



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

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

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Dear Mr. Hull:

Thank you for your letter regarding funds to pay for at-sea deployment for vessels subject to partial observer coverage in the Alaska groundfish and Pacific halibut fisheries. We strongly support 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, including revisiting the current 1.25% fee assessment.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) provided approximately \$7,108,000 in FY 2017 to the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) for the Alaska Observer Program. These funds are used to pay for infrastructure costs. As I reported to you at the October Council meeting, and in response to requests for additional funds supporting adequate observer coverage in the partial coverage program, NMFS was fortunately able to provide \$350,000 in FY 2017 and \$650,000 in FY 2018 of National Observer Program discretionary funds to supplement the partial coverage categories in North Pacific fisheries.

We also provided \$1,500,000 in FY 2017 to the AFSC for implementation of electronic monitoring in the Alaska fixed gear groundfish and halibut (partial observer coverage) fisheries. The intent is to use electronic monitoring data for catch estimation for these fleets.

Since March 2017 the National Observer Program has been exploring a priority-based resourcing approach to strengthen the connection between strategic planning, performance, and budget allocation. The approach will be developed in the context of increasing financial pressures on base resources due to inflationary costs, specifically directed funding, and corporate costs while managing relatively level funding and competing demands from all regional observer programs. The National Observer Program Advisory Team, including AFSC and Alaska Regional Office staff, is working this year to develop an improved apportionment process for FY 2018. We would be happy to provide an update on our progress early next year.

I appreciate your interest in this matter.

Sincerely,

Chris Oliver

Chris Oliver

