



Partial Coverage Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee

REPORT

September 10, 2025: 8:00am-10:30am AKDT

Committee members present: Nicole Kimball (Chair), Bob Alverson, Haley Anderson, Kathy Hansen, Stacey Hansen, Julie Kavanaugh, Chelsae Radell, Abigail Turner-Franke

Council/NMFS/ADF&G Staff: Sara Cleaver (NPFMC), Gwynne Schnaittacher (NMFS AFSC), Geoff Mayhew (NMFS AFSC), Jason Jannot (NMFS AFSC), Craig Faunce (NMFS AFSC), Karla Bush (ADF&G), Lisa Thompson (NMFS AFSC), Mike Vechter (NMFS AFSC), Josh Keaton (NMFS AKR), Pearl Rojas (NMFS AFSC), Joel Kraski (NMFS AKR), Alex Perry (NOAA OLE), Cindy Tribuzio (NMFS AFSC), Jennifer Cahalan (PSMFC), Maggie Chan (NMFS AKR), Melanie Rickett (NMFS AKR), Jason Gasper (NMFS AKR), Sarah Neumeyer (NMFS AFSC), Phil Ganz (NMFS AKRO).

Other Attendees: Michael Lake, Heather Mann, Chad See, Ruth Christiansen, Sarah Williamson, Susie Zagorski, Ernie Weiss, Pam, Olivia.

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

Introduction

The chair of the Partial Coverage Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee (PCFMAC) opened the meeting and gave an overview of the agenda, and attendees introduced themselves. This was a hybrid meeting; it was hosted and available to join remotely and there was also an in-person option at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) in Seattle. The main purpose of this meeting was for the committee to review the Draft 2026 Annual Deployment Plan (ADP). The Council will review the Draft 2026 ADP at its October 2025 meeting. Opportunities for public input were provided throughout the meeting though no formal comments were given.

The Final 2026 ADP with the final budget and resulting coverage rates will be provided to the Council under B reports in December 2025 as usual.

Draft 2026 ADP

Ms. Lisa Thompson and Mr. Geoff Mayhew (NMFS AFSC Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division) provided the presentation on the draft 2026 ADP. More than 90% of Alaska's federal fisheries (by tonnage) are within the full coverage program. Monitoring resources are allocated amongst the remaining <10% (by tonnage) of partial coverage fisheries as described in the ADP and funded by the observer fee. Preliminary selection rates for Alaska's federal fisheries in 2026 are shown on p8 of the Draft 2026 ADP.

For reference, the 2025 **target** selection rates for vessels remaining in partial coverage are:

- At-sea observer:
 - Fixed gear, BSAI: 20%
 - Fixed gear, GOA: 6%
 - Trawl, BSAI: 40%
 - Trawl, GOA: 15%

- EM:
 - Fixed gear, BSAI: 48%
 - Fixed gear, GOA: 11%
 - Trawl EM GOA: 100% EM coverage at-sea and 100% shoreside salmon and halibut accounting, plus 33% shoreside sampling for biological data

The Draft 2026 ADP retains the same sampling unit (trip or delivery), stratification (8 partial coverage strata based on monitoring method, gear type, and FMP) and allocation method ('proximity', except for trawl EM GOA) as the Final 2025 ADP. This is consistent with the Council's recommendation in June 2025. **The committee noted its appreciation for the work that went into the Draft 2026 ADP and the report from FMA. Additional committee discussion and recommendations are described in the following sections.**

Budget Update & Cost Estimates

Ms. Lisa Thompson provided a preliminary budget update. The prior year's fee revenue, carryover revenue from ex-vessel fees from earlier years, and federal funding comprise the total funds available for observer and EM days in any given year. The estimated preliminary budget through August 2026 of \$4.75 million for partial coverage monitoring will be updated in the final ADP. The 2025 budget was \$4.19 million.

The preliminary budget is still uncertain because: 1) the fee revenue for 2025 landings is still being collected; 2) the costs of trawl EM are still being refined; and 3) the observer cost model has been modified to account for the fact that observer assignments are now billed by the hour rather than half days.

In July 2025, the Council sent a [letter](#) to the Department of Commerce / Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requesting the immediate transfer of the remaining sequestered observer fee funds which were delayed, and the de-obligated funds from the past contract which were not transferred due to an error in the DOC financial system. Ms. Thompson indicated that these funds are included in the preliminary budget estimates. OMB has requested the sequestered and de-obligated funds (Fee dollars) and they are in process to arrive. AFSC budget analysts are tracking this and will alert FMA when they are available. **The committee recommended that the Council write a letter to OMB to request that industry-paid observer funds not be sequestered in future years, as part of the Council's response to E.O. 14276 on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness. These are industry funds, not appropriations from Congress, and the continued delay of these funds impacts the annual level of observer/EM coverage.**

Partial Coverage Sampling Design for 2026

Mr. Geoff Mayhew presented the sampling design for the 2026 ADP, which is largely the same as the sampling plan in place for 2025. 2024 was the first year to use the proximity allocation method, which serves to minimize data gaps in time and space. This design is the subject of the upcoming CIE review.

A member of the committee noted the decrease in selection rates for the at-sea observer GOA fixed gear and trawl strata and wondered if that was a result of incorporating pelagic trawl EM. Another committee member stated that in the GOA, the preliminary selection rate in the EM fixed gear stratum (13%) is significantly higher than the observer fixed gear stratum (7%). They described how the decrease in efficiency that pot vessels experience when using EM catch-handling protocols, combined with the lower probability of being monitored in the at-sea observer strata, is making the at-sea observer strata for fixed gear seem more desirable than EM.

In balancing costs of and priorities for the observer program, selection rates for some strata have decreased. As noted in the final 2025 ADP, target selection rates for fishing year 2025 dropped in all strata. This is in part due to lower fee revenue, not having the full observer fees due to sequestration and

other delays, and partially due to competing funds with the implementation of pelagic trawl EM. NMFS reiterated how focusing on coverage rates is not the most useful way to interpret sampling success, particularly due to the new proximity allocation method, whereby representative data of trips that are similar in both space and time can still be obtained despite less sampling, especially if there are many trips within the stratum. A higher sampling rate is warranted in stratum with fewer trips, to minimize data gaps. The fixed gear pool of vessels is very large and has many trips. It was also pointed out that the implementation of pelagic trawl EM moved the entire Gulf pollock fleet into full coverage (100% EM + 100% halibut and salmon accounting, no extrapolation), with the exception of potentially one vessel in 2026 who is remaining in the at-sea observer strata. This means the volume of trawl harvest fully covered by monitoring has increased, even if the rate for those few vessels who remain in partial coverage has gone down.

One committee member raised an issue that occurred several weeks ago regarding whether a partial coverage observer needed to be deployed for partial coverage deliveries (from vessels participating in GOA trawl EM) at an AFA (full coverage) plant. This issue caused confusion given it was determined not necessary under the trawl EM EFP and analysis implementing trawl EM. It not only uses partial coverage observers where unnecessary but the EFP proved it adds a layer of complexity in terms of communication and who is responsible for which deliveries. The draft 2026 ADP “assumes no partial coverage-shoreside observers are stationed at False Pass, Akutan, or Dutch Harbor plants,” but does not explicitly state that trawl EM partial coverage GOA pollock can be delivered to an AFA plant in the full coverage category. **In keeping with the original intent of the pelagic trawl EM Program and the EFP prior to program implementation, the committee recommended that AFA plants with full coverage observers be allowed to accept and monitor GOA pollock (trawl EM) deliveries.**

The Agency explained that this is not a regulatory issue, nor is it an attempt to restrict vessels from offloading where necessary. Instead, this is a contractual matter. With the implementation of the new regulated Trawl EM program, the contract was updated to include guaranteed (base) and optional (bonus) plant day funding lines specifically for GOA Trawl EM partial coverage vessels. The Agency is committed to honoring the Performance Work Statement to avoid any breach of contract, and noted that this issue emerged after the analysis for the draft ADP was already underway, preventing its inclusion in the draft. However, the Agency is actively working on a solution, which will be addressed in the final ADP.

The committee and Agency reiterated the deadline for vessels looking to opt-in to trawl EM is November 1, and vessels must opt-in every year. The fixed gear EM deadline for new vessels is Nov 1 but vessels are assumed to continue to be in the program and do not need to opt-in again after the first year. NMFS will be sending emails out to registered ODDS users. Committee members noted the importance of getting this information out to the fleet and at the committee’s request, NMFS indicated they would also develop a flyer to provide to vessel and processor associations.

Zero-Selection Pool

While not addressed in the Draft 2026 ADP, potential revisions to the zero-selection pool have been an ongoing priority for the committee, and NMFS indicated this is an issue they would like to address in the future. The committee discussed the potential for adding vessels with small amounts of quota or that have conducted few fishing trips to the zero-selection pool. In the past and at this meeting, NMFS has explained that basing stratification on metrics that may change annually, or those that reflect fishing behavior, is challenging. A member of the committee stated that changes to the zero-selection pool should be explored in both directions; while some additional vessels may warrant being added to the pool, some vessels under 40 feet which are currently in the zero-selection pool may be harvesting substantial amounts of quota, and these vessels could be using EM to monitor their harvest. **The PCFMAC recommended again that NMFS pursue such changes, to base the fixed gear zero selection pool on the amount of quota, volume harvested, or few trips.**

Feedback on ODDS Trip Cancellation/ Modification

One committee member noted that for their sector, outreach by NMFS on the ODDS change to modify rather than cancel a trip has mostly worked well so far and that more ODDS users seemed to be modifying rather than cancelling trips, when needed.

ODDS IT Issue

AFSC is currently transferring all databases to the cloud, per requirements from Headquarters. The IT team at AFSC is trying to keep up with issues despite limited staff, however, there have been instances where the ODDS application has gone down. AFSC stated that ODDS users could call the ODDS call center and fill out a paper form. Committee members had several questions, such as whether a vessel could get a waiver if they were not able to log a trip through ODDS if the system was down. Ms. Thompson noted that ODDS users should log any trips that they know about early, so that if the system goes down at least the trip is logged, however the plan to handle these cases is not yet decided. Once a plan is in place, AFSC will be sending out an email to ODDS operators explaining this issue and any expected outages. **The committee recommended that this messaging include direction to ODDS users on what to do if the system is down unexpectedly. The committee requested NMFS include PCFMAC members on any emails that go out to all ODDS users (regarding this issue and others) to assist in messaging to their fleets. Council staff is providing committee email addresses to FMA to facilitate this communication.**

Future Scheduling

The next monitoring committee meeting (FMAC) typically occurs in May to review the annual report. Unless the Council identifies a need for the PCFMAC to meet earlier, the PCFMAC would meet in September 2026 to review the Draft 2027 Annual Deployment Plan.