



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910
THE DIRECTOR

Mr. Simon Kinneen, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 W. 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501-2252

RECEIVED
DEC 27 2018
DEC 19 2018

Dear Mr. Kinneen:

Thank you for your letter regarding the need for additional funds to support supplemental observer days in the partial observer coverage category of the Alaska groundfish and Pacific halibut fisheries. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) strongly supports the goal of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to support reliable and scientifically valid observer coverage for vessels in all coverage categories. We encourage the Council to consider all potential options to secure the necessary funding to achieve its desired coverage rate over the long term, and recognize the Council is exploring options to raise the vessel landing fee, which is the primary source of funds to purchase observer sea days.

NMFS provided approximately \$7.5M in FY 2018 funds to the Alaska Fisheries Science Center for the North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer Program. These funds paid for additional sea days on the current service contract to meet the observer coverage objectives detailed in the 2018 and 2019 Annual Deployment Plan and for infrastructure costs. Additionally, we also provided the Center with nearly \$800K to support research and development and expand infrastructure resources.

NMFS also provided over \$1.5M in FY 2018 to continue implementation of electronic monitoring (EM) in the Alaska fixed gear groundfish and halibut (partial coverage) fisheries, reprogram the Observer Declare and Deploy System to incorporate the recently regulated EM option for the fixed gear fleet, and continue EM research and development. In 2019, more than 150 vessels will participate in the partial coverage program using EM.

NMFS is unable at this time to allocate funding as requested. Once we have an FY 2019 budget enacted and are able to better assess any possibility of supplemental funding, we will have more information. Please contact Liz Chilton, NOP Coordinator, if you have additional questions about the timeline for distribution of NOP funds and the reapportionment process.

Sincerely,

Chris Oliver

THE ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR
FOR FISHERIES

