

DI FISHERY MONITORING AND ADVISORY
COMMITTEE (FMAC) REPORT
JUNE 2020 COUNCIL MEETING

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INTRODUCTION

- The Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee (FMAC) met virtually on May 19, 2020 focusing on current challenges and responses to observer deployment and data collection in the full and partial coverage fleets.
- The meeting opened with an update on recent Council actions related to fishery monitoring.
 - In October 2019, the Council raised the [observer fee](#) percentage from 1.25% to 1.65%, and prioritized work on [cost efficiencies](#) in the partial coverage observer program.
 - In January 2020, the Council [adopted](#) three priorities for continued and newly initiated work on cost efficiencies in the partial coverage observer program.
 - The Council's January 2020 motion provides important direction for the agency's work on the 2021 Annual Deployment Plan (ADP) to develop a more cost efficient approach to partial coverage that meets data needs and can be supported by industry fees.



UPDATES AND CHANGES TO OBSERVER DEPLOYMENT AND SAMPLING PROTOCOLS

- **Observer training:** The agency is at least one observer training class behind but is moving to a blended training model.
 - Potentially 30-70 fewer trained observers leading to a possible labor shortage for observer providers, depending on when the agency reintroduces observer deployment in the partial coverage observer program.
- **Observer testing and quarantine:**
 - 1) An observer who has undergone the mandatory 14-day quarantine in port and is asymptomatic or tested negative for COVID-19 could join a vessel whose crew have undergone a 14-day quarantine and are asymptomatic or tested negative for COVID-19.
 - 2) An observer could be picked up from port and quarantine with vessel crew if all are in the same stages of quarantine.
- **Fishery-dependent data:** There is currently a scenario where there has thus far been relatively little partial coverage observer data collected in the calendar year 2020.



VESSEL SAFETY INSPECTION UPDATES

- Coast Guard's Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety examination plans
 - Allowing virtual checks of life-saving equipment as part of a process to defer the full examination.
 - This deferment extends the expiration date of the vessel's safety decal for 90 days.
- Flow scale inspections



FULL COVERAGE UPDATE

- The FMAC received an update on several full coverage issues related to COVID-19, including:
 - Central Gulf of Alaska rockfish
 - Freezer longline fleet
 - Amendment 80 fleet
 - B season AFA pollock



PARTIAL COVERAGE UPDATE

- **The agency's proposal has two main elements and would constitute a mid-year change to the 2020 ADP.**
 - 1) Use an alternative vessel selection model, where if a vessel is selected for coverage in ODDS, every trip taken by that vessel would be selected for coverage under a specified time period.
 - 2) Raise fixed gear EM coverage from the current 30% rate to 100% due to reduced fishing effort across multiple partial coverage fisheries (e.g., due to reduced market prices, TAC reductions, or fishery closures).



FMAC DISCUSSION POINTS RELATED TO PARTIAL COVERAGE

- The fixed gear EM program is voluntary; raising the fixed gear EM coverage rate to 100% deviates from what participants expected when they signed up for the program and would not be equitable as observed trips are not held to the same coverage rate.
- Important to consider the timeliness of receiving and reviewing fixed gear EM data at the current 30% coverage rate, and especially if the fixed gear EM coverage rate is increased to cover data gaps.
- Some FMAC members asked whether it would be possible to change observer protocols to focus on filling data gaps. The agency emphasized this level of change would likely be infeasible.
- Using vessel selection could result in a shift in fishing effort to vessels not selected for observer coverage.
- The FMAC discussed the utility of a geographic cluster approach to allow an observer to stay in region which could limit observer travel but could also reduce the spread of quantity of spatially representative data.
- FMAC members encouraged the agency to develop guidelines or practices for creating “safety envelopes” around different personnel groups.
- The FMAC encourages the agency to consider early outreach opportunities to communicate their model for reintroducing observer coverage in the partial coverage fleet, including townhall meetings, making use of the Council website and newsletters, and associations such as the United Fishermen of Alaska.



PLAN FOR THE 2021 ADP AND 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

- The 2019 Annual Report should be published in June 2020 on the agency and Council website.
- The FMAC discussed the 2021 ADP, noting the agency has not yet dedicated significant resources to this plan.
 - In-year changes to the 2020 deployment plan for the partial coverage observer fleet could influence the 2021 ADP.
 - The agency reiterated the Council's January 2020 motion on prioritization of cost efficiencies for the partial coverage fleet provides clear direction for their work on the 2021 ADP moving forward.
 - The trawl EM EFP continues to be fully supported with staff resources, but the agency does not anticipate being able to undertake additional work on integrating fixed gear EM or evaluating different criteria to define the zero selection pool.



FMAC DISCUSSION RELATED TO THE 2019 ANNUAL REPORT AND 2021 ADP

- FMA reported it did not receive the maximum allocation of observer funds for fiscal year 2021- receiving \$785,326 of the requested \$1 million to support sea days in the partial coverage fleet.
 - While FMA is currently seeking other funding avenues to reach \$1 million in federal funding to support partial coverage observer sea days, the FMAC discussed the Council may need to plan for addressing a funding shortfall in the future for the partial coverage observer program.
- The FMAC discussed evaluating different criteria for the zero selection pool in the partial coverage observer fleet, and agreed that optimizing zero selection should remain a high priority.
 - Without optimizing the zero selection pool, the FMAC was concerned the agency's proposal to reintroduce observer coverage in the partial coverage fleet (i.e., vessel selection combined with multi-trip selection) could further burden smaller vessels, or be
 - FMAC members encouraged the agency to consider mitigation strategies and not further burden small boat fishermen in a year with exceptional operational challenges.



OTHER ITEMS

- The FMAC also discussed different proposals for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) current RFP for EM, ER, and associated modernization projects. (This RFP closes on July 1st, 2020).
- The FMAC discussed different ideas for proposals, including the expansion of the trawl EM EFP, using machine learning for real time image quality feedback and testing a lower cost EM system for small boats, and monitoring co-ops for both observer and EM in the partial coverage program.
- FMAC discussion contextualized these proposals in relation to cost efficiencies in the partial coverage observer program.
- The Council discussed NFWF proposals and written letters of support for some if they are in alignment with Council goals and objectives for Alaska's EM programs.



QUESTIONS?

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