Observer Advisory Committee – Meeting Report
April 1, 2013
Dillingham/Katmai Room, Hilton Hotel, Anchorage, AK
3 pm – 10 pm

Committee: Dan Hull (Chair), Bob Alverson, Jerry Bongen, Julie Bonney, Dan Falvey, Kathy Hansen, Michael Lake, Todd Loomis, Paul MacGregor, Brent Paine, David Polushkin, Anne Vanderhoeven. **Not present**: Kenny Down, Joe Rehfuss (at sea), Darren Stewart.

Agency Staff[1]: Diana Evans, Chris Oliver (NPFMC); Martin Loefflad, Farron Wallace, Michael Vechter, Nick Thom, Paul Wilkins (NMFS FMA); Glenn Merrill, Mary Furuness, Rachel Baker, Josh Keaton (NMFS AKR); Nathan Lagerwey (NMFS Enforcement); Susan Auer (NOAA GC - Enforcement); Nicole Kimball, Cora Campbell (ADFG), Gregg Williams (International Pacific Halibut Commission).

Other attendees included: JoAnn Alvarez, Linda Behnken, Heather Brandon, Tim Carroll, Sam Cotton, Craig Cross, Jason Dean, Ed Dersham, Jeff Farvour, Paul Gronholdt, Kent Helligso, John Henderschedt, Rhonda Hubbard, David Long, Dorothy Lowman, Brian Lynch, Tracy Mayhew, Chuck McCallum, Liz Mitchell, Becca Robbins-Gisclair, Herman Squartsoff, Lori Swanson, Shawna Thoma, Matt Upton, Ernie Weiss, Elizabeth Wiley.

Agenda

I. Introductions, review agenda
II. Update on implementation of observer restructuring
III. Update on national electronic monitoring initiatives
    a. Pacific Council EM workshop
    b. NMFS HQ EM papers and CCC discussion
IV. Electronic monitoring strategic plan - outline
    a. Presentation of EM strategic plan outline
    b. Public comment
    c. Discussion and recommendations
V. Scheduling & other issues

1 Introductions and agenda

Introductions were made, and the agenda was approved. The Chair identified the two tasks that the Council provided for this meeting: to review the draft outline of the NMFS EM strategic plan, and to receive an update on implementation of the restructured observer program for the current year.

2 Update on implementation of observer restructuring

Martin Loefflad provided an update on the implementation of the new program, focusing on operations to date in the trip selection and vessel selection pools. He also reported about the agency's training and outreach activities, and the impacts of sequestration on hiring for the program. The Committee had various questions of clarification.

[1] NPFMC – North Pacific Fishery Management Council; NMFS FMA – Fishery Monitoring and Assessment division at the National Marine Fisheries Service's Alaska Fisheries Science Center; NMFS AKR – NMFS Alaska Region; NOAA GC – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration General Counsel; ADFG – Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

3 Update on national electronic monitoring initiatives

Pacific Council EM workshop

Various members of the OAC attended the Pacific Council's EM workshop, held at the end of February. It was noted that the Pacific Council is dealing with many of the same issues with implementing EM as the North Pacific, although they are trying to address different fishery objectives. The workshop was a good example of a collaborative process among all industry and agency stakeholders.

NMFS HQ EM papers and CCC discussion

Mr Loefflad updated the Committee on NMFS HQ's release, in late February, of five of six planned white papers on EM, and summarized key findings. The six white papers address the following topics: 1) Analysis of existing EM technologies/programs; 2) Enforcement issues/impediments; 3) Research and development requirements; 4) Re-alignment of management and monitoring; and 5) Funding options; and 6) Legal/confidentiality concerns (not yet released). Chris Oliver noted that the white papers were presented at the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) meeting last month, and provide a good summary of the current state of EM development and associated issues. The CCC will form a subgroup to provide input to NMFS as they work on turning the white papers into national policy guidance, with the hope that any guidance will enhance, not constrain, regional efforts.

4 Draft electronic monitoring strategic plan

Presentation of draft EM strategic plan

Farron Wallace and Mr Loefflad gave a presentation of the March 26th draft of the Strategic Plan for EM/ER (electronic monitoring/electronic reporting) in the North Pacific. The plan includes a description of current observer program objectives, and whether EM, as it is currently available, can meet those objectives. The plan also describes the Council's objectives for EM, and efforts that are underway to address those objectives. Largely, Mr Wallace reported that information would be available to assess EM objectives in mid-2014, with the combination of results from the 2013 pilot program, and the performance evaluation of the first year of the restructured program. The Committee questioned whether other information can be used to assess data needs and identify objectives on an earlier timeframe.

The Committee clarified Mr Wallace's intent in comparing an audit compliance monitoring approach (such as is used with EM in Canada), and a sampling/estimation approach (which is currently used in the Alaska human observer program, but not yet in any EM programs). The intent was to clarify the relative merits and challenges of both approaches, about which there has been confusion in the past, and to present these alternative approaches, and their cost effectiveness, as an eventual decision point for the Council with respect to the use of EM in Alaska.

Finally, Mr Loefflad walked through the draft's vision statement, goals and objectives, and strategies and actions related to the objectives. Mr Loefflad noted that NMFS' intent with the strategic plan was to provide a broad perspective on EM/ER, and articulate multi-year goals that would apply across Alaska fisheries. The final section of the plan focuses on implementation, and provides the intersection with the Council's existing EM priority for discard monitoring on the IFQ small boat fleet, and the ongoing work to address that priority, as described by Mr Wallace.

Public Comment

Two people provided public comment on this issue. The issues raised in public comment were subsequently captured in the Committee's discussions and recommendations. One of the Committee members, who could not be present at the meeting, also submitted a written letter.

Committee Discussion and Recommendations

The Committee makes the following recommendations to the Council regarding the draft Strategic Plan for EM/ER.

The OAC recommends the matrix presented in the strategic plan, beginning on page 4, be expanded to include:

1. The list of tools identified in the draft EM roadmap (page 12, EM Fisheries Monitoring Roadmap - attached)
2. The high, medium and low rankings, notations describing handling procedures, and comments describing the integration of various monitoring tools to meet monitoring objectives in the fixed gear IFQ and Pacific cod fisheries similar to those included in the EM Roadmap (page 12).

The Committee commented that the current portrayal of EM capability in the strategic plan's matrix, as compared to the tasks that can be performed by a human observer, does not provide sufficient context about other reporting tools that are also available in an integrated fishery monitoring system. It was noted that a broader understanding of the available tools would help the Council evaluate the strategic uses of EM, in June. The referenced EM Roadmap is not a NMFS document, but is a draft document that was made available during the CCC meeting in late February. The recommendation is intended to reflect that the format of the attached table is a useful way to expand the existing version in the strategic plan; the Committee does not presuppose that the content of the table would necessarily be the same, and understands that in some instances (such as the small boat IFQ fleet), Alaskan data needs (as listed in the rows) have yet to be identified.

The Committee also discussed that the strategic plan for EM needs to include information to allow the Council to specifically identify monitoring objectives for EM. The Council may reaffirm its existing objective (discard monitoring on the IFQ fleet 40-57.5 ft), or may wish to identify different objectives. Including a discussion of the known data needs for different Alaska fisheries (e.g., data needs for the stock assessment program, or other observer program clients) would allow the Council to better determine appropriate objectives, which could then lead directly to a strategic choice of the appropriate combination of monitoring activities and EM/ER tools to meet those objectives. The Committee noted the interrelationship of these data needs with potential elements that may be reported to the Council in the June 2013 performance evaluation.

The OAC recommends the following changes to the vision statement on page 7 (new text is underlined):

> A future where electronic monitoring and reporting technologies are integrated into NMFS Alaskan fisheries dependent data collection systems, where applicable, to ensure that scientists, managers, policy makers, and industry are informed with fishery dependent information that <u>meets fishery specific data needs, is</u> relevant to policy priorities, of high quality, available when needed, and is obtained in a cost effective manner <u>that is designed to minimize economic and social impacts to the vessel</u>.

The Committee discussed whether the vision statement should remain focused specifically on EM/ER, or be expanded to recognize that EM/ER is part of a diverse suite of tools in an integrated observer program. The Committee chose to have the vision statement remain focused, in part to avoid slowing down the impetus to move forward with implementation of EM.

The OAC recommends that a tactical strategy appendix be added to the strategic plan identifying the following decision points for Council consideration:

1. Regulatory options, EFPs, voluntary participation in pilot programs, and regulatory changes with their associated timelines
2. Funding options
3. Strawman alternatives, describing alternative timelines and implementation schedules
4. The more detailed description on how workplans and experimental designs for pilot program phases and design elements affecting cost effectiveness will be developed, reviewed, and coordinated with stakeholders.

The Committee would like the strategic plan to explicitly identify decision points for the Council with respect to the cost effectiveness of EM choices, the different pathways that could be taken to achieve them, the process to ensure that the data resulting from these choices will be credible, and different timing options for when these decisions might be made (including what information would be available to the Council with respect to these decisions at different times). The Committee had a brief discussion about the regulatory process for EFPs in Alaska (which is different than that in other regions). It was noted that many of the requested items relate more to deployment of EM, rather than strategic goals, and the Committee noted that these items could also appropriately be addressed in the final section of the document, "Implementing the strategic plan", beginning on page 13, rather than as an appendix.

The OAC would like to reaffirm the sense of urgency, and the need to move EM ahead, as an alternative to human observers, and part of the integrated observer program.

5 Scheduling

The Committee discussed the need for and timing of future OAC meetings. The Chair suggests that the next OAC meeting should be in conjunction with the June 2013 Council meeting, to review the draft EM strategic plan, and also provide comment on the 2013 performance evaluation of the program. The meeting could either be during the meeting (likely Sunday or Monday), or the week before, depending on when documents are available for review, and may need to be two days. The Chair also recommends holding an OAC meeting in September, once the 2014 Annual Deployment Plan has been released, to provide recommendations for the Council discussion in October.

The Committee also discussed what the appropriate process should be for soliciting and reviewing potential regulatory amendments to the restructured program. The Committee did not feel that a formal call for proposals was required at this time, but noted several potential amendments that have been suggested in public testimony or Council discussion. The Committee suggests that a list of potential amendments be discussed by the OAC in June, for Council consideration, and that a more detailed review of these proposals could then occur at the September OAC meeting.

ABILITY TO MEET DATA NEEDS

	high
	medium
	low
	not applicable

Data Needs	Fishery Characteristics		Independent Monitoring				Self-Reporting	
			Vessel Monitoring System	Camera-based System	At-sea Observers	Dockside Monitoring	Logbooks	Hailing or Notifications
confirm if any catch was discarded	full retention			Requires appropriate camera coverage. Cameras must stay on once catch is onboard.	Requires observer to be present during all catch handling events		Can upgrade this rating if there is incentive to report discards	Ability to notify if any catch was discarded is high. Need incentives to ensure accuracy of data.
Discards: species and amount (count, length or weight)	serial or low volume catch handling			Discards released one at a time in a dedicated location	requires access to catch handling areas		Given experience with the vessel and fishing gear, vessel operators can estimate amount of catch discarded	Logistically, it may be difficult to notify discards for every event.
	high volume catch handling	single target species		Can use bins to approximate volume of catch				Not optimal as a standalone reporting mechanism.
		multi-species		Requires discards to get sorted into bins by species	Speciation is facilitated if the observer can take samples for catch composition or for later identification			
	species difficult to differentiate							
Retained catch: species and amount (count, length or weight)	serial or low volume catch handling			High ability as long as camera is not obstructed			Can upgrade this rating if incentives to report are high.	Not optimal as a standalone reporting mechanism.
	high volume catch handling	single target species		Can use bins to approximate volume of catch				
		multi-species		requires modified catch handling procedures	requires access to catch handling areas			
	species difficult to differentiate			requires modified catch handling procedures				

ABILITY TO MEET DATA NEEDS

	high
	medium
	low
	not applicable

Data Needs	Fishery Characteristics	Independent Monitoring				Self-Reporting	
		Vessel Monitoring System	Camera-based System	At-sea Observers	Dockside Monitoring	logbooks	Hailing or Notifications
spatial information for fishing trip	single management area	will depend upon reporting frequency	Usually integrated with GPS-can show location of gear deployment and retrieval				Stock area fished often declared upon departing and returning to port.
spatial information by fishing event	multiple management zones	can show areas fished, but no catch attribution data		Record fishing location based on vessels GPS			can notify changes in fishing location-catch attribution difficult
details on interactions with protected species	species encountered			Are trained to identify, assess condition, properly handle and release and collect any necessary samples from protected species			
	handling method						
	condition at release						
	discarded or retained				Species retained can be identified and sampled		
	other interactions						
operational details	gear used						
	amount and type of bait						
	economic data						
biological data from catch	length frequency		only for low volume batch with dissimilar species		considerations needed for discarded catch		
	age						
	reproductive condition						