

Status of analytical projects related to the Observer Program

September 20, 2019 – does not include edits proposed by FMAC in September 2019

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 FMAC and the Council will review the Draft 2020 ADP in September and October respectively.
2	Analysis of catch and bycatch estimation methods	Ongoing analysis of catch and bycatch estimation methods, including evaluating design-based and ratio estimators; incorporating variance from at-sea sampling through to the trip level; and then assessing post-strata definitions.	NMFS is continuing work to incorporate programming into CAS and evaluate alternative estimators and post-strata. Staff are finishing up a Tech Memo on variance estimates.
3	Report on onboard observer sampling	Report on observer sampling results, e.g., proportion of total hauls that are sampled, by vessel size and gear. This item was requested by the Council in June 2016 during review of the Annual Report.	This report was presented to the FMAC in May 2017, and an AFSC tech memo is in peer review and is expected to be published by the end of 2019.
4	Biological Data Assessment	The AFSC is conducting an assessment of the current way biological information collected by observers is used in stock assessments. The result of this project is to provide the scale and scope of data needs in the current program.	Preliminary information has been collected from stock assessment authors. FMA will compile this by early 2020.
5	Average weight of halibut wastage	Impact analysis of differences in average weights on the final wastage (discard) estimates of halibut in the IFQ fishery. Currently, CAS estimates halibut discard based on mean weight from the unsorted (retained and discarded) catch. Since halibut <32" are required to be discarded, CAS may be overestimating discarded halibut.	In 2016 NMFS modified data collection methods for halibut viability so that it is part of randomized biological sampling. Staff have begun analysis and will present preliminary results at the American Fisheries Society meeting in October, 2019.
6	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.	Updated DMR estimation methods were adopted, after Council review, at the October 2016 Council meeting and have been used annually to specify DMRs through 2021. The DMR workgroup is ongoing and future changes will be made as needed.

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Program-level Projects (Continued)			
7	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.	FMA staff have begun documenting existing ODDS logic so that potential changes can be discussed with the FMAC. Staff have currently been pulled off this project to make ODDS changes required to enable the trawl EM EFP.
8	Explore alternative approaches to evaluate observer effects	In June 2018, NMFS recommended and the Council supported reassessing the performance standards used to evaluate observer effects in the Annual Report and explore alternative approaches.	OSC members had a preliminary discussion in March 2019 on this issue but do not have a conclusion about how best to proceed. No other work has been completed.
9	Effects of changes to the observer program	Evaluate the effects of changes to data collection protocols that occur because of observer restructuring, potential funding limitations and the introduction of electronic monitoring. Ensure that data collected provides a valid representation of the catch and can be compared easily to the previous data collection methods and time series remain intact. Because there have been no changes to data collection protocols and funding limitations and representativeness are addressed through the annual deployment and review process, this project will focus on potential corrections for the halibut fishery not being observed prior to 2013.	This project was moved to here from the research priorities list where it was originally listed as "Urgent". Staff have not yet been assigned to this project.
10	Identify best practices for estimating species weight when it is unavailable for an observed haul	Catch estimates for EM and observer data rely on weight measurements from observed hauls. This project would identify the best algorithm for assigning weights when they are unavailable.	Staff have not yet been assigned to this project.
Projects in NMFS Development or Review (Council has taken action or major work at current stage is NMFS's responsibility)			
11	Halibut PSC deck sorting EFP	Exempted fishing permit (EFP) projects are being used to develop the components of a regulated program to allow deck sorting of halibut on trawl catcher/processors in the Bering Sea to reduce halibut mortality rates. In 2018 and 2019, catcher/processors may fish in the GOA under the EFP.	NMFS has issued a modified permit for 2019, and EFP fishing began in January 2019. FMA, AKR, and OLE staff regularly engage with EFP applicants on the ongoing administration of the EFP.

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Projects in NMFS Development or Review (Continued)			
12	Halibut PSC deck sorting rulemaking	Regulatory Impact Review analysis and rulemaking to allow trawl catcher/processors to sort halibut on deck to reduce halibut mortality rates in non-pollock fisheries.	The final rule package and response to comments was transmitted to NMFS HQ on August 21, 2019.
13	Observer provider insurance requirements	In May 2015, NMFS determined that some observer provider insurance requirements in § 679.52(b)(11)(vi) are inapplicable and should be removed or revised. NMFS National Observer Program (NOP) staff hosted a workshop in Nov 2016. The NOP published a tech memo in November 2017 and a request for information in the Federal Register on July 16, 2018 with comments invited through September 14, 2018 regarding possible insurance packages and cost that could address observers, observer providers, and the fishing industry concerns in the event of an occupational injury.	NMFS HQ staff continue to gather additional information to prepare a Regulatory Impact Review to modify observer provider insurance requirements. The FMAC received an update on the status of this project in May 2019. A proposed rule is expected in 2019 with a final rule to follow in 2020.
14	Trawl EM EFP	The collaboration with the Council's Trawl EM Committee, Industry representatives are developing an EFP application to test full retention with shoreside sampling for pelagic pollock trawl fishery in the BSAI and GOA in 2020.	Observer Program and AKRO staff are engaging with the applicants as the draft EFP application is being developed through the summer and fall of 2019. Council review of the EFP is planned for October 2019.
Projects in Council Review (Council or NMFS have tasked staff and scheduled review at a future Council or FMAC meeting)			
15	Observer fee analysis	In October 2017, the Council initiated an analysis to consider raising the observer fee. The analysis is a response to low sampling rates in partial coverage.	The FMAC and the Council will receive the public review draft analysis in September and October 2019, respectively.
16	Trawl CV EM Development	Engage with the Trawl Electronic Monitoring Committee (EMC) to develop EM for compliance monitoring on pelagic trawl catcher vessels. Research projects include EM for compliance monitoring of full retention in pollock fisheries including tender vessels in the Western Gulf as well as EM to support alternate methods of dockside salmon accounting.	The EMC met August 21-22, 2019, to discuss current and ongoing research projects and the status of the 2020 EFP development. The Council will review the EFP application in October 2019.

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Projects in Council Review (Continued)			
17	Sablefish Discards	Since April 2018, a regulatory change 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 reviewed discussion papers in October 2018 and April 2019. The council will review a third discussion paper in December 2019. This project includes a request for an evaluation of discard estimates including information on lengths, number, and mortality rates, based on observer and EM data.
18	Partial coverage EM/ Shoreside Sampling	In May 2019, the FMAC partial coverage subgroup identified information needed to scope the next steps toward an integrated cost efficient observer/EM/shoreside sampling program.	The FMAC requests the Council task staff to scope a shoreside sampling program in the partial coverage category. No staff have been assigned to work on this project.
19	Partial Coverage Cost Efficiencies Subgroup	In April 2019, the Council tasked this group to continue to develop ideas related to how to best integrate the different monitoring tools, such as dockside monitoring, EM, and monitoring cooperatives.	The FMAC partial coverage subgroup report describes a long term vision for integrating monitoring tools in the partial coverage category to increase cost efficiencies. The near term priority is to task staff to create a discussion paper to scope what a dockside monitoring program would look like. Work is currently tasked to subgroup members and NMFS staff have not been assigned to work on this project.
20	Change tender trip definition, consider deploying observers from tenders	In October 2017, the Council initiated an analysis to look at changing the definition of a tender trip to start a new trip with each delivery to a tender or to limit the number of deliveries that can be made before a vessel must log back into ODDS. The analysis should also evaluate options to deploy observers at sea from tenders.	Initial scoping of a similar action was undertaken in 2015-2016, before the analysis was tabled. In December 2018, the Council received a summary of progress on this project and recommended no further action at that time. No staff have been assigned to work on this project.

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