

Status of analytical projects related to the Observer Program

Priority	Name	Description	Status / Due Date / Target Date
Program-level Projects - recently completed			
1	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 final 2024 ADP was presented to the Council in December 2023. Relative to past ADPs, the 2024 ADP uses new stratification and allocation methods to address the Council's priority for improving cost efficiencies in the partial coverage program while maintaining a monitoring program that meets NMFS's data collection mandates.
2	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 included 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 integrating both monitoring methods into the sampling plan and reducing data gaps that occur when fixed gear selection rates are set by policy.
3	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.	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 proposed moving fixed-gear vessels under 50 ft LOA that haven't used their EM system in three or more years into zero selection. However, this wasn't included in the final ADP due to lack of time for analysis and low confidence in the potential cost reductions it would result in.
4	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 program. Shoreside sampling was identified as one tool to be considered.	Shoreside sampling has been incorporated into the trawl EM program. Additional approaches for shoreside sampling were considered as part of the 2024 ADP but not implemented due to cost and the negative implications on data collection.

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Program-level Projects			
5	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.	The 2023 Annual Report will be presented to the FMAC in May and to the Council in June 2024. The draft 2025 ADP will be presented to the Council in October 2024.
6	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.	Methods for evaluating monitoring effects were kept the same for the 2023 Annual Report. Staff have begun to evaluate alternative methods.
7	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.
8	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. Work is currently underway and will be presented to the Groundfish Plan Teams in September and the Council at the October meeting.
9	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. Estimation routines for haul-specific estimates have been updated to be consistent and use mean weights based on near trips. New deployment methods under the 2024 ADP support increased potential for monitored trips to neighbor unmonitored.

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10	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. In the 2023 Annual Report, NMFS recommends that the agency and the PCFMAC collaborate to develop an ODDS trip cancellation policy that will not significantly impede industry, affords the observer provider adequate time to deploy an observer, and reduces impacts to coverage rates and non-random monitoring. This new policy should be decided on in time for implementation as part of the 2025 Annual Deployment Plan.
Projects in Council Review (Council or NMFS have tasked staff and scheduled review at a future Council or FMAC meeting)			
11	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.	This issue is under initial review at the June 2024 Council meeting.
12	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 in September and the Council in October, 2024.
13	Electronic Logbook integration	An industry led project funded by NFWF exploring expanded use of eLogbook software (Deckhand). Long term may change how logbook data is collected by observers.	A pilot project was conducted in 2023 and is continuing in 2024. An EFP permit has been submitted for the next phase of the project that would exempt fishermen from the requirement to print logbooks.
14	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 applied for additional funding to test a new service delivery model. While the initial proposal was not funded, NMFS staff and industry continue to seek funding support for this work, and NMFS will support the requested data to the extent possible while maintaining confidentiality.
15	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.	Staff have been assigned and have 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)			
16	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.
17	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) and the program was implemented starting in January 2024.
18	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.