

Annual Coverage Category Requests

Partial coverage catcher/processors

Under Observer Program regulations at 50 CFR 679.51(a)(3), the owner of a non-trawl catcher/processor can request to be in the partial observer coverage category, on an annual basis, if the vessel processed less than 79,000 lb (35.8 mt) of groundfish on an average weekly basis in a particular prior year. The deadline to request placement in the partial observer coverage category for the following fishing year is July 1 and the request is accomplished by submitting a form⁵ to NMFS. Eight catcher/processors requested, and NMFS approved, placement in the partial coverage category for the 2020 fishing year.

Full coverage catcher vessels

Under Observer Program regulations at 50 CFR 679.51(a)(4), the owner of a trawl catcher vessel may annually request the catcher vessel to be placed in the full observer coverage category for all directed fishing for groundfish using trawl gear in the BSAI management area for the upcoming year. Requests to be placed into the full observer coverage in lieu of partial observer coverage category must be made in ODDS⁶ prior to October 15, 2019 for the 2020 fishing year. NMFS published the list of 32 catcher vessels that have been approved to be in the full coverage category in 2020 on the website at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/bsai-trawl-catcher-vessels-cvs-full-coverage>.

Observer Declare and Deploy System (ODDS)

For 2020, the user experience in ODDS will not change for a vessel operator unless they are operating in the trawl EM EFP. As in 2019, there will be a selection box to indicate whether the vessel will be delivering to a tender, however the response will not affect selection rates. NMFS will retain the current business operating procedure of allowing vessels to log up to three trips in advance and programming that prevents a 40 – 57.5' fixed gear vessel from being randomly selected for a third consecutive observer trip. Any observed trip that is canceled would automatically be inherited on the next logged trip. Vessels are allowed to cancel or change any unobserved trips (logged trips that have not been selected to carry observer coverage) themselves, but any observed trips (logged trips that have been selected for observer coverage) that must be rescheduled need to be coordinated by contacting the ODDS call center (1-855-747-6377). As NMFS has described in the previous three Annual Reports, there are improvements to the programming in ODDS that would allow vessels to change the dates for future observed trips, rather than having the current cancel and inherit process. This modification is a priority for NMFS and the Council, however due to limitations in staff resources, the programming changes to ODDS have not yet been evaluated.

Vessels Participating in Halibut Deck Sorting

On October 24, 2019, NMFS published a final rule to implement regulations allowing halibut to be sorted on deck of trawl catcher/processors in the non-Pollock fisheries off Alaska. Fishing under the new regulations will begin on January 20, 2020.

⁵ The form for small catcher/processors to request to be in partial coverage is available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/webdam/download/85047638>

⁶ Instructions for catcher vessels to request to be in full coverage using ODDS are available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/bsai-trawl-catcher-vessel-annual-full-observer-coverage-request>

