

Status of analytical projects related to the Observer Program

Updated December 1, 2016

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 will be 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 integration analysis	Analysis tasked to integrate EM as part of the Observer Program. In Oct 2016, the Council selected a preferred alternative and also added an option to address monitoring requirements for fishing IFQ in multiple regulatory areas during a trip by evaluating EM as an alternative to an observer for compliance monitoring on such trips.	Analysis released for public review in November 2016, Council final action scheduled for December 2016. EM Workgroup will provide recommendations based on their November 2016 meeting. If the Council recommends a proposed action, it will be moved to the top of the list of priorities for actions listed below in "NMFS Development."
3	Electronic monitoring research	Fieldwork, research, and planning for developing electronic monitoring technologies. Pre-implementation program is completed for 2016, and in planning for longline and pot vessels >40 ft for 2017. 2017 plan includes research and development of new technologies and scoping for <40 ft vessels.	In October 2016, the Council approved the draft 2017 pre-implementation plan developed by the EM Workgroup. Pre-installations for 2017 are underway, and the Workgroup finalized the plan at their November 2016 meeting.
4	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.
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 will be presented to the Council at the December 2016 meeting.
6	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 it being available in June 2017.
Projects in NMFS Development or Review (Council has taken action or major work at current stage is NMFS's responsibility)			
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, the Council has indicated that it will likely initiate analysis to implement deck sorting in regulation.	Fishing under the 2016 EFP application began in May 2016 and will continue through April 2017. NMFS continues to work with the fleet and EFP permit holder on implementation issues as they arise. A new EFP application is expected that may result in further refinements for methods to test in 2017 and 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	GOA trawl bycatch	Implementation planning and analysis for catch monitoring and observer coverage requirements for transferable halibut and salmon PSC allocations, including for vessels delivering to tenders.	Discussion paper was presented in June 2016. The Council will review a preliminary analysis at the December 2016 Council meeting.
9	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 tentatively scheduled for April 2017.
10	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.
11	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, Nov 8-9 in Washington DC. NOP staff will compile the workshop proceedings and update the Council as necessary on the development of any national level guidance.
12	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 allowance for catcher vessels to make multiple deliveries to a tender on a single trip for purposes of observer coverage or revising regulations to allow observers to be deployed from tender vessels.	The Council supported NMFS recommendation to deploy observers by tender strata in 2017. Determine next steps after review of new deployment strata.
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 necessitates a change in 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 funding will be submitted in Dec 2016.
	<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.	