

Status of analytical projects related to the Observer Program

Updated January 26, 2017

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 Final 2017 ADP was presented at the December 2016 Council meeting. Preparation of the Annual Report is a major analytical project between January and May 2017. The 2016 Annual Report will be presented at the June 2017 Council meeting.
2	Electronic monitoring research	Fieldwork, research, and planning for developing electronic monitoring technologies. Pre-implementation program for 2017, and in planning for longline and pot vessels >40 ft for 2017. 2017 plan includes research and development of new technologies.	2017 pre-implementation plan is underway. 2016 Observer report will include review of 2016 EM pre-implementation year. Next EM Workgroup meeting planned for March 2017.
3	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.	Update on development of estimation methods for variance and initial results was presented in June 2016 and NMFS is continuing work to incorporate programming into CAS and evaluate alternative estimators and post-strata.
4	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 will be addressed by the Observer Program as an AFSC tech memo and NMFS anticipates presenting information at the OAC meeting in May 2017.
5	Halibut DMRs	Evaluation of appropriate methods to determine halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs) given current observer monitoring and data.	Ongoing analysis by interagency working group. The final DMRs for 2017-2018 were presented to the Council at the December 2016 meeting.
Projects in NMFS Development or Review (Council has taken action or major work at current stage is NMFS's responsibility)			
6	Electronic monitoring integration analysis	Council final action in Dec 2016 on analysis to integrate EM as part of the Observer Program. Preferred alternative includes an option to address monitoring requirements for fishing IFQ in multiple regulatory areas during a trip through EM.	NMFS is developing the proposed rule. Intent is for EM implementation by 2018. EM Workgroup will review the proposed rule once it is published, and provide any comments to the Council.
7	Halibut PSC – deck sorting	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. Once the experimental work is complete, NMFS has indicated that it will likely initiate analysis to implement deck sorting in regulation.	Fishing under the EFP is underway, and will continue through April 2017. Minor changes agreed on by Council, NMFS, and industry for 2017, and NMFS anticipates extending the existing EFP through the end of 2017. NMFS anticipates a new EFP with additional changes for 2018.

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Projects in Council Review (Council or NMFS have tasked staff and scheduled review at a future Council or OAC meeting)			
8	Lead level 2 (LL2) observers	In October 2016, the Council initiated a regulatory analysis of alternatives to reduce the potential for shortages of fixed gear LL2 observers.	Initial review of the analysis is scheduled for April 2017.
9	Observer disembark location	Analyze the proposal that a partial coverage category observer may be disembarked from a vessel in any community with a processor with a FPP or from a community from which the observer boarded the vessel if that community has regularly scheduled air service.	Discussion paper tasked and initial scoping begun, will be further developed as higher priority projects are completed.
10	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 on observer provider insurance requirements in Nov 2016. NOP staff is compiling the workshop proceedings and will update the Council as necessary on the development of national guidance.
11	<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.	No staff have been assigned to work on this project yet.
12	Low sampling rates	After review of the draft 2017 ADP in October 2017, the Council requested that NMFS begin to consider approaches to address low coverage rates, including 1) finding efficiencies within the existing sampling design, and 2) evaluating the observer fee structure.	No staff have been assigned to work on this project yet.
13	ATLAS – Observer data entry and transmission	Discussion paper about observer data entry (ATLAS) and transmission requirements identified several changes to regulations that could resolve overlapping requirements fill gaps to align requirements with existing practices.	Discussion paper presented to the OAC in May 2016. No critical issues were identified, so this project is on hold until higher priority projects are completed or additional information changes its priority.
Proposed projects			
	Evaluation of alternative sampling methods for salmon	Industry is seeking funding to conduct a collaborative study with NMFS to evaluate alternative sampling methods for salmon bycatch in the GOA rockfish fishery.	Proposal for SK funding was submitted in Dec 2016.
	Observer coverage on vessels delivering to tenders	Consider alternatives to improve the ability to randomly deploy observers on catcher vessels delivering to tenders. This may involve rescinding the provision for catcher vessels to make multiple deliveries to a tender on a single trip for purposes of observer coverage or allowing observers to be deployed from tender vessels.	The Council supported NMFS recommendation to deploy observers by tender strata in 2017. This project is on hold until after review of new deployment strata.
	<i>De minimus</i> IFQ	Exempt/release from observer coverage vessels or trips with small amounts of IFQ.	Council considered these actions in February 2014 but did not task staff with further analysis of the issues.
	IFQ fee assessment	Use standardized current annual prices for fee assessment for IFQ rather than standardized prices lagged one year.	