

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC and AP Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke  
Executive Director



ESTIMATED TIME  
2 HOURS

DATE: January 3, 1995

SUBJECT: Observer Plan

**ACTION REQUIRED**

Receive report from Observer Oversight Committee and discuss issue of observer qualifications and possibility of pilot program for Western Alaskans.

**BACKGROUND**

Near the close of the September meeting the Council requested that the Observer Oversight Committee (OOC) meet to discuss an issue involving admission requirements for the domestic observer corps. Specifically, the question is whether there might be a mechanism developed which would allow for persons involved in the CDQ programs to enter the observer training program(s) without having a Bachelor's degree in fisheries as a prerequisite. Item C-7(a) is a letter from Dr. Bill Aron to the Council Chairman which provides background on the issue and suggests that it may be possible to waive the degree requirement by developing alternative qualifications, without compromising the standards of professionalism of the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program. The task for the Council, and the OOC, is to evaluate the feasibility of such a program and perhaps suggest specific, alternative qualifications to be used.

Item C-7(a) also contains a letter from Mr. Nels Anderson of Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation (BBEDC) which suggests alternative qualifications which would allow local fishing community residents to participate in the observer program as another fishing industry career. Though such alternative qualification is not limited to only Western Alaskans, most of the discussions to date, and the focus of the OOC, have been on evaluating the feasibility of a pilot program specific to those persons. Item C-7(b) is a report from Mr. Steve Davis to the Council and the OOC which outlines his initiatives in this area, including development of observer prerequisite coursework as qualification for observer training school. This information may be useful to the Council regardless of the scope of the current initiative.

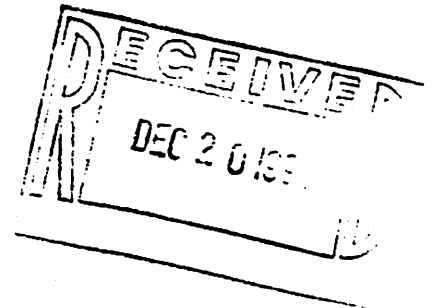
The OOC met on Sunday, January 8, in Anchorage to discuss this issue. Their report will be made available at meeting time. Committee Chair Chris Blackburn will give the report.



AGENDA C-7(a)  
JANUARY 1995

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Alaska Fisheries Science Center  
BIN C15700; Building 4  
7600 Sand Point Way NE  
Seattle, Washington 98115-0070

DEC 16 1994



Richard Lauber, Chairman  
North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
P.O. Box 103136  
Anchorage, AK 99510

Dear Rick,

I understand that you have asked Chris Blackburn to schedule a meeting of the Observer Oversight Committee (OOC) to discuss possibilities for preparing Western Alaskans to be trained as groundfish observers. The following provides background on this issue which may be helpful to those participating in the OOC meeting.

We recently received a letter (enclosed) from Mr. Nels Anderson, Executive Director of the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation. Mr. Anderson suggests that NMFS review its observer qualification requirements and develop alternatives so Western Alaskans could qualify to attend observer training classes without having to obtain B.S. degrees. While we cannot compromise the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program by lowering standards for certification, we believe it would be possible to waive the B.S. requirement by developing alternative qualifications.

Requirements for waivers could be met through supplementary education in the form of internships, training at facilities in Alaska (such as community colleges and university programs), and/or apprenticeships on vessels that are required to carry multiple observers. I believe that we should develop a mechanism for providing oversight in evaluating the feasibility and funding requirements for a program of this nature, and in the development of policy for establishing waivers. The participation of fishery representatives, individuals from academic facilities, and observer contractors should also be sought. This could be accomplished through the Observer Oversight Committee or a technical committee of the type established to examine observer insurance issues.



Thank you for considering this proposal. If you wish to discuss it further, please do not hesitate to contact me or Bill Karp at any time.

Sincerely,

*Bill*

William Aron  
Science and Research Director  
Alaska Region

Enclosure

**Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation**

P.O. Box 1484 • Dillingham, Alaska 99576 • (907) 842-4370 • Fax (907) 842-4336 • 1-800-478-4370

November 10, 1994

Mr. Steve Pennoyer, Director  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Box 021668  
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668



Dear Mr. Pennoyer:

BBEDC is looking forward to the time when 100% observer coverage will be a requirement for vessels fishing in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska. As you know, the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation has a constituency that is deeply interested in reducing bycatch and for full utilization of species caught in fishing operations on the high seas.

We feel that 100% observer coverage will go a long way to achieving the goals of stopping waste and protect the long term health of all fish, marine and bird populations off of Alaska's shores. We are also aware of fact that when 100% observer coverage is mandated that there will be a need for fully qualified, certificated observers ready to take on that mission.

We have been working with the University of Alaska and the Department of Fish and Game to see what can be done to qualify as many Western Alaskans as possible for future observer positions. We have suggested to Steve Davis, Director of the University of Alaska Observer Training Program, that the Alaska-based program develop an accreditation basis whereby local fishing community residents' field of experience could be "credited" towards fishery observer certification, in lieu of the B.S. prerequisite.

We are not in any way suggesting that standards of professionalism be compromised. We want the standards to be high to make sure that observers know what they are doing with the proper scientific and data collection training to do the job right. This "credit" coupled with core course observer training could allow Western Alaskans lacking a full B.S. degree in Biology or Fisheries to participate in another fishing industry career.

Page two Letter to Steve Pennoyer

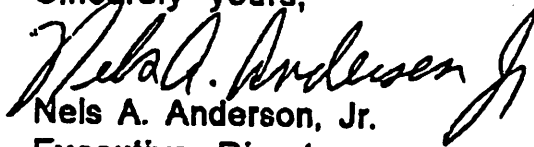
We are hopeful that you will consider this proposal so that we can take advantage of our entry into the off-shore fisheries through the CDQ program. The scientific and data gathering aspects of the Alaska ground fish industry could open up numerous job opportunities and the observer program is another that could provide Western Alaskans another new career track. Scholarship funds from CDQ funds could then be made available to those individuals wishing to continue with a fisheries degree program.

NMFS has stated its intent to establish a career path for observers- from vessel observer to observer de-briefers to fishery managers. This career track could provide an alternative to the industry track of processing line worker to deckhand to other positions in the industry.

Observer experience is valuable to the industry as well. Many fleet managers and company executives started as observers, fishery scientists and resource managers. BBEDC, and Western Alaska as a region, would benefit from more local participation in this key aspect of the fisheries.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

  
Nels A. Anderson, Jr.  
Executive Director

cc: Governor Walter J. Hickel  
Commissioner Carl Rosier, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game  
Steve Davis, UAA, Observer Training Program  
Dr. Margaret Wood, Director, Bristol Bay Campus  
Adelheid Hermann, Coordinator, Bristol Bay Borough Fisheries  
Economic Development Commission  
Ambassador Ed Wolfe, Oceantrawl, Director of Governmental  
Affairs  
Senator Ted Stevens  
Senator Frank Murkowski  
Congressman Don Young




# UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE

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North Pacific Fisheries  
**OBSERVER TRAINING PROGRAM**  
COLLEGE OF COMMUNITY AND  
CONTINUING EDUCATION

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
Observer Oversight Committee

**FROM:**   
Steve Davis, Director  
North Pacific Fisheries Observer Training Center

**DATE:** December 19, 1994

**SUBJECT:** Status report on 1994 NPFOTC initiatives and plans for 1995.

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### BACKGROUND

As reported to you previously (June and September 1994 reports), I have successfully ended the pilot-program phase of the University of Alaska's observer training program and I am currently leading the North Pacific Fisheries Observer Training Center (NPFOTC) through a transition phase as it becomes a fully-operational fishery observer training facility.

In June 1994, I embarked on an ambitious training schedule, with NPFOTC staff teaching groundfish, crab, and scallop observer classes. Compared to 1993, the number of classes taught has increased 133% and we have seen more than 100% growth in enrollment.

In September I reported how Congress had expanded the NPFOTC's mission and increased its federal appropriation to help cover some of these costs. We expect additional federal funds we be allocated to the NPFOTC as I fill vacant staff positions to meet the increased workload.

The purpose of this meeting is to report on my initiative to take some action which would result in an increase in Alaskans being employed as observers. I should state at the outset that my motives are purely regional and focused on bringing benefits to Alaskan residents. However, my concept is universal and certainly the opportunities I intend to describe are available for all Americans.

Currently, I estimate that less than 20% of the observer corps are Alaskans; with most observers being recruited and hired from the Pacific northwest and other areas of the country. It seemed to me that as a state, and as a state university, Alaska should take steps which encourage Alaskans to pursue jobs as observers, possibly using those real-world experiences as a means of earning a bachelor's or graduate degree in fisheries, and/or as a stepping stone toward employment in the fishery management profession.

As a new member of the Alaskan academic community, I began to discuss this concept with appropriate faculty at the University of Alaska, Dean's and Chancellor's of the various campuses, and with the University President himself. I have also had discussions with ADF&G staff involved with the observer program, congressional staff, observer contractors, and with the Governor's office. Governor Knowles and I also discussed these ideas during his campaign. Needless to say, all were supportive of the concept. We all would like to see more Alaskan residents get their training and education here in the state. I would also like to see more of these bright young people find meaningful employment in Alaska's fisheries.

How might we achieve this goal without reducing the quality of observers or the observer program?

Currently, both NMFS and ADF&G have a policy whereby an observer candidate may be accepted for training if:

- (1) they possess a B.S. degree in fisheries or in some other natural science;
- (2) they have 2-years of college and relevant fishery experience; or
- (3) they demonstrate and possess some other education/experience combination that the agency's find acceptable.

[Note: currently all contractors are required to submit their recruits resumés/qualifications in advance for agency approval.]

Since 1990, the default or preferred requirement has been the B.S. degree and the contractors have done an outstanding job in recruiting across the country to keep the observer corps filled. As a member of the original observer committee, I remember the initial agency fears that with the new domestic program, the government might not be able to recruit the number of B.S. candidates needed compared to the days of the foreign observer program. Again, the contracting companies have done an outstanding job meeting the increased need for observers.

As a result, many have assumed that a B.S. degree was the required minimum requirement for entering observer training school (in Anchorage or Seattle). Recent correspondence by both ADF&G (Rosier) and NMFS (Aron) have clarified the admission requirements.

So how might we get more Alaskans (and perhaps other Americans) interested in fishery observer jobs?

One way is for the university to award students who choose a Fishery Observer Elective, with degree-earning credit. Students pursuing a fisheries degree at either the baccalaureate

or graduate level, would have the opportunity to get first-hand exposure to Alaska's commercial fisheries. Having people enroll in this program would bring fisheries career-oriented individuals into the program. Perhaps fresh minds might generate new and progressive ways of solving the problems with the current data gathering program. New ideas gained from actual at-sea experience could lead to thesis or dissertation topics. The students would benefit. The observer program and fisheries management could also benefit.

To prepare a student (or anyone who doesn't already meet the agency's minimum requirements) for observer training school, I proposed developing a observer prerequisite course, taught over a semester or two, which would contain elements of biology, fisheries science, statistics, computer science, etc. Such a course would have measurable milestones to judge a student's progress and understanding of the material. Both ADF&G and NMFS would help in evaluating the curriculum. My idea is that someone successfully completing this course would then become eligible to enroll in an agency approved observer training course.

I should mention that the idea of integrating at-sea observer experience and prerequisite training at the university is not a new one. Last June, Dr. Bill Aron mentioned to me that he likewise envisioned this concept but that the University of Washington was not interested. Dr. Aron serves on the program committee for the University of Alaska's School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences and suggested that the UA may be more receptive to the idea.

Such a prerequisite course may take a year or more to design, review, and approve. Time and money is needed to fully prepare such a program. To help accelerate this process, I talked with several CDQ and western Alaska representatives about my desire to develop a prerequisite course, offer observer training courses at other campuses, and establish a Associates of Arts degree (2-yr degree) program for fisheries.

This fall I met with Dr. Peggy Wood, Director of the UA-Fairbanks Bristol Bay Campus, and Nels Anderson, Executive Director of the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation, to further discuss this concept and develop plans for 1995. Outside funding will be necessary to put this program together. Currently federal NPFOTC funds cannot be used for this purpose and there are no UA funds available. Several fishing companies have contacted me to express their interest in supporting this program in Alaska and to offer the possibility of providing scholarships for students wishing to enroll in the prerequisite course or in a degree program. I have consulted on several occasions with the Alaska Congressional delegation and their staff on the future of the NPFOTC program and these other educational/observer training initiatives. All have strongly supported my plan.

My intention is that during 1995, the NPFOTC staff will design a prerequisite course and will work closely with the agencies. It is likely that Congress will approve an increase in funding to support this education/jobs program in Alaska. ADF&G is considering making observer experience an evaluating criteria for its Fisheries Technician and Fishery Biologist positions.



Up to now, I have chosen not to bring these initiatives before the Committee, the Council, or NMFS, until I had a chance to complete my homework. My overall goal is to increase the education and employment opportunities for Alaskans while at the same time not reducing the standards that we have all become accustomed with the observer program. Some claim that the reason there are few Alaskans in the observer corps is due to a limited number of residents possessing B.S. degrees.

I claim that there are residents who may not have the degrees but do have tremendous fisheries and ecological experience. I want to develop a high quality course at the University that would allow me to guarantee that anyone passing it would be as prepared as any other candidate. Perhaps, the at-times high turnover rate in the observer corps can be stalled if more Alaskans (who already live in Alaska and are accustomed to its harsh working conditions) held these positions.

As I develop the prerequisite course and complete the NPFOTC's transition to a fully operational training center, I will provide status reports to the committee and the Council.

cc: Rene Carter-Chapman, UAA  
Peggy Wood, UAF  
Nels Anderson, BBEDC  
Ed Wolfe, Oceantrawl  
Ron Dearborn, Alaska Sea Grant  
Al Tyler, UAF, SFOS  
Bill Aron, AFSC  
Bill Karp, AFSC  
Mike Ward, ADF&G