

Partial Observer Coverage Integrated Analysis Work Plan

May, 2021

Prepared by NMFS

Introduction:

At their October 2019 meeting, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) identified developing cost efficiencies in the partial coverage component of observer program as its highest priority for the observer program moving forward. Specifically, the Council requested work to focus on:

- Pelagic trawl Electronic Monitoring (EM) combined with shoreside sampling;
- Integrated monitoring plan for fixed gear that combines EM, shoreside sampling, and at-sea observer coverage as needed (e.g., consider whether the 15% hurdle is still the appropriate baseline level for observer coverage in combination with EM coverage; develop average weight protocols to support the use of EM);
- Optimizing the size and composition of the fleet using fixed gear that is monitored with observers or EM, taking into account both cost priorities and data needs for average weights and biological samples (including consideration of expansion of the zero-coverage pool to include vessels fishing from remote ports harvesting small amounts of fish).

Of these, the Council designated establishing a pelagic trawl EM program as their highest priority. NMFS and industry prioritized that work and have made significant progress on developing the trawl EM program under the EFP. Pelagic trawl EM now comprises over half of pelagic trawl vessels in the Gulf of Alaska and BSAI. This collaboration will continue through the analysis and development of regulations.

The Council and NMFS have been challenged to make progress on other cost efficiency priorities. Currently, various advisory groups and the Council have developed a list of over 15 projects related to the deployment of fishery monitoring tools and associated regulatory packages. These additional projects are in addition to ongoing work needed to maintain existing monitoring infrastructure, produce Annual Reports, and create Annual Deployment Plans. The Council and NMFS have limited capacity to prioritize the most impactful work and develop measures that improve cost efficiencies.

To improve our progress in meeting the Council's objectives, NMFS recommended developing one integrated evaluation of the deployment design to monitor the partial coverage fleet at the PCFMAC meeting in April, 2021, and in the Observer Program 2020 Annual Report. NMFS recommends that this effort be conducted holistically with a target date of being fully implemented by 2024. To enable staff to work on the analysis, NMFS recommends that the key elements of the 2022 ADP are carried forward to 2023.

This document is responsive to the PCFMAC recommendation that NMFS present a brief work plan that outlines the timeline and major milestones for the analysis.

Analysis Goals:

The outcome of the analysis would be a draft ADP with a scientifically robust sampling plan that would be fiscally sustainable. In addition, the analysis would seek to achieve the following Council goals:

- Cost efficiency: Spend the limited, available funding more efficiently such that more coverage (both EM and observers) is achieved for the available budget;
- Increase coverage on trawl for PSC accounting;
- Monitoring that has least impact on fishing operations;
- A partial coverage program that isn't contentious.

The analysis will consider the multiple objectives asked of the partial coverage observer program, including providing information for catch and bycatch estimation and providing biological data collections to support stock assessment (addressing gaps in biological samples due to implementation of EM is one of the Council’s 2022-2024 top research priorities).

Additionally, the draft 2024 ADP would incorporate the myriad changes affecting the observer program in recent years, including the expansion of pot fishing gear, new fishing effort and budget projections driven by the BSAI Pacific cod limited access privilege program, and the implementation of a trawl EM program under regulations - including an associated shoreside observer monitoring component.

Approximate Timeline & Major Milestones

Year	Month	Milestones
2021	May	FMAC Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present 2020 Annual Report Trawl EM Committee Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trawl EM EFP update • Development of trawl EM alternatives Work with stakeholders who are planning to submit proposals for external funding (e.g. NFWF) for projects that impact coverage and/or fishing effort.
	June	2020 Annual Report to Council BSAI Pacific cod trawl CV program: Initial Review
	June - September	Evaluation of existing monitoring tools and their regulatory structure to determine if regulatory changes would be needed to enable a more efficient fisheries monitoring plan.

		Continue work on trawl EM EFP
	September	<p>Draft 2022 Annual Deployment Plan to PCFMAC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Incorporate NMFS recommendations from 2020 Annual Report; ● Include potential expansion of the trawl EM EFP; ● Model impacts of any known projects requesting support by external funding (e.g., NFWF) that impact coverage and/or fishing effort <p>Groundfish Plan Team briefing</p>
	October	<p>Draft 2022 Annual Deployment Plan to Council</p> <p>BSAI Pacific cod trawl CV program: Final Action</p>
	December	<p>Final 2022 Annual Deployment Plan to Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Updated fishing effort and budgetary projections ● Incorporate externally funded projects that impact coverage and/or fishing effort <p>Define any regulatory changes required to implement integrated deployment model</p>
2022	January / Feb	<p>Work on 2021 Annual Report</p> <p>Fisheries Monitoring Science Committee Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identification of monitoring goals - review proposed analyses <p>Partial Coverage Contract:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NMFS works on a performance work statement for observer services for a partial coverage observer program that includes shoreside observers and a re-evaluated minimal size (currently at 2000 sea days). ● NMFS will also explore with AGO if there are alternatives to having a minimum size program contract that would be more cost efficient. <p>Trawl EM Committee Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Preliminary analysis on Trawl EM (e.g. EFP results, sampling issues, key decision points, etc)
	April / May	<p>Fisheries Monitoring Science Committee Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review 2021 Annual Report <p>PCFMAC Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Initial review of questions and recommendations arising from partial coverage integrated analysis; gather input from stakeholders ● Initial review if regulation changes are required to implement integrated deployment model ● Tradeoffs of the goals - proposed analyses, including those that were considered by the agency but not pursued and why <p>FMAC Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2021 Annual Report

	June	2021 Annual Report to Council Trawl EM: Initial Review BSAI Pacific cod trawl CV program: Publish Final rule
	September	PCFMAC Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present preliminary results of partial coverage integrated analysis Groundfish Plan Team Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present preliminary results of partial coverage integrated analysis
	October	Partial Coverage Contract: AGO releases the RFP for observer services
	December	Final 2023 Annual Deployment Plan to Council Trawl EM: Proposed rule for the Trawl EM program and associated shoreside observers
2023	Jan / Feb	BSAI Pacific cod trawl CV program: Publish Final Rule
	May	FMAC Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2022 Annual Report presented Preliminary results of partial coverage integrated analysis and 2024 Annual Deployment Plan BSAI Pacific cod trawl CV program: implementation (initial allocations, cooperative formation, etc)
	June	Trawl EM: Publish final rule for the Trawl EM program and associated shoreside observers 2022 Annual Report presented to the Council
	August	Partial Coverage Contract: Award new observer services contract
	September	PCFMAC Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present results of partial coverage integrated analysis Review draft 2024 Annual Deployment Plan Groundfish Plan Team Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present results of partial coverage integrated analysis Review draft 2024 Annual Deployment Plan
	October	Draft 2024 Annual Deployment Plan presented to the Council, AP and SSC
	December	2024 Annual Deployment Plan
2024	January	Trawl EM: Implementation of regulatory program begins BSAI Pacific cod trawl CV program: fishing starts under the program