

Status of analytical projects related to the Observer Program

Updated May 20, 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 2018 Annual report in May and June 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. Estimates for the partial coverage strata are expected to be incorporated into the AKRO production database in 2019.
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 expected in 2019.
4	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. This should facilitate evaluation of average weights and enable NMFS to refine estimation methods. Staff have not yet been assigned to this project.
5	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 used to specify 2017 DMRs. The same estimation methods have been used specify 2018-19 DMRs. The DMR workgroup is ongoing and future changes will be made as needed.
6	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 been assigned to begin documenting existing ODDS logic and recommend changes for FMAC review.
7	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.

Priority	Name	Description	Status / Due Date / Target Date
8	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.
Projects in NMFS Development or Review (Council has taken action or major work at current stage is NMFS's responsibility)			
9	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.
10	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.	NMFS published a proposed rule on April 16, 2019, held a public meeting to discuss the proposed rule in Seattle, WA on April 18, 2019. The comment period closed on May 16, 2019.
Projects in Council Review (Council or NMFS have tasked staff and scheduled review at a future Council or FMAC meeting)			
11	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 Council adopted a purpose and need statement and alternatives in Feb 2018. Staff discussed draft monitoring objectives and the analytical approach with the FMAC in May and Sep 2018.	The FMAC and the Council reviewed an Initial Review Draft analysis in April 2019 and released the analysis for public review after revisions and additions as recommended by the Council and its advisory bodies. Final action is scheduled for October 2019.
12	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 will receive and update on the status of this project in May 2019.

<i>Projects in Council Review continued</i>			
13	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 March 4-5, 2019, to discuss current and ongoing research projects. Fieldwork and development of an EFP for the 2020 fishing year will continue throughout 2019.
14	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.
15	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.
16	Cost Efficiencies	In October 2018 the Council tasked the partial coverage subgroup of the FMAC to: “develop additional recommendations for how to potentially lower costs and increase observer coverage rates in the partial coverage category while maintaining: the data sufficient for managing the fisheries; randomized deployment; and cost equity considerations among participants. The subgroup should also continue to provide input on differential deployment base levels by gear type.”	The FMAC partial coverage subgroup met May 15, 2019 to discuss how to best integrate different monitoring tools, such as dockside monitoring, EM, and monitoring cooperatives. Work is currently tasked to subgroup members and to date no NMFS staff have been assigned to work on this project.
17	Changes to EM and zero selection pools to address low selection rates	In 2017 the Council endorsed the FMAC Subgroup’s recommendation to evaluate how changes to the zero selection pool and strategic use of EM may improve program efficiency.	Demographic data were prepared in 2017, but no staff have been assigned to further work on this project.
18	Observer disembark location	Analyze a change to the requirement that a partial coverage category observer be disembarked only in a community with a processor with a FPP.	Initial scoping has begun, including Council-approved change to alternatives in June 2017, but no staff have been assigned to further work on this project.
19	<40’ vessels in EM Pool	In December 2016, at the recommendation of the EM Workgroup, the Council requested a discussion paper about incorporating vessels <40’ LOA in the EM selection pool.	Preliminary demographic data were prepared for this evaluation in 2017. In February 2018, the Council prioritized EM development on trawl vessels ahead of this project.

Accessibility of this Document: Every effort has been made to make this document accessible to individuals of all abilities and compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. The complexity of this document may make access difficult for some. If you encounter information that you cannot access or use, please email us at Alaska.webmaster@noaa.gov or call us at 907-586-7228 so that we may assist you.