

**Lead Level 2 Update**  
Observer Advisory Committee Meeting  
September 18-19, 2015

**Background**

During the summer of 2014 some issues arose with the availability of lead level 2 (LL2) observers for the catcher processor longline fleet. In November 2014 NMFS met with the Freezer Longline Coalition (FLC) and observer providers to consider non-regulatory actions to address the shortage of LL2 certified observers available for deployment on the freezer longline fleet. This meeting was a follow up to the Council motion in October 2014 directing industry to convene on the issue and to consider steps available to move forward (*Appendix 1*).

**Agency Actions to Address LL2 Shortage**

Following the meeting with FLC and observer providers NMFS took several steps to address the LL2 shortage:

- Sampling credit: Currently, an observer will achieve LL2 status by meeting these requirements as stipulated in the regulations (50 CFR §679.53):
  - Successfully complete 60 days of observer data collection,
  - Receive an evaluation by NMFS for the most recent deployment that indicates the observer's performance met Observer Program expectation standards for that deployment,
  - Successfully complete 2 cruises of at least 10 days each, and
  - Sample at least 30 sets of fixed gear.
- On February 3, 2015 the Observer Program issued a policy that modified the process of crediting voluntary second observers on CP longliners for hauls sampled<sup>1</sup>. Within the FMA policy, credit will be given for a sampled set if at least one sample on a haul is completed, and the LL2 trainee has completed the other responsibilities associated with the experience as outlined in the memo (*Appendix 2*).
- Revised random sample tables (RST) for observers on CP longliners: The Observer Program recognized that one of the challenges of retaining experienced LL2 observers was the workload associated with deploying as the sole observer aboard a CP longliner. The existing random sample tables proved to be a challenge for a sole observer due to the nature of longline gear deployment with very long sets and haulback sometimes exceeding of 12 hours. Revised RST designed specifically for CP longliners were provided to observers in early 2015.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that this policy was not intended to prevent LL2 observers from being certified through the normal LL2 process aboard trawlers. Specifically, the additional training requirements were intended for newly certified observers deploying on CP longliners with the intent of achieving a LL2 certification on a 30 day trip.

- Debriefing backlog: The observer program has been taking steps to reduce the debriefing backlog.
  - The Observer Program held a Value Stream Mapping training exercise to document the steps in the debriefing process aimed at identifying bottlenecks in the process.
  - Progress has been made in decreasing debriefing times for partial coverage observers and additional steps are being taken to decrease full coverage debriefing times.
  
- Tracking the status of LL2 observers: The Observer Program has been tracking the number of LL2 observer being certified (*Appendix 3*).
  - Number of C/P longliners each provider covered each year. Some providers covered the same vessel in the same year.
  - Number of LL2 observers each provider had by year.
  - Number of newly generated LL2 observers each provider generated each year.

### **Industry and Observer Provider Actions to Address LL2 Shortage**

In addition to the agency's non-regulatory actions, the Council motion encouraged industry and observer providers to take steps to address the LL2 shortage including: (1) The owners of the FLC vessels send letters to their vessels reaffirming the vessel responsibilities to the observer and company policy on treatment of observers. The FLC vessels will continue to voluntarily take a second observer for training purposes as space and scheduling allows. (2) The observer providers consider incentives that would facilitate retention of trained LL2 observers including (but not limited to): increased pay; variation in deployment scheduling between trawl and fixed gear vessels; contract length; as well suggestions on encouraging a work place environment to which the observers would be more likely to return.

Several steps have been taken to address the Council recommendations and will be reported to the OAC by the FLC and observer providers.

### **Next Steps**

In June 2014, the Council tasked a discussion paper to look at regulatory and non-regulatory solutions to LL2 observer qualification requirements. Additional Council direction on non-regulatory solutions was provided in October 2014. No specific staff are currently tasked to complete an analysis of regulatory amendments, and the LL2 issue is listed as a proposed project on the Status of analytical projects related to the Observer Program. There are several issues to consider in moving forward with a regulatory amendment.

- Is there a continuing shortage of LL2 observers and is shortage acute enough that a regulatory fix is still required?
- If a regulatory fix is required what level of priority should it be given on the list of observer program priorities?
- What staff resources are available?
- What is the timeline for a regulatory amendment?

## **Appendix 1: LL2 Observer motion – October 2014 Council Meeting**

The Council recognizes that there is a shortage of Lead Level 2 (LL2) observers for deployment on CP hook-and-line vessels. In order to provide and maintain a viable observer pool, there is a need to ensure that there is a sufficient training opportunity for new LL2 observers as well as consideration of incentives to retain existing trained LL2 observers.

Resolution of this issue may require non-regulatory actions in the near term. There may be a need for a future discussion paper to analyze options that would require regulatory amendment.

Successful resolution of this issue in the near term will require a cooperative effort from NMFS, the Freezer Longline Coalition, and the observer providers. The Council strongly encourages the FLC and observer providers to meet and collectively work together to resolve this issue. The Council requests that a representative from the NMFS Observer Program should be in attendance at the work session in order to assist the parties in arriving at solutions. The work group should consider (but are not limited to) the following recommendations:

- 1.) The owners of the FLC vessels send letters to their vessels reaffirming the vessel responsibilities to the observer and company policy on treatment of observers. The FLC vessels will continue to voluntarily take a second observer for training purposes as space and scheduling allows.
- 2.) The observer providers consider incentives that would facilitate retention of trained LL2 observers including (but not limited to): increased pay; variation in deployment scheduling between trawl and fixed gear vessels; contract length; as well suggestions on encouraging a work place environment to which the observers would be more likely to return.

In addition to the work group considerations, the Council recommends that NMFS investigate training and deployment requirements and non-regulatory changes that may assist in increasing the pool of available LL2 qualified observers. NMFS should also determine what changes are required to be able to deploy trawl LL2 observers on fixed gear vessels in the event a longline trained LL2 observer is not available.

## Appendix 2. NMFS policy on LL2 crediting for sampled hauls.



*UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE*  
*National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Alaska Fisheries Science Center  
Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division  
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Seattle, WA 98115-6349

February 3, 2015

To: All North Pacific Groundfish Observer Providers

From: Chris Rilling, Acting Director  
Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division

Subject: Lead Level 2 Certification Policy

Effective mid-February 2015, FMA will institute a policy within the context of current regulations to credit observers for experience needed to achieve Lead Level 2 (LL2) certification on fixed gear vessels. The NMFS goal with the LL2 regulatory requirements is to ensure that observers deployed to LL2 assignments have the skills and abilities necessary to complete this job successfully which results in the collection of quality data.

Currently, an observer will achieve LL2 status by meeting these requirements as stipulated in the regulations (50 CFR §679.53):

- Successfully complete 60 days of observer data collection,
- Receive an evaluation by NMFS for the most recent deployment that indicates the observer's performance met Observer Program expectation standards for that deployment,
- Successfully complete 2 cruises of at least 10 days each, and
- Sample at least 30 sets of fixed gear.

Within the FMA policy, credit will be given for a sampled set if at least one sample on a haul is completed, *and* the LL2 trainee has completed the other responsibilities associated with the experience as outlined below:

- Provider must identify individuals intended to deploy as LL2 trainees before completion of any briefing or training; FMA must be notified prior to deployment to vessel,
- LL2 trainee must complete additional training as directed by FMA, in conjunction with the one-day or four-day briefing prior to deployment as a LL2 trainee,

- Successfully complete trip and haul level duties as defined in training (such as, but not limited to; designing sample frames, verifying total gear on vessel, completing hook counts, successfully managing the overall work load, and documenting their work in their log-book),
- The LL2 trainee will be responsible for all data collected during a deployment as a LL2 trainee, which will be presented in debriefing,
- LL2 trainee must successfully complete a midcruise prior to their first trip as the sole observer if LL2 status will be awarded during deployment,
- Attend a pre-cruise meeting with FMA staff prior to the first deployment as the sole LL2 observer, and
- To the extent possible, re-deploy new LL2 observers onto the same vessel that they achieved their needed experience on.

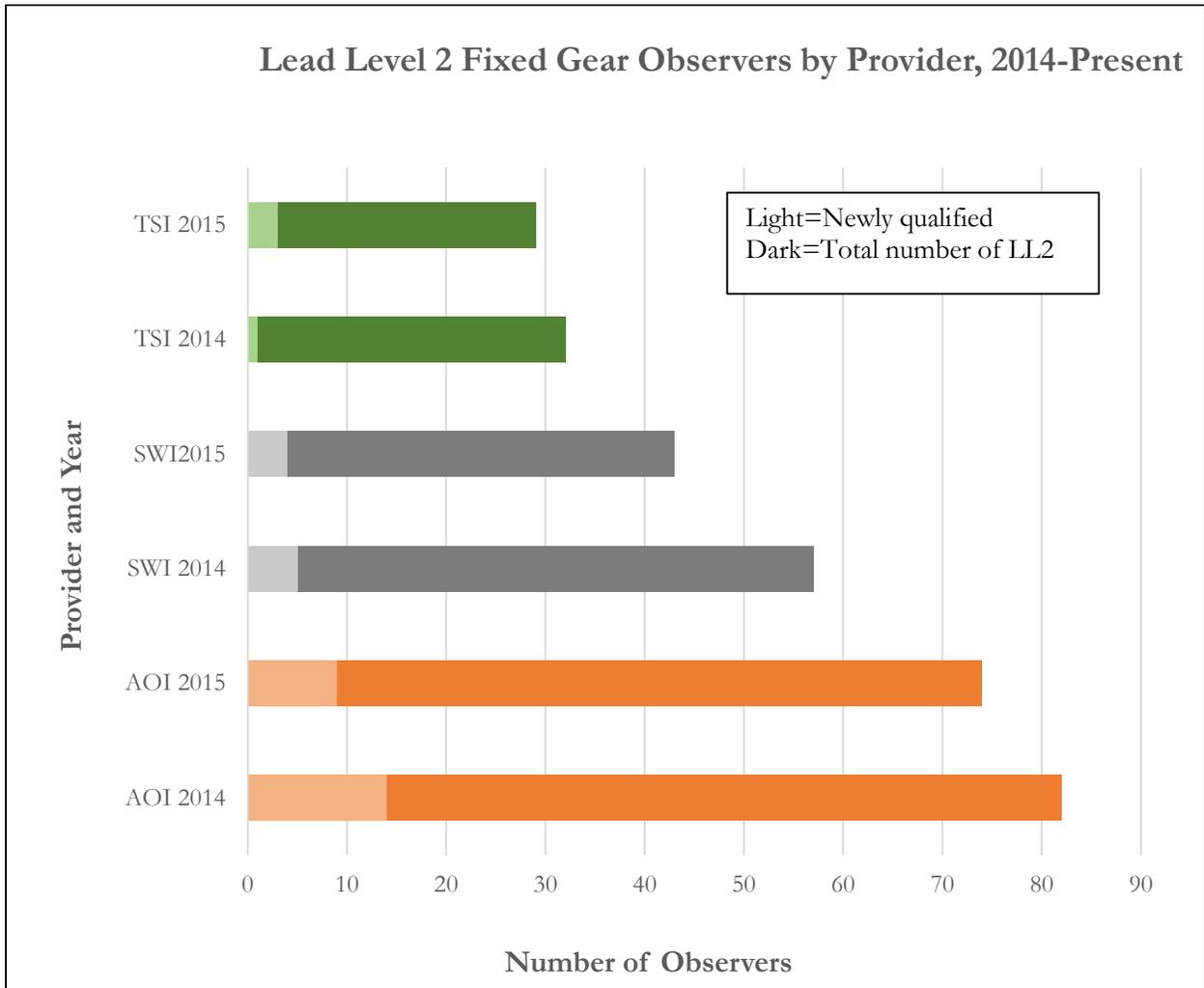
This policy will achieve the goal of ensuring that observers on LL2 assignments are fully prepared for the responsibilities required to collect quality data, while minimizing the cost and workload associated with achieving the requisite experience. The FMA Division plans to monitor how well this approach is working, and we reserve the right to modify the policy if this approach does not provide quality data.

Thank you for your support in this matter. Our experience is that the vast majority of the observers who work in Alaska do an excellent job, and our efforts are geared to helping them be prepared so they can be successful in the challenging longline sampling environment.

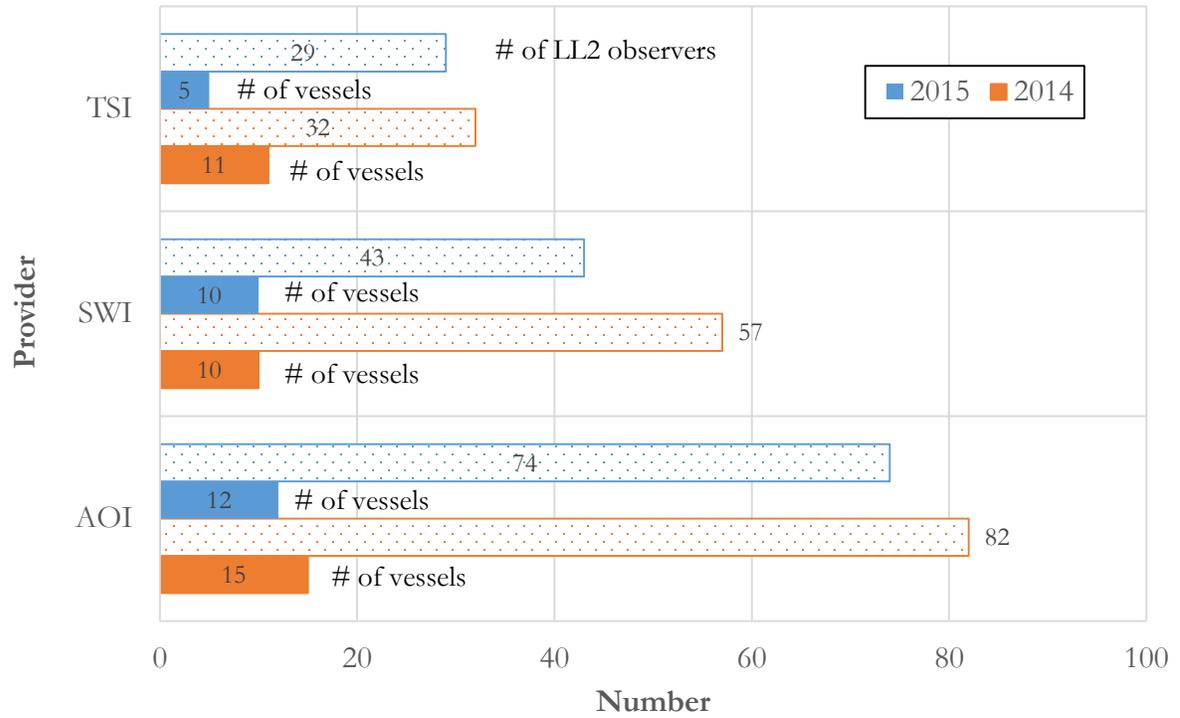
If you have any questions regarding, please contact myself at (206) 526-4194 or Gwynne Schnaittacher at (206) 526-4674.

CC: Elizabeth Chilton  
Brian Mason  
Gwynne Schnaittacher  
Lisa Thompson

**Appendix 3. Number of LL2 observers by provider 2014-2015.**



### Number of Catcher-Processor Vessels and Lead Level 2 Observers by Provider and by Year



### Number of Catcher-Processor Longline Vessels Covered by Each Provider By Year

