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NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Fishery Monitoring and Advisory Committee

REPORT

May 18, 2026

9:00 am-1:00pm AKDT

Committee members present: Nicole Kimball (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, 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), Gwynne Schnaittacher (NMFS AFSC), Melanie Rickett (NMFS AKR), Joel Kraski (NMFS AKR), Mike Vechter (NMFS AFSC), Andrew Kingham (NMFS AFSC), Cindy Tribuzio (NMFS AFSC), Brian Mason (NMFS AFSC), Olivia Bertelsen (FMA), Craig Faunce (FMA), Christian Gredzens (FMA), Cathy Tide (NMFS AKR), Sean Lucey (NMFS AFSC), Pearl Rojas (NMFS AFSC), Michael Moon (NMFS AFSC)

Other Attendees: Jim Armstrong, Karla Bush (ADF&G), Carlton Burnside (ADF&G), Fabio Prior Caltabellotta, Paul Cleveland, Mark Fina, Lauren Howard, Andrea Keikkala, Alyssa Lambert, Jaime Messer, Noah Taylor, Wayne Walter, Ernie Weiss, Sarah Williamson

1. Introduction

The 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 2025 Observer Annual Report (report), make recommendations on the report and/or for the next (2027) Annual Deployment Plan for partial coverage fleets, and to receive additional monitoring-related updates. Of particular note, Dr. Sean Lucey was introduced as the new Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis (FMA) Division Director at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC). Opportunities for public input were provided during the meeting.

2. 2025 Observer Annual Report

Ms. Lisa Thompson, Mr. Geoff Mayhew, Dr. Jason Jannot, and Special Agent Jaclyn Smith provided a presentation on the 2025 Observer Annual Report. The annual report covers full coverage fisheries, which represent the majority of harvest in the North Pacific (including 90% of pelagic trawl harvest and 96% of non-pelagic trawl harvest in 2025), 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, most 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 (observers and electronic monitoring (EM)) deployment performance, i.e., whether actual coverage rates by each category met the coverage rates *projected* by NOAA 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, EM video review, enforcement and compliance information, and agency recommendations for the draft 2027 ADP. This year's annual report evaluated the sampling design in the 2025 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. This sampling design was first implemented in 2024, so 2025 is the second year of data on this design. Note this design is the subject of a review by the Center for Independent Experts (CIE), the results of which should be available this summer. In addition, 2025 was the first year of the regulated EM Program for BSAI and GOA CVs in the pelagic trawl pollock fishery, which is full coverage. This means cameras are on 100% of the time for every trip to ensure compliance with retention requirements, and catch accounting, salmon census, and biological sampling occurs by observers at shoreplants.

Similar to last year, the sampling design continued to perform well. **Mr. Mayhew explained there were no substantial temporal or spatial issues in sampling, and noted improvement from 2024 due to the change in the ability to cancel trips in ODDS.** The committee noted this demonstrates one of the successes of the proximity allocation method. Mr. Mayhew also demonstrated that coverage rates were mostly consistent with expected values in five of the seven partial coverage strata that are subject to monitoring. This indicates the deployment of monitoring as intended by the 2025 ADP was largely successful. The two strata that had lower than expected coverage were the EM fixed gear GOA stratum and the EM trawl GOA stratum (99.9% coverage instead of 100%). For EM fixed gear, this was due in part to trips being shorter than projected by NOAA in the ADP. For GOA EM trawl, this was due to the last trip at the end of the season where the shoreside observer was not present to observe a delivery due to a miscommunication about season end timing.

NMFS noted that for the draft 2027 ADP, the agency aims to receive more accurate and early information on the number of GOA processors that intend to receive deliveries from CVs or tender vessels in the Trawl EM Program, as this helps to determine costs and allows the agency to budget accordingly. Notice of intent to participate in the regulated Trawl EM Program is required by November 1. While there is no penalty to processors if they indicate their intent to receive deliveries and then do not do so, this poses a budgeting challenge. The trawl EM allocation (based on estimated plant observer days) is subtracted from the total budget and the remaining amount is allocated to fixed gear and other strata. Therefore, when the number of expected deliveries is lower than the realized deliveries, this results in less of the budget allocated to other parts of the program than could have been. The committee discussed the particular challenges of the November 1 deadline in the Western Gulf, because it is difficult to know which processors will participate more than a month out from the season start date in a region with high uncertainty and disruption in the past couple of years. The committee discussed the need for contingency planning for use of funds if they are not going to be used for trawl EM if processors are unable to determine their intent to receive trawl EM deliveries by Nov 1. The agency and industry will continue to communicate to try to resolve this issue.

Additionally, the agency is continuing to develop criteria to remove vessels from fixed-gear EM pool or deny vessels from the Trawl EM Program that have not been participating. NMFS is expecting to have further information or recommendations on this in the draft 2027 ADP. The committee supported this intent in the past and continues to support it, to optimize the use of the fixed budget.

Overall, NMFS did not recommend significant changes for the 2027 ADP. **NMFS recommends continuation of the proximity allocation method and the strata (deployment categories) used in 2024, 2025, and 2026 for the 2027 ADP.**

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. This results in many more categories for potential violations to be reported, and multiple categories can be associated with one incident/trip. The first full year of statements in this new system was 2024, therefore it may take a few more years to identify trends.

The presentation indicated that the number of statements in the GOA Salmon Bycatch subcategory represented 2% of offloads. This represents potential violations which do not always equate to actual violations. The discussion indicated this is a situation in which more communication is required with the observer if salmon are missed in the first sorting of fish (due to volume of fish), as the CMCP protocols provide a clear way for salmon to be accounted for by the observer in the second sort. NMFS noted all salmon were still counted and sampled, but these occurrences could impact being able to connect a specific genetic sample with a particular haul. While there are no other management impacts associated with this situation, Committee members noted this requires further communication between FMA and processors. NMFS noted this will continue to be addressed.

Public Comment

Ms. Susie Zagorski provided written and oral public comment on the discrepancy between estimated pollock discards in the AFA pollock fleet reported by vessel operators and those reported by EM video reviewers. Ms. Zagorski provided three recommendations to attempt to better understand and resolve this issue.

3. Committee Discussion and Recommendations

Annual Report and Draft 2027 ADP

The following includes FMAC recommendations and discussion and specific responses to NMFS recommendations, as well as to the content of the annual report.

The FMAC supports continuing the proximity allocation method and the strata used in 2024, 2025, and 2026 for the 2027 ADP, and other NMFS recommendations on pages 130-131 of the annual report.

The Committee continues to support modifying the zero selection pool in the draft 2027 ADP for increased cost efficiencies.

The FMAC recommends that in the enforcement section of the annual report, the agency include whether the vessel or processor was able to resolve the issue in response to the statement during the season.

The FMAC recommends the report provide additional clarity on overall full coverage costs. While the costs of full coverage overall are decreasing, it is difficult to discern the impact of movement of trawl CVs into the Trawl EM Program and skews the interpretation of the cost to full coverage participants that are participating in the Trawl EM Program. While the committee acknowledged the challenges of providing detail due to confidentiality issues, there may be additional ways to present these data to discern costs.

Discard estimates for pollock discards

The committee discussed the information provided in public comment regarding the discrepancies between pollock discard estimates reported by vessel operators in the AFA pollock fleet and estimates generated by EM video reviewers. Committee members noted that during the Trawl EM EFP, vessel operators generally overestimated discards compared to the EM review, and so the new discrepancy was surprising. The committee acknowledged the regulated EM program is still in its early stages and improvements are expected over time through better communication and refinement of reporting practices. They also noted that generally OLE should use compliance assistance significantly in the first few years of the regulated program, the same way they did when the fixed gear EM program started and fleets were getting used to new EM protocols. **The committee had three recommendations on this issue:**

- **improving communication pathways among AFA, NMFS, and PSMFC to clarify what vessel operators are required to report**
- **ensuring vessel logbook explanations are available to EM reviewers to provide additional context for discard events**
- **developing a formalized secondary blind review process for discard estimates that may advance toward enforcement actions**

Agency staff stated that the EM video review methods used to estimate discards have not changed since the EFP period. Staff also explained that some discrepancies may result from vessel operators being unable to observe all discards, such as fish exiting through excluders or blowouts, while EM reviewers can observe these events on video. The agency also explained that EM reviewers already consider logbook information during review and that multiple reviewers are involved in evaluating discard estimates as part of existing quality control procedures.

4. NMFS Budget, Annual Reporting, & Other Updates

Budget

Ms. Lisa Thompson reported that NOAA's new financial system is still creating challenges, particularly with generating understandable reports, but processes are improving. One major update is that all sequestration funds from prior years have now been accounted for. The funds are currently at Treasury and requests have been submitted, so no additional support letters from the Council are needed this year. Actual sequestration numbers for several years were successfully filled into the annual report, resolving previous accounting uncertainties. Ms. Thompson indicated that most 2025 fee revenue has now been collected and reported 2025 fee revenue totaled approximately \$2.975 million. Looking ahead, projected fee revenue for 2027 is estimated at \$3.6 million, based on fees collected during 2026 and received in 2027. She also reminded the committee that the Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) funds acquired through Congress for additional EM hardware will have been fully used and not available starting in 2027.

Future Annual Reporting Structure

The Council has previously supported the agency's suggestion to move toward a more abbreviated annual report. NMFS staff considered using an online dashboard for annual reporting beginning in 2027 due to the reduced number of Council meetings but determined a dashboard would increase workload without better meeting reporting goals. In addition, there are time constraints to creating an annual report by early May, which would be needed starting in 2027 since the Council's June meeting is moving to May. As a result, staff are proposing a two-phase reporting process:

- **Early May FMAC meeting:** NOAA provides an oral report and detailed slide deck at the FMAC and Council meetings in May, with sufficient data included for both bodies to provide recommendations for the following year draft ADP.
- **Summer:** NOAA releases the full written annual report.
- **September PCFMAC:** Committee reviews the next year's draft ADP and provides recommendations to the Council for its October meeting.
- **October Council meeting:** Council reviews and makes final recommendations for the ADP. The annual report is posted for reference, but not presented.
- **December Council meeting:** The final ADP is posted for reference, as currently occurs.

The revised process would still allow discussion of the previous year's performance and potential improvements early in the year, while preserving time for additional recommendations before final ADP decisions later in the cycle. The committee discussed how this would work but did not indicate support either way. The committee wanted to ensure they and the Council could react to the ADP recommendations in October if an issue arose between the draft version and final annual report.

Additional NMFS updates

Mr. Keaton outlined several regulatory changes and streamlining resulting from the Council's response to EO 12476 (increasing U.S. seafood competitiveness), intended to reduce administrative burden on observer providers and industry participants. Many of the simpler proposed updates would use Secretarial authority, an expedited process under Section 305(d) of the Magnuson Stevens Act. Staff indicated these actions are a priority, but no specific implementation timeline is available yet. A discussion paper with proposed regulatory language and impacts is expected for the June Council meeting, where stakeholders would have an opportunity to comment.

NMFS staff also described NOAA's planned transition to login.gov multi-factor authentication for all public-facing systems (such as ODDS) beginning as early as mid-2026. Committee members expressed significant concern, including unreliable internet and cell service in rural Alaska, difficulty using text/call verification systems, and the burden on fishermen and processors in remote communities. **The committee recommended the Council send a letter to the Department of Commerce highlighting the challenges and requesting reconsideration or accommodations for Alaska fisheries participants.**

Additional NMFS updates included 2026 data collection changes, information on remote observer debriefing previously requested by the committee, and on the January 2025 final rule on confidentiality requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act ([89 FR 102000](#)).

5. Other Updates from Committee Members

Mr. Chad See and Mr. Jim Armstrong updated the committee on development of an EM pilot project for the freezer longline fleet. The project would explore using EM systems in place of onboard observers on some trips. The presentation outlined specific milestones covering equipment installation, data collection, catch accounting, and protected species monitoring. EM installations are expected to begin in fall 2026, followed by several years of testing and evaluation. Presenters emphasized that EM is not intended to fully replace observers and that the project will require continued collaboration among NMFS, industry, observer providers, and other partners as the program develops. The committee was excited about the potential for this project, raised several questions and noted the need to balance NMFS prioritization on this project with other monitoring-related projects and duties already underway.

Ms. Abby Turner-Franke reported on the NFWF-funded pot cod catch handling project. Preliminary findings were encouraging despite low volunteer participation. The project tested redefining a "haul" by grouping pots together instead of clearing the table after every pot. Results suggested the approach improved efficiency and accuracy for both vessels and video reviewers.

Mr. Jack Meyers shared preliminary feedback from observers on the new plant sampling design following the end of A season. Overall, observers responded positively and said the workflow functioned well when plants were adequately staffed. The primary concern raised was whether the sampling design would remain manageable during a high-volume B season or if there is a high chum salmon event. Jack said he plans to follow up again with the committee after B season and also share feedback with the Observer Program. The committee appreciates getting direct input from the observer representative.

6. Timeline and Future Scheduling

The next monitoring committee meeting is the Partial Coverage Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee (PCFMAC), typically in September. The PCFMAC will meet to review the Draft 2027 Annual Deployment Plan and receive other updates. There may be an FMAC portion of the meeting scheduled; staff will work with the committee chair to determine needs and agenda items.