



## Fishery Monitoring and Advisory Committee

REPORT  
May 12, 2025  
9:00 am-1:30pm AKDT

*Committee members present: Nicole Kimball (co-chair), Bob Alverson, Chelsae Radell, Beth Concepcion, Ruth Christiansen, Stacey Hansen, Michael Lake, Charlotte Levy, Courtney Paiva, Chad See, Abigail Turner-Franke, Paul Wilkins, Jack Meyer, Haley Anderson*

*Committee members not present: Bill Tweit (co-chair), Mike Orcutt, Kathy Hansen, Julie Kavanaugh*

*Council/NMFS Staff: Sara Cleaver (NPFMC), Lisa Thompson (NMFS AFSC), Jason Jannot (NMFS AFSC), Josh Keaton (NMFS AKR), Geoff Mayhew (NMFS AFSC), Jaclyn Smith (NMFS OLE), Phil Ganz (NMFS AKR), Jason Gasper (NMFS AKR), Anna Henry (NPFMC), Gwynne Schnaittacher (NMFS AFSC), Melanie Rickett (NMFS AKR), Alex Perry (NOAA OLE), Joel Kraski (NMFS AKR), Mike Vechter (NMFS AFSC), Andrew Kingham (NMFS AFSC), Cindy Tribuzio (NMFS AFSC), Ben Williams (NMFS AFSC), Steve Barbeaux (NMFS AFSC), Katy Echave (NMFS AFSC), Mallorie Yeager (NMFS AKR), Sarah Neumeyer (NMFS AFSC), Brian Mason (NMFS AFSC)*

*Other Attendees: Karla Bush (ADF&G), Michelle Dahler, Sarah Williamson, Lauren Howard, Pam Gale, Heather Mann, Ernie Weiss*

*This list may not be comprehensive as some attendees did not use full names.*

### 1. Introduction

The co-chair of the Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee (FMAC) opened the hybrid meeting and gave an overview of the agenda. The purpose of this meeting was for the committee to receive the 2024 Observer Annual Report and to receive additional monitoring-related updates. Draft Terms of Reference were available for review by committee members. Opportunities for public input were provided throughout the meeting.

### 2. 2024 Observer Annual Report

Ms. Lisa Thompson, Mr. Geoff Mayhew, Dr. Jason Jannot, and Ms. Jaclyn Smith provided a presentation on the 2024 Observer Annual Report (report). The annual report covers full coverage fisheries, which represent the majority of harvest in the North Pacific (including 91% of pelagic trawl harvest and 96% of non-pelagic trawl harvest), and partial coverage fisheries, which are primarily comprised of the halibut and sablefish IFQ fleet and groundfish fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) not in a catch share plan. As the full coverage (100% or 200% coverage) fisheries are straightforward in terms of regulated coverage rates, much of the annual report focuses on the partial coverage fisheries operating under the fee system and subject to an annual deployment plan that is informed by the annual report.

The annual report evaluates monitoring deployment performance, i.e., whether actual coverage rates by each category met the coverage rates projected in the prior year's Annual Deployment Plan (ADP), and whether the characteristics of monitored trips are similar to unmonitored trips in partial coverage. The annual report also includes information on budget and costs, electronic monitoring (EM) video review,

enforcement and compliance information, and agency recommendations for the 2026 ADP. This year's annual report evaluated a new sampling design implemented in the 2024 ADP, whereby stratification is based on monitoring method, FMP, and gear (fixed vs trawl), and the proximity allocation method which differentially assigns a selection rate to each stratum. While the change in sampling design means that some data cannot be directly compared to those in prior annual reports, the new design seemed to perform well, spreading sampled trips across space and time and minimizing data gaps. The presenters noted that coverage rates were consistent with expected values in six of the seven partial coverage strata that are subject to monitoring. This indicates that the deployment of monitoring as intended by the 2024 ADP was largely successful. The one strata that had lower than expected coverage was the EM fixed BSAI stratum, and this was due to temporary understaffing of EM video reviewers.

Due to both staffing changes and pending the upcoming Center of Independent Experts (CIE) review of the ADP process, **NMFS did not recommend significant changes for the 2026 ADP. NMFS recommends continuation of the proximity allocation method and the strata used in 2024/2025 for the 2026 ADP.**

Another issue highlighted in the presentation and committee discussion was the proportion of inherited trips. Inherited trips occur when trips selected for observer coverage are subsequently cancelled, and the vessel's next logged trip is automatically selected for coverage. Inherited trips preserve the number of selected trips in the year, however they can cause a delay of selected trips during the year and result in temporal bias. In comparison to 2023, the proportion of inherited trips decreased in 2024, which improved random sampling and helped to provide a more representative sample of trips. Due to the changes to the trip cancellation policy in ODDS in 2025, it is likely that temporal bias related to inherited trips will continue to be reduced in future years.

### *Enforcement and compliance*

During the 2023 fishing year, the AFSC's Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division (FMA) and NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) updated the observer database to create finer resolution of the categories of violations that can be reported. The first full year of statements in this new system was 2024, so comparisons with a full year of data showing trends over time will be available in next year's report.

The committee discussed a change to regulations last August which now require observer providers to enforce their own conduct and behavior policy. This change is intended to increase accountability for providers to follow through on policies they already have in place, it does not change the reasons why the agency can decertify an observer (i.e., impacts to data and safety).

### *Committee Recommendations and Discussion on the 2024 Observer Annual Report*

The following includes FMAC discussion and responses to the NMFS recommendations on p. 118-119 of the annual report.

***Deployment design:* The FMAC supports continuing the proximity allocation method and the strata used in 2024/2025 for the 2026 ADP.**

***EM video review:* The FMAC supported the NMFS' recommendations on EM video review.**

- The committee appreciates the prioritization and timeliness of 2025 EM video review by PSMFC, including the additional staff capacity to review video.
- As noted previously, a temporary staffing shortage at PSMFC resulted in the EM fixed BSAI stratum being below the expected coverage rate. For these trips, cameras were turned on as expected, however the delay in video review combined with the smaller stratum size led to a lower-than-expected coverage rate.

*Fixed-gear EM: The FMAC supported the NMFS recommendations on fixed gear EM.*

- The committee noted the improvements in fixed gear EM video image quality, with the amount of usable video continuing to increase. This reflects the effectiveness of outreach from the NMFS and PSMFC and feedback occurring with vessels using EM.
- For next year's report, the committee suggested inclusion of information on EM video review timeliness issues for trawl gear, similar to those included in Table 4-5 for fixed gear.
- Starting in 2025, NMFS has added a feature that allows ODDS users to see whether there were image quality issues from previous trips when they log a trip into ODDS. The FMAC highlighted the continued need for and importance of outreach from committee members and industry representatives to their respective fleets to be aware of this feature and check ODDS to see if there was a flag on video review.
- The committee again highlighted that the opt-in/out deadline for fixed-gear EM is November 1 each year. If a vessel is not going to fish in the following year, they should opt out of EM and allow use of the equipment on active vessels.

*EM Development: The FMAC supported the NMFS recommendation to continue to support EM development and cost efficiency projects.*

### 3. NMFS Budget Update

Ms. Lisa Thompson provided an update on 2024 observer fees (Chapter 2 of the Annual Report) and the anticipated budget for 2025. As of the FMAC meeting, and in part due to the Dept of Commerce's transition to a new financial system, NMFS had not yet received funds from the last three years of sequestered observer fees. The Council has previously expressed concern about this process and written letters to NOAA OMB and Treasury.<sup>1</sup> NMFS has received the fees shown in green in the figure below. FMA needs to receive any sequestered or deobligated funds (left on expired contracts) by the end of June in order for them to be applied to the next contract for deployment in 2026. The program is owed more than \$1.1 million in fee revenue. **These funds directly affect coverage rates.**

The preliminary estimate for revenue generated from 2025 landings (observer fees) for use in 2026 is \$3.1 million, a \$400,000 decrease from 2024.

#### Expected Funding Available for Partial Coverage

2025 Observer Fee (revenue generated from 2024 landings)	\$3.5M
2022 Sequestered Observer Fee	\$178,802
2023 Sequestered Observer Fee	\$225,378
2024 Sequestered Observer Fee	\$199,290 (estimate*)
2024 Carry Over Observer Fee	\$297,700
Deobligation from past contract	\$544,504

<sup>1</sup> Each year, a percentage of the industry's fees paid for monitoring in the North Pacific is held in the fund, and NMFS tracks these sequestered funds.

## 4. Other NMFS Updates

Ms. Lisa Thompson and Mr. Josh Keaton provided updates on staffing and the impacts of reduced staff monitoring. Impacts of reduced staff are affecting observer debriefing time (especially in Anchorage), availability of gear needed for monitoring, and support for systems such as ODDS and the ATLAS observer software. Overall, development of new programs is being constrained and timelines for agency assistance are extended. The agency encourages the industry to be proactive (prior to a trip) when alerting them of issues as it is likely it will take longer for the agency to address them.

Ms. Thompson presented on positive changes to observer data collection in 2025, including image storage and transmission changes to ATLAS which can assist observers in species identification in-season.

The final rule on confidentiality requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act ([89 FR 102000](#)) went into effect on January 16, 2025. An advisory team was formed to address high priority issues related to the interpretation of the rule across observer programs, however, this team is currently on hold due to staffing and contract issues. NMFS Alaska Regional Office is putting together a confidentiality handbook to articulate how confidential data should be treated to avoid risks to data sharing agreements (State of Alaska, NOAA, IPHC) in the North Pacific.

## 5. GOA Rockfish Trawl EM

Mr. Josh Keaton, Ms. Chelsae Radell (Alaska Groundfish Data Bank), and Mr. Joel Kraski provided updates on the pilot phase and next steps for implementing EM in the Central GOA Rockfish Program. This year the project includes six vessels which are delivering to multiple plants and using both EM service providers. Certified observers will be collecting data to better understand issues that may be specific to shoreside rockfish deliveries (in contrast to issues that arose during the pelagic trawl EM EFP). Mr. Kraski presented drafts of four potential approaches to develop EM in the Rockfish Program which are posted to the committee eAgenda. The agency expects there will be an EFP application related to these efforts later this year to explore these approaches.

## 6. Other Updates from Committee Members

Observer providers, a member of the industry, and a member of the public spoke to the ongoing issue of the reduced pool of lead level observers (including lead level 2). As discussed previously by the committee, this issue is likely due to a combination of factors, particularly the loss of available training platforms for lead level 2 (fewer vessels/trips on which to be certified), but also the movement of vessels to EM, fewer fishing trips due to reduced markets, and labor pool shortages. The committee discussed potential paths forward such as using hake hauls in the Pacific to count toward the sampling requirements for lead level 2 certifications. The agency was uncertain whether this is already technically allowed by regulation. Committee members mentioned the opportunity offered by the Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness Executive Order for members of the public to suggest changes to regulation.

## 7. Timeline and Future Scheduling

The next monitoring committee meetings are typically in September. The committee suggested scheduling a short FMAC meeting in conjunction with the September PCFMAC meeting, to discuss NFWF EM proposals and updates on ongoing projects, if needed.