

Status of analytical projects related to the Observer Program

Priority	Name	Description	Status / Due Date / Target Date
Program-level Projects			
1	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 draft 2025 ADP will be presented to the PCFMAC in September and to the Council in October 2024. The final 2025 ADP will be presented to the Council in December. The 2024 Annual Report will be presented to the Council in June, 2025.
2	Observer Declare and Deployment System (ODDS)	The 2023 Annual Report highlighted that the cancellation and inheritance process in ODDS results in monitored trips moving forward in time and creates bias. As a result, NMFS recommended, and the Council agreed, that NMFS work with the PCFMAC to develop a new ODDS trip cancellation policy for the 2025 ADP. The goal is to develop an ODDS trip cancellation policy that will not significantly impede industry, affords the observer provider adequate time to deploy an observer, and reduces impacts to coverage rates and non-random monitoring.	NMFS has developed a paper proposing 3 ways to improve the rules ODDS uses to ensure high-quality, representative, unbiased data. The agency will discuss the proposed solutions with the PCFMAC in September. Pending the availability of agency IT resources, the goal is to implement an improved process as part of the 2025 Annual Deployment Plan.
3	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 review methods used to estimate halibut mortality with a particular focus on marine mammal interactions in the BSAI and GOA. Work will be presented to the Groundfish Plan Teams in September and the Council at the October meeting.
4	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 was completed as part of the 2019 Annual Report (Appendix C) and published by NMFS in December 2021. Work continues to evaluate post-stratification methods in CAS. A publication using Machine Learning methods to explore different post-stratification schemes is in peer review.
5	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.

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6	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. The proximity allocation approach that was implemented under the 2024 ADP support increased potential for monitored trips to neighbor unmonitored.
Projects in Council Review (Council or NMFS have tasked staff and scheduled review at a future Council or FMAC meeting)			
7	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 will be reviewed by FMAC in September and the Council in October, 2024.
8	Electronic Logbook integration	An industry led project funded by NFWF exploring expanded use of e-logbook software (Deckhand). Long term may change how logbook data is collected by observers.	A pilot project was conducted in 2023 and is continuing in 2024. An EFP permit has been processed for the next phase of the project that would exempt fishermen from the requirement to print logbooks. The next step in the project is pending NMFS development of an Application Programming Interface (API) for logbook data submission.
9	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.	This issue is scheduled for final review at the April 2025 Council meeting.
10	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.
11	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. Timeline is not determined.
Regulatory Projects in NMFS Development or Review (Council has taken action or major work at current stage is NMFS's responsibility)			

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12	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.	NMFS has issued a final rule Final Rule (89 FR 60796, 07/29/2024) to implement EM on pollock catcher vessels using pelagic trawl gear. Implementation under the regulated program will begin in 2025. Vessels must opt-in annually by November 1, and be approved by NMFS, to participate in the EM Trawl category for the upcoming fishing year.
13	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 staff have been working on program implementation starting in January 2024.
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.