


**NOAA
FISHERIES**

North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer Program 2014 Annual Report



Presented by
Fishery Monitoring and Analysis Division,
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Annual Report Overview

- This is the second Annual Report for the restructured Observer Program that takes a retrospective look at the previous year and an outlook for the coming year that will inform the 2016 Annual Deployment Plan presented to the Council in October.
- This report provides information, analysis, and recommendations on the methods used for deploying and funding partial coverage observers in the North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer Program.
- The report includes information on Fees and Budget, Deployment Performance Review, Descriptive Information, Compliance and Enforcement, and Outreach for the Observer Program in 2014.

Overview

- Overall, the observer deployment, sampling, and data collection goals outlined in the 2014 Annual Deployment Plan were met.
- 436 individual observers were trained, briefed, and equipped for deployment to vessels and processing facilities operating in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. These observers collected data on board 417 fixed gear and trawl vessels and at 14 processing facilities for a total of 44,178 observer days.
- The FMA Division conducted training for 164 new observers to deploy in 2014, of which 60 were deployed in the partial coverage fisheries.
- With few exceptions, the Observer Provider company AIS Inc. was able to successfully deploy observers from 30 ports for 4,368 days at sea with a minimal number of trips released (15).

Overview (continued)

- There were 97 debriefings in Anchorage completed by three FMA staff and 572 debriefings in Seattle completed by 21 FMA staff.
- The Observer Declare and Deploy System (ODDS) performed as expected with only one service interruption and 4,687 trips logged by vessels >57.5 feet.
- NMFS held 17 outreach events in 2014 in Seattle, Petersburg, Sitka, Juneau, Kodiak, and Homer to maintain a dialogue with industry members and inform them about the program, vessel responsibilities, and the objectives of quality collection of data and management.

Fees and Budget

- The budget for observer deployment in 2014 in the partial coverage category was \$4,937,414. The budget was made up of \$3,044,606 in fees (from 2013 landings) and \$1,892,808 in NMFS funds.
- \$1,206,846 in observer fees were carried over from 2014 to 2015 (\$306,846 in sequestered funds and \$900,000 in unused observer fees).
- The breakdown in contribution to the 2014 observer fee liability by species was: 30% halibut, 22% sablefish, 26% Pacific cod, 19% pollock, and 2% all other groundfish species.
- Fee billing statements for all landings that occurred in 2014 were mailed to approximately 100 processors in January, 2015, for a total of \$3,458,715. These funds will be used to fund the new observer contract that was awarded to AIS on April 22, 2015.

Fees and Budget

	2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Fees	Federal	Fees	Federal	Fees	Federal	Fees	Federal
Funds at the start of the calendar year	\$0		\$0		\$0		\$1,206,846	
Funds deposited during the calendar year	\$0		\$0		\$4,251,452		\$3,458,715	\$1,400,000
Funds paid out during the calendar year	\$0	\$4,484,962	\$0	\$2,115,166	\$3,044,606	\$1,892,808	\$4,665,938	
Observer Days at the start of the calendar year	0	0	0	4,535	0	2,915	2471	239
Observer Days purchased during the calendar year	0	4,535	0	1,913	2,596	1,772	4,369	
Observer Days used during the calendar year	0	0	0	3,533	125	4,448		

Cost for Partial Coverage

- To date, NMFS has spent \$11,537,542 to procure 10,816 observer days for an average cost per observer day of \$1,067 per day.
- This rate is on par with partial coverage government contracted observer costs in other regions. There are several factors that effect costs in partial coverage:
 - Federal contracts are subject to Federal Acquisition Regulations, Fair Labor Standards Act, Service Contract Act, and Department of Labor wage rate determinations which establish minimum wages and other benefits;
 - Partial coverage observers deploy out of many small, remote ports thus increasing costs
 - Average trip duration is 3-5 days vs 60-90 days in full coverage
 - Travel costs are reimbursed according to Government Travel Regulations

Compliance and Enforcement

- AKD Fisheries Enforcement Agents and Officers dedicated 3,831 hours to observer related investigations, outreach and education, and compliance assistance with a focus on observer safety, work environment and data collection duties. AKD reported an increase of reports and investigations of systematic sample biasing as well as harassment, intimidation and sexual harassment.
- AKD continues to work closely with the Observer Program and partial coverage observer provider to address high priority compliance issues that affect observer safety, sampling, and the observer's work environment.

Recommendations

- *NMFS reiterates the recommendation that vessels less than 40ft continue to be in the no selection pool for 2016*
- *For 2016, NMFS recommends providing vessels in the small vessel category where taking an observer is problematic an opportunity to 'opt-in' to the EM selection pool to participate in the EM cooperative research.*
- *NMFS was able to increase coverage rates in 2015 based on carryover of funds, less anticipated effort, and Federal funds. NMFS will continue to explore efficient sampling designs with the constraints of available budgets and anticipated fishing effort in 2016.*
- *There are two aspects of tendering activity that require further analysis: 1) impact on biological sampling for salmon, and 2) the potential for bias.*

Recommendations

- *For 2016, NMFS recommends expanding key performance metrics to improve our understanding of the Observer Program performance.*
- *NMFS staff will consider and identify the best approach to develop a trip identifier tied to landing data to provide linkage between ODDS and eLandings and improve data analysis.*
- *NMFS recommends modifications to ODDS to address in observer coverage and temporal bias exhibited in trip-selection during 2013 and in 2014.*
- *The 2016 ADP should explore defining strata to deploy observers by gear (e.g. fixed gear, and trawl gear) and FMP area (BSAI, GOA).*