

Status of analytical projects related to the Observer Program

Priority	Name	Description	Status / Due Date / Target Date
Program-level Projects - recently completed			
	2024 ADP & cost efficiencies	In October 2019, the Council recommended continued development of mechanisms to improve cost efficiency in the partial coverage program. The overarching goal of the cost efficiencies analysis was to develop a fishery monitoring design that balances statistically rigorous data collection with minimizing the impacts on fishing operations while maximizing the amount of sampling conducted under a given budget.	The draft ADP was presented to the Council in October. New allocation and stratification methods that were evaluated to address the Council's priority for improving cost efficiencies in the partial coverage program and maintaining a monitoring program that meets NMFS's data collection mandates. The final 2024 ADP will be presented to the Council in December 2023.
	Improve integration of fixed gear EM data with observer data	In April 2019, the Council tasked the partial coverage cost efficiencies subgroup to continue to develop ideas related to how to best integrate the different monitoring tools, such as dockside monitoring, EM, and monitoring cooperatives.	This project was identified by the PCFMAC cost efficiencies subgroup as the second priority, and was considered as part of the 2024 ADP. Beginning in 2024, fixed gear EM selection rates will be set using the same allocation methodology used to set observer selection rates, thereby reducing data gaps that occur when fixed gear selection rates are set by policy.
	Reevaluate the zero selection stratum	In April 2019, the Council tasked the partial coverage cost efficiencies subgroup to continue to develop ideas related to how to best integrate the different monitoring tools, such as dockside monitoring, EM, and monitoring cooperatives.	This project was identified by the PCFMAC cost efficiencies subgroup as the third priority. Increasing the number of vessels in zero selection would reduce data quality. However, removing vessels that take very few trips per year from the EM pool and adding them to zero selection could improve the cost efficiency of the EM program. The draft 2024 ADP recommended moving fixed-gear vessels that haven't used their EM system in three or more years into zero selection.
	Biological Data Assessment	The AFSC conducted an assessment of the current way biological information collected by observers is used in stock assessments. The result of this project is to provide the scale and scope of data needs in the current program. The Council has identified evaluation of gaps in biological samples due to implementation of EM as one of their top 2022-2024 research priorities.	Information has been collected from stock assessment authors. Initial analyses related to reducing biological data were presented to the PCFMAC as part of the Draft 2021 ADP. The number of opportunities for observers to collect biological information was used as a metric to evaluate candidate sampling designs in the draft 2024 ADP.
	Shoreside Sampling	In May 2019, the FMAC partial coverage subgroup identified information needed to scope the next steps toward an integrated and cost efficient partial coverage monitoring	This project was considered as part of the 2024 ADP. Shoreside sampling has been incorporated into the trawl EM program but no other changes were made to shoreside sampling.

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		program. Shoreside sampling was identified as one tool to be considered.	
	Pot CP Monitoring Changes	At its February 2023 meeting, the Council passed a motion in favor of additional monitoring requirements for Pot CPs, including the need for at least one Level 2 observer on board at all times.	NMFS published a final rule on Nov 9, 2023 (88 FR 77228 Effective: 12/11/23)
Program-level Projects			
1	Annual Report / Annual Deployment Plan	Every year, an Annual Report of the preceding fishing year and an Annual Deployment Plan (ADP) for the upcoming fishing year are prepared.	An abbreviated 2023 Annual Report will be presented to the FMAC in May and to the Council in June 2024. The agency will resume full Annual Reports beginning in 2025 with the 2024 Annual Report. The draft 2025 ADP will be presented to the Council in October 2024.
2	Explore alternative approaches to evaluate monitoring effects	In June 2018, NMFS recommended and the Council supported reassessing the performance standards used to evaluate monitoring effects in the Annual Report and explore alternative approaches.	Since June 2018, NMFS staff have completed multiple novel analyses of monitoring effects, the results of which are contained in an unpublished manuscript, the draft 2024 ADP, and presentations to the FMAC and PCFMAC. NMFS staff could consolidate these results into one analytic product in order to address this issue.
3	Analysis of catch and bycatch estimation methods	Analysis of catch and bycatch estimation methods, including evaluating design-based and ratio estimators; and incorporating variance from at-sea sampling through to the trip level.	Development of variance estimators has been completed and was included as Appendix C of the 2019 Annual Report, which NMFS published in December 2021. Work continues to evaluate post-stratification methods in CAS. Currently, Machine Learning methods are being tested to explore different stratification schemes that better utilize available data.
4	Halibut DMRs	Evaluation of appropriate methods to determine halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs) given observer monitoring sampling design and available data; undertaken by the NPFMC's DMR Workgroup.	In October 2023, the Council passed a motion requesting the DMR workgroup to review methods used to estimate halibut mortality with a particular focus on marine mammal feeding on discards per their recommendation, for all fisheries with marine mammal interactions in the BSAI and GOA.
5	Identify best practices for estimating species weight when it is unavailable for a monitored haul	Catch estimates for EM and observer data rely on weight measurements from observed hauls. This project would identify the best methods for assigning weights when they are unavailable.	Methods have been updated to use average weights from the current year instead of average weights from the prior year. Further work on this project has been slow due to work on higher priority projects.

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6	Agency ODDS Subgroup	In June 2018, NMFS recommended and the Council supported the formation of an Agency Subgroup to document how ODDS operates and identify alternatives for improvement. Changes could include improvements to the linkage between ODDS and eLandings, changes to allow vessels that also fish trawl gear to be placed in the EM selection pool, and the trip cancellation and inherit process.	Starting in 2022, NMFS recommended that all ODDS trips be closed using the existing pull down menu that lists landing reports associated with each vessel. This has yet to be implemented.
Projects in Council Review (Council or NMFS have tasked staff and scheduled review at a future Council or FMAC meeting)			
7	GOA Tanner Crab	In June 2023 the Council requested a discussion paper to evaluate potential GOA Tanner crab protections.	The discussion paper is scheduled to be presented to the Council in February 2024
8	Small sablefish release	Regulatory changes that would allow discarding of small sablefish in the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) sablefish fishery has been discussed as a potential tool to mitigate economic impacts to the fishery while also accounting for possible population-level impacts to the sablefish spawning stock during years of very large sablefish recruitment.	NMFS staff are working to identify future fishery-dependent data needs in the stock assessment if discarding were allowed, and identifying data collection trade-offs that would be required. This will be included in future Council analyses.
9	Observer Availability	In June 2023 the Council requested a discussion paper on observer availability and training opportunities on vessels, including solutions to improve observer availability	The discussion paper is scheduled to be reviewed by FMAC and the Council in June 2024.
10	Electronic Logbook integration	An industry led project funded by NFWF exploring expanded use of e-logbook software (Deckhand). Long term may change how logbook data is collected by observers.	A pilot project occurring in 2023. An EFP permit has been submitted for the next phase of the project that would exempt fishermen from the requirement to print logbooks.
11	Partial coverage proposal to contract directly with observer service providers	In October 2024, the Council passed a motion supporting submission of an industry cooperative research grant proposal and encouraged NMFS to provide data to support the project. This project envisions a group of partial coverage fixed gear vessels that continue to be selected for coverage through ODDS but procure observers through a private contract with an observer provider (remove the Federal contract component).	Industry members have applied for additional funding to test a new service delivery model. NMFS staff will support the requested data to the extent possible while maintaining confidentiality.
12	Use of flow scales in sablefish A share fishery	In October 2023, the Council requested a discussion paper evaluating options for sablefish A share IFQ holders to use flow or hopper scales when participating in the sablefish fishery.	An AKR staff person has been assigned and started initial exploration of this issue. Timeline is not determined.

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Regulatory Projects in NMFS Development or Review (Council has taken action or major work at current stage is NMFS's responsibility)			
13	Trawl CV EM Development	Engage with the Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) project to develop EM for compliance monitoring of maximized retention on pelagic trawl catcher vessels in both the GOA and BSAI pollock fisheries including tender vessels in the Western Gulf combined with dockside sampling by observers.	The Council took final action at their October 2022 meeting recommending that this become a regulated program. NMFS is currently working on a proposed regulation package and regulatory implementation is planned for 2025. Fishing under an EFP is anticipated until then.
14	PCTC implementation	The PCTC Program is a limited access privilege program for the harvest of Pacific cod in the BSAI trawl catcher vessel (CV) sector. The program assigns Pacific cod harvest quota to qualifying groundfish LLP license holders and qualifying processors.	NMFS published a final rule on August 8, 2023 (88 FR 53704). NMFS staff are working on implementation for the fishery start in January 2024..
15	Record keeping regulatory changes	Observer Provider Portal and Small CP request process changes.	NMFS would develop an RIR and regulatory change in consultation with the FMAC and the Council. No staff have been assigned to this project yet.