

Status of analytical projects related to the Observer Program

Updated November 30, 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. EM pre-implementation was included in the 2016 Annual Report and EM has been integrated into the 2018 ADP.	Preparation of the ADP is a major analytical project between June and December 2017. NMFS will notify the Council of any changes in the 2018 final ADP in December.
2	Logistics for electronic monitoring implementation	Work on this project involves many aspects of EM implementation including reprogramming ODDS; programming the Catch Accounting System to ensure that EM data can be used in catch estimation; developing the Vessel Monitoring Plan template and approval process, etc.	This is a major project for NMFS for the remainder of 2017 and early 2018. Programming is underway to ensure that the EM option is fully implemented by 2018 and the VMP approval process is starting.
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 will be presented in June 2018 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 was presented to the OAC in May 2017, and an AFSC tech memo is expected by the end of the year.
5	Average weight of halibut wastage	Analysis of impact 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.
6	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. DMRs for 2018-2019 were presented to the Plan Teams and at the October Council meeting.
7	ODDS programming changes for cancelled trips	A programming change that has been identified in the Annual Reports to improve data quality: when an observed trip is cancelled the next trip taken is automatically observed rather than the next logged trip	This modification to ODDS cannot happen until after the work to incorporate EM is completed. NMFS will then consider whether this is feasible for 2019.
8	Fixed gear vessels that also fish trawl in EM pool	There are vessels that fish both fixed gear and trawl that would like the option to opt into the EM selection pool. At this time, NMFS is unable to accommodate this option due to how EM infrastructure is built.	Making this change would not be a large analytical project, but would require programming changes to both ODDS and CAS. No staff have been assigned to work on this project yet.

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Projects in NMFS Development or Review (Council has taken action or major work at current stage is NMFS's responsibility)			
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.	The Council took final action in June 2017. NMFS is developing a proposed rule that is expected to publish this winter.
10	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.	NMFS has received a new EFP application for 2018/2019; Council reviewed in October and NMFS is working to issue the permit. NMFS has also begun work on an analysis to implement deck sorting in regulation (see #12 below).
11	Evaluation of alternative sampling methods for salmon	A collaborative study between industry and NMFS to evaluate alternative sampling methods for salmon bycatch in the GOA rockfish fishery.	SK funding was received in Summer 2017. NMFS staff began initial scoping work in preparation for field work in the 2018 fishing season.
12	Halibut deck sorting – regulatory analysis	In April 2017, NMFS informed the Council that the EFP work is approaching the stage where an analysis can be initiated to implement deck sorting in regulation.	An update on this Analysis is planned for the Council in April 2018.
13	Observer Program Standard Prices	Annually, NMFS calculates and publishes in the Federal Register the standard prices that will be used to calculate observer fees in the upcoming year.	Work on this project occurs October through December.
Projects in Council Review (Council or NMFS have tasked staff and scheduled review at a future Council or OAC meeting)			
14	Raise the observer fee analysis (and additional considerations to address low selection rates)	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, and should fold in other analytical considerations as raised by the OAC Subgroup during the summer of 2017. These include developing reference points to evaluate what level of observer coverage is needed, and consideration of how changes to the zero selection pool and strategic use of EM may improve program efficiency.	An update on and outline of this analysis will be provided to the Council in February 2018.
15	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 provided an update to the OAC in May 2017 and will publish a tech memo. Staff will evaluate specific regulatory and analytical tasks after the tech memo is published.
16	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. No staff have been assigned to work on this project yet.

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<i>Projects in Council Review continued</i>			
17	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.	In June 2017, the Council approved a staff recommendation to change the alternatives to better meet the Council intent. Initial scoping has begun, but no staff have yet been assigned to work on this project.
18	<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.	Demographic data have been prepared for this evaluation over the summer of 2017, but no staff have been assigned to work on this project yet.
19	Full retention on AFA Pollock CVs with EM compliance	AFA catcher vessels have applied for funding and are interested in an EFP to evaluate EM for compliance and reduce or replace at-sea observers in the BSAI Pollock fishery.	The Council will review EM priorities in February 2018.
20	Full retention on WGOA pollock trawl CVs with EM compliance	In October 2017, the Council expressed long-term support for a project to develop a full retention requirement, using EM for compliance, in the Western GOA pollock fisheries, to facilitate dockside monitoring of Chinook salmon.	The Council will review EM priorities in February 2018.