

Status of analytical projects related to the Observer Program

Priority	Name	Description	Status / Due Date / Target Date
Recently Completed Projects			
1	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. The report on this topic was presented to the Council at the October 2024 meeting.
2	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.
3	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 was reviewed by the Council in October, 2024. The Council took no further action.
4	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.	After several years of development with industry, the regulated trawl EM program was implemented in 2025.
5	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.

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Program-level Projects			
6	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 Annual Report is presented to the FMAC in May and to the Council in June of each year. The ADP is presented to the Council in October of each year.
7	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.
8	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. An evaluation of the efficacy of Machine Learning methods to explore different stratification schemes that better utilize available data has been published in Fisheries Research. Further evaluation of CAS methods are ongoing and on pause until staffing situations stabilize.
9	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. After consultation with the PCFMAC, trip logging rules in ODDS were changed as part of the 2025 Annual Deployment Plan so that trips can no longer be cancelled, although dates and strata can still be changed. This change preserves the order of when observed trips are taken relative to unobserved trips by the same vessel.
Projects in Council Review (Council or NMFS have tasked staff and scheduled review at a future Council or FMAC meeting)			
10	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 from 2023 to 2024. NMFS is currently approving elogbooks and may adjust data collection requirements in the future.

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11	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.
12	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, but the project has been postponed while staff prioritize other projects.
Regulatory Projects in NMFS Development or Review (Council has taken action or major work at current stage is NMFS's responsibility)			
13	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.	The Council took final action on this issue at the April 2025 meeting, recommending that vessels be allowed to discard sablefish less than 22" in length. NMFS is currently prioritizing rulemaking for this action.
14	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.