAL COVERAGE

- Suspended annual fish & crab training and testing could lead to more identifications being recorded at higher taxonomic groupings (e.g., skate unidentified rather than Aleutian skate)
- Increased use of briefing waivers limits our ability to make mid-year sampling changes; opportunities for agency-observer interaction is reduced.
- Completion of the 2020 Observer Data Set for 2021 stock assessment purposes will be delayed due to less-efficient remote debriefing requirements.



CHANGES AFFECTING FULL COVERAGE

- Full coverage provides the vast majority of observer data (more than 90 percent of coverage days).
- Processing Plants – Vessel observers cannot enter most processing plants to collect biological samples. Several processors will have more observers present in the summer and fall Pollock fisheries to help complete data collections.
- The full coverage model supports a tight observer-vessel relationship, despite logistics burdens of travel, quarantine, testing, etc.
 - Full coverage most easily enables an observer safety model that is the same as that for the crew
- Coordinating with the At-Sea Hake Observer Program to allow Hake observers to transition to groundfish and stay with the vessel between regions.



CHANGES AFFECTING PARTIAL COVERAGE

- March 24, 2020 NOAA Fisheries issued an emergency rule allowing observer coverage waivers if:
 - Local, State, or national governments, or private companies or organizations that deploy observers pursuant to NMFS regulations, restrict travel or otherwise issue COVID-19-related social control guidance, or requirement(s) addressing COVID-19-related concerns, such that it is inconsistent with the requirement(s) or not recommended to place an observer(s); or
 - No qualified observer(s) are available for placement due to health, safety, or training issues related to COVID-19.
- Observer coverage for partial coverage vessels was waived on March 26
 - Waivers are valid for 2 weeks and re-evaluated frequently
 - Waiver for vessels operating from the port of Kodiak was lifted on April 20
 - Status of current waiver



EXPECTED DATA IMPACTS ON FULL AND PARTIAL COVERAGE

- The deployment rates for 2020 were to be:
 - Trawl – 20%
 - Hook-and-line – 15%
 - Pot – 15%
- Trawl EM EFP vessels had full EM coverage, and biological data were to be collected at processing plants.
- Operators are logging trips, allowing us to quantify the number of trips not covered in 2020.
- A few vessels voluntarily carried observers despite the waiver



POTENTIAL WAYS TO LIFT THE WAIVER – CHANGING THE ADP

- To the extent practical, emulate the “one observer, one boat” model of the full coverage and West Coast program
 - Observers follow Health Mandate 17 quarantine periods and other restrictions
 - Modify trip selection to extend observer deployments for longer periods of time, similar to previously used vessel selection
 - Observers disembark back into ports from which they embarked to limit need for further quarantine periods
- To mitigate data loss and more closely match modified trip selection, increase fixed gear EM coverage rate from 30 percent to full coverage



QUESTIONS?

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