



Fishery Monitoring and Advisory Committee

REPORT

September 25, 2024, Webinar via Zoom

9:00 am-1:00 pm AKDT

Committee members present: Bill Tweit (co-chair), Nicole Kimball (co-chair), Bob Alverson, Chelsae Radell, Beth Concepcion, Ruth Christiansen, Kathy Hansen, Stacey Hansen, Julie Kavanaugh, Michael Lake, Charlotte Levy, Mike Orcutt, Courtney Paiva, Chad See, Luke Szymanski, Abigail Turner-Franke, Paul Wilkins

Council/NMFS/ADF&G Staff: Sara Cleaver (NPFMC), Anna Henry (NPFMC), Jennifer Ferdinand (NMFS AFSC), Jennifer Mondragon (NMFS AKR), Jennifer Cahalan (PSMFC), Geoff Mayhew (NMFS AFSC), Gwynne Schnaittacher (NMFS AFSC), Lisa Thompson (NMFS AFSC), Josh Keaton (NMFS AKR), Melanie Rickett (NMFS AKR), Joel Kraski (NMFS AKR), Tom Meyer (NOAA GC), Mike Vechter (NMFS AFSC), Jason Jannot (NMFS AFSC), Andy Kingham (NMFS AFSC), Karla Bush (ADF&G), Pearl Rojas (NMFS AFSC), Alex Hildebrand (NOAA GC), Taylor Holman (NPFMC), Marlon Concepcion (NMFS AFSC), Michelle Ruge (NMFS AFSC)

Other Attendees: Haley Anderson, Anne Vanderhoeven, Lauren Howard, Pam, Alyssa Lambert, Cameron V., Lange Solberg.

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

1. Introduction

Mr. Tweit (co-chair) opened the virtual Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee (FMAC) meeting and Ms. Sara Cleaver gave an overview of the agenda. The purpose of this meeting was for the committee to review the Observer Availability Discussion Paper, and to receive NFWF EM proposals. Opportunities for public input were provided throughout the meeting and there were four written comments submitted to the meeting eAgenda. The committee would like to congratulate Ms. Jennifer Ferdinand on her new position as Deputy Director of the AFSC and thanked her for all her work within NMFS Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division (FMA) and with the Council's monitoring committees over the years.

2. Observer Availability Discussion Paper

Ms. Anna Henry provided a presentation on the Observer Availability Discussion Paper. The presentation focused on a comparison of the observers needed across fishing seasons of each endorsement level and the existing number of unique qualified observers and newly qualified observers. The paper included a description of challenges observer providers face in providing observer coverage in both partial and full coverage fisheries, and potential solutions that NMFS and observer providers are considering to improve observer availability.

Public comment was provided by Alyssa Lambert, a current observer with four years of experience. She emphasized that the issue of observer availability is intrinsically linked to retention and discussed issues regarding observer support structures, pay, union representation, harassment and the importance of communicating how observer data are used.

The committee expressed appreciation to the author and contributors for the work on the paper and the thorough coverage of the issues specified in the motion. Committee discussion focused on many of the themes addressed in the paper including potential strategies for communication with local community colleges and universities to ensure that students are aware of the academic requirements to become observers and to develop programs which could assist in recruitment from academic institutions. **The committee confirmed that maintaining the current high standards and requirements for observers is of primary importance.** While looking at ways to increase flexibility, **the principal objective is to maintain data quality, which requires observers with proper knowledge and understanding of sampling methods and design.**

Some committee members articulated challenges that they have experienced with a limited pool of observers at higher experience levels (particularly lead level 2) and that the “available” observers are the observers who are working. **The committee expressed concern regarding the loss of diversity of deployment opportunities on vessels and highlighted the importance of maintaining a variety of deployments to keep the job interesting and less routine and to sustain a vibrant observer program.**

The committee recognizes the critical role of observer data in the management process. The committee supported efforts described in the paper that are currently being undertaken or envisioned by the agency to address these issues and encourages continued exploration of programs to increase observer recruitment opportunities and retention. Observer availability remains a difficult issue to address comprehensively.

3. Trawl EM Implementation

Mr. Joel Kraski and Ms. Melanie Rickett provided an update on implementation of the Pelagic Trawl EM Program. The final rule has been published and the regulated program will go live January 1, 2025. The opt-in period for vessels is open and will close on November 1, 2024. The agency is sending emails to the fleet every Monday to ensure they are aware of this deadline. NMFS staff are working with shoreside processors to complete and approve catch monitoring control plans (CMCP) to ensure they are all ready by January 1. One change in 2025 will be that the target sample rate for salmon and halibut accounting from trawl EM offloads will be 100% at shoreside plants in the Gulf of Alaska. Observers will target a 33% sampling rate to collect biological samples on other species. These rates are set in the draft ADP and represent an increase from previous years when the GOA shoreside sampling rate for all observer duties associated with Trawl EM deliveries were set at 33%. The Committee recognized the significant work from agency and industry participants in developing and implementing this program and commended the collaborative process.

4. National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) EM and Reporting Grant Program Proposals and Other Project Updates

The FMAC heard from several industry representatives on upcoming proposals that will be submitted for NFWF funding. The deadline for proposals is Wednesday, October 2, 2024.

Ms. Abigail Turner-Franke introduced a proposal between Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association (ALFA) and Archipelago collaborating on a project titled: "Implementation of AI in EM review for Alaska fixed gear fisherman." The collaborators are working with PSMFC to use AI to move data review along faster. Ms. Lauren Howard submitted a [description](#) of the project proposal to the committee's eAgenda. The committee noted that this was a worthy proposal of support due to the fact that the committee has consistently identified the need to reduce the time needed for and costs associated with EM data review.

Ms. Turner-Franke also described a proposal from Real Time Data/Deckhand working towards a NMFS-approved elogbook. She indicated there have been some unforeseen delays and that they are continuing to work on necessary workflow improvements. Mr. Josh Keaton explained that the delays in development are on the agency side due to resource constraint issues with multiple programs coming online at the same time. The agency is in communication with Real Time Data/Deckhand and are recommending the project be extended for another year. The agency commended Real Time Data for their communication and patience.

Ms. Chelsae Radell provided updates on a project testing EM on trawl catcher vessels (pelagic and non-pelagic gear) in the Rockfish Program. The project includes having observers in processing plants collecting data that can be compared to vessel data and fish ticket data for species composition as well as differences between data at the trip and haul level. This is not a new proposal, and the FMAC supported the pilot project in 2023. Ms. Radell indicated that poor rockfish markets this year led to few vessels available for testing this project, and the loss of the shoreside processor that was providing match funds. Therefore, the current performance period is being extended to 2025. This project will be expanded to both EM service providers and may be tested under an EFP in the future.

The committee supports both of the above NFWF Proposals and the extension of the rockfish EM project.

Ms. Turner-Franke also noted that North Pacific Fisheries Association (NPFA) and the Under Sixty Cod Harvesters are working with Saltwater, Inc., on changes to evaluate pot cod catch handling protocols. The project seeks to maintain fleet buy-in and relieve catch handling burdens and improve data quality (e.g. timeliness). Those involved in the project are seeking feedback to add a component on catch handling to help identify crab bycatch.

Mr. Chad See provided an update on a pilot project testing the feasibility of FlyWire technology on Freezer Longline Coalition (FLC) vessels. Thus far, FlyWire has funded and installed equipment on one vessel, and the technology may be able to reduce the work burden on observers that are deployed in this fleet. The next step for this project may be an EFP, but there will need to be future discussions with FMA and AKRO regarding timeline.

The Committee discussed whether it would be useful to recommend a priority listing of these projects for Council consideration at this time and concluded that it was not necessary at present. The agency appreciates receiving the Council priorities when they are useful to assist the agency in allocating their staff resources, which does not appear to be the case at present. The agency explained that they currently

have allocated resources to work on the eLogbook development and the testing of EM on trawl vessels in the GOA Rockfish Program. It is uncertain how much agency staff time will be needed for the first stage of exploring the use of AI to speed EM data review time, so there seemed little value in a committee recommendation on prioritization at present. If the agency encounters workload issues at a future point, the committee can reconsider at that time.

5. NMFS updates – (Confidentiality policy, etc.)

The FMAC received several updates from agency staff. These updates were repeated from those provided at the PCFMAC meeting, for members of the FMAC that were not in attendance at that meeting. See the [September 2024 PCFMAC Report](#) for details.

6. Other Issues and Future Scheduling

The next FMAC meeting typically occurs in May to review the annual report.

Observer representation on the monitoring committee(s) should be announced shortly.

One committee member asked for a status update on any efforts to improve EM video review times coming out of the Council's [motion](#) in June 2024, noting that delays in data review (i.e., large retroactive catches) are still impacting fisheries. Updates related to this work will likely come up in the next Annual Report. Ms. Mondragon indicated that the agency has already been in communication with PSMFC regarding potential changes to video review priorities. Additionally, PSMFC has increased video review staff. Ms. Turner-Franke highlighted that some of the industry-led projects (such as the changes to pot cod catch handling protocols) are intended to address issues with EM video review time. The committee appreciated the update and acknowledged the substantial progress being made regarding this issue.