

**DRAFT SSC MINUTES**  
**October 4, 2018**

**C3 – Observer Program 2019 Annual Deployment Plan**

The SSC heard a presentation from Craig Faunce (NMFS-AFSC), Phil Ganz (PSMFC), and Jennifer Ferdinand (NMFS-AFSC) providing an overview of the draft 2019 Annual Deployment Plan (ADP) for observers in the BSAI and the GOA to support the estimation of groundfish catches, discards, PSC, and related biological attributes. Public testimony was provided by Dan Falvey (ALFA) and Molly Zaleski (Oceana).

The SSC thanks the analysts and authors of the draft 2019 ADP for their hard work and diligence in preparing the report. It is concise and well written, resulting in an easy-to-understand, readable document. The appendices were very helpful in providing technical background for the analyses and recommendations made in the report. Since initiation of the restructured observer program in 2013, the analysts have been very responsive to SSC comments and recommendations for improving the ADP and the observer program. The SSC greatly appreciates the tremendous amount of work that has been done to develop and implement these improvements. The newly revised program has matured significantly in the last two years with respect to current use of trip-based selection, gear-based stratification, and standardized methods of ADP development and observer program performance evaluation. These enormous improvements reflect the hard work and dedication of the analysts, observers and their supervisors, and reviewers of the program.

The SSC has the following comments and recommendations concerning the draft 2019 ADP:

- The agency recommendation to continue use of the five strata for partially observed trips in 2019 is a good one, with the choice of strata reflecting differences in catch and PSC characteristics of gears and whether trips or tendered or not. **The SSC agrees with the recommendation for continued use of these five strata for partially observed fleets.**
- Despite the continued positive evolution of this program and responsiveness to requests from the SSC, several aspects of the draft ADP continue to have unresolved issues that the SSC has discussed in prior years. All of the issues are related to use of available funds, the assumptions made in analysis of allocation of trips, and the breadth of various allocation scenarios available for review by the Council. Although largely discussed by the analysts in consultation with the Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee (FMAC) and in the analysts' presentation at the SSC meeting, these items are not contained in the written draft ADP that the SSC received. Specifically:
  - The analysis of optimization in the draft ADP is not all that helpful to reviewers because of the assumption of effort levels anticipated in 2019. The most recent year available is 2017 and there is good reason to believe that effort in 2019 may not be at the levels observed in 2017. Using 2017 effort in the allocation analysis expends all available funds in exerting the 15% sample rate across all strata, so that optimization could not be used to adjust sampling rates beyond 15%.
  - Although use of gear-specific hurdles was suggested by the SSC last year and graphics were supplied to investigate gear-specific hurdles in this year's draft ADP, no scenarios were developed for review to look at how a reduction in hurdle of one gear might benefit the sampling rates and estimation of discards and PSC, particularly of Chinook and halibut

in the other gear strata. Gains in precision of PSC might be made if these tradeoffs could be brought forward for review in the draft ADP. For example, a scenario with one stratum set to 10% instead of 15% (pot gear would probably be best based on the graphical analysis) to see how a reallocation of trips would affect sampling rates and probabilities of adequate coverage and PSC estimation. The SSC notes that the FMAC saw an example of such a scenario at their recent meeting and the analysts also presented this information to the SSC at the meeting.

- While the draft ADP recommends allocating any additional trips (either due to additional funds or lower effort, or both) with optimization based on discards, and Chinook, halibut, and crab PSC, it does not provide any scenarios of what the realized sampling rates could reasonably be if additional trips were made available. For example, scenarios of 10% or 20% less effort than 2017 could be provided for review with respect to changes in sampling rates among strata. The FMAC received an example of such a scenario at their recent meeting and we saw an example of such a scenario in the presentation by the analysts at the SSC meeting.
- Based on the trip allocation analyses in the draft ADP, **the SSC suggests that optimization be based on Chinook and halibut PSC, those PSC species that are subject to constraining limits in fisheries, rather than optimization based on Chinook, halibut, and crab.** While the SSC requested that crab be looked at in the optimization, in the end the SSC doubts that adding crab to the optimization will change the realized sampling rates very much for the most critical strata if additional trips are made available for allocation. To this end, the draft ADP should include a comparison of scenarios that utilize additional trips, as this could help reviewers in assessing the tradeoffs in sampling rates among strata involved with optimization based on just Chinook and halibut PSC, or Chinook, halibut and crab PSC. We saw such an example in the presentation given to the SSC.
- **The SSC recommends adding the aforementioned types of allocation scenarios to the draft ADP.** Adding these to the draft ADP report would provide more information to the reviewers and provide more context for the agency-recommended allocation approach. The SSC greatly appreciates the work of the FMAC in requesting these additional scenarios and the analysts for bringing these additional scenarios forward for review by the SSC.
- The SSC remains concerned about funding levels for the observing program as these data are foundational to the stock assessments and PSC analyses that utilize these estimates, as well as Council decision making. If funding levels were to be reduced, it is likely that many of the PSC estimates that are critical to Council actions that have occurred for Chinook and ongoing Council actions on halibut would be negatively impacted.
- The SSC notes that when a trip is designated to be observed via ODDS, but is then canceled, the subsequent trip for that vessel inherits the “observed” status. This systematically shifts sampling effort later in the season, generating temporal bias. Recognizing this, a Trip Inheritance Group has been formed by NMFS. The SSC looks forward to the Trip Inheritance Group’s recommendations to resolve this issue.
- In previous minutes the SSC encouraged consideration of vessels under 40 feet to be in the Electronic Monitoring pool. We had requested to see some deployment options brought forward for discussion at this meeting. Acknowledging the Council’s priority for EM research on trawl vessels, the SSC would still like to highlight this as a sampling gap and hopes to see further

discussions about that in the future.

- Another item in the June 2018 SSC minutes that has not yet been addressed was fleet-wide training of crew on the necessity of the observer program. The SSC reiterates that compliance and enforcement issues remain a problem within the observer program that are contributing to bias, fluctuate substantially among years, and may be substantially underreported for a variety of social and safety reasons. This was highlighted as a critical need to be addressed immediately.