

Status of analytical projects related to the Observer Program

Updated September 8, 2017

Priority	Name	Description	Status / Due Date / Target Date
Program-level Projects			
1	Annual Report/ Annual Deployment Plan	Every year, an Annual Report of the preceding fishing year and an Annual Deployment Plan (ADP) for the upcoming fishing year are prepared. EM pre-implementation was included in the 2016 Annual Report and EM has been integrated into the 2018 ADP.	Preparation of the ADP is a major analytical project between June and December 2017. The 2018 draft ADP will be presented to the OAC in September 2017 and at the October 2017 Council meeting and finalized in December.
2	Logistics for electronic monitoring implementation	Work on this project involves many aspects of EM implementation including reprogramming of the Observer Declare and Deploy System (ODDS) to allow vessels in the EM selection pool to opt in to the EM pool, and to log and be selected for their trips; programming the Catch Accounting System to ensure that EM data can be used in catch estimation; developing the Vessel Monitoring Plan template and approval process, etc	This is a major project for NMFS for the remainder of 2017. Programming is underway to ensure that the EM option is fully implemented by 2018.
3	Analysis of catch and bycatch estimation methods	Ongoing analysis of catch and bycatch estimation methods, including evaluating design-based and ratio estimators; incorporating variance from at-sea sampling through to the trip-level; and then assessing post-strata definitions.	Update on development of estimation methods for variance and initial results was presented in June 2016 and NMFS is continuing work to incorporate programming into CAS and evaluate alternative estimators and post-strata.
4	Report on onboard observer sampling	Report on observer sampling results, e.g., proportion of total hauls that are sampled, by vessel size and gear. This item was requested by the Council in June 2016 during review of the Annual Report.	This report was presented to the OAC in May 2017, and an AFSC tech memo is expected by the end of the year.
5	Average weight of halibut wastage	Analysis of impact of differences in average weights on the final wastage (discard) estimates of halibut in the IFQ fishery. Currently, CAS estimates halibut discard based on mean weight from the unsorted (retained and discarded) catch. Since halibut <32" are required to be discarded, CAS may be overestimating discarded halibut.	In 2016 NMFS modified data collection methods for halibut viability so that it is part of randomized biological sampling. This should facilitate evaluation of average weights and enable NMFS to refine estimation methods. Staff have yet been assigned to this project.
6	Halibut DMRs	Evaluation of appropriate methods to determine halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs) given current observer monitoring and data.	Ongoing analysis by interagency working group. DMRs for 2018-2019 will be presented to the Plan Teams and the Council in the fall.
7	Electronic monitoring research and development	Fieldwork, research, and planning for developing new electronic monitoring (EM) technologies, and extending EM to new fleets.	2017 pre-implementation plan, including research on new technologies, is underway.

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Projects in NMFS Development or Review (Council has taken action or major work at current stage is NMFS's responsibility)			
8	Lead Level 2 (LL2) observers	In October 2016, the Council initiated a regulatory analysis of alternatives to reduce the potential for shortages of fixed gear LL2 observers.	The Council took final action in June 2017. NMFS is developing the proposed rule that is expected to publish this fall.
9	Halibut PSC – deck sorting	Exempted fishing permit (EFP) projects are being used to develop the components of a regulated program to allow deck sorting of halibut on trawl catcher/processors in the Bering Sea to reduce halibut mortality rates.	EFP Fishing will continue through the end of 2017. NMFS has received a new EFP application for 2018; Council will review in October. NMFS has begun work on an analysis to implement deck sorting in regulation (see #12 below).
10	Evaluation of alternative sampling methods for salmon	Industry is seeking funding to conduct a collaborative study with NMFS to evaluate alternative sampling methods for salmon bycatch in the GOA rockfish fishery.	SK funding was received in Summer 2017. NMFS staff began initial scoping work in preparation for continued work in the 2018 fishing season.
Projects in Council Review (Council or NMFS have tasked staff and scheduled review at a future Council or OAC meeting)			
11	Low sampling rates	In October 2017, the Council requested that NMFS begin to consider approaches to address low coverage rates, including 1) finding efficiencies within the existing sampling design, and 2) evaluating the observer fee structure. In May 2017, the OAC recommended further work to scope out potential mitigative actions that can be achieved through the ADP, through changes to the observer contract, or through regulatory change.	A subgroup of the OAC met over the summer to conduct a preliminary evaluation of options to address low coverage rates. The OAC will discuss in September 2017 and provide recommendations for the Council in October.
12	Observer coverage on vessels delivering to tenders	In February 2016, the Council put on hold an analysis of rescinding the provision for catcher vessels to make multiple deliveries to a tender on a single trip for purposes of observer coverage or allowing observers to be deployed from tender vessels in favor of NMFS' recommendation to deploy observers by tender strata in 2017. The 2016 Annual Report identified bias associated with GOA pollock vessels delivering to tenders in the Western GOA.	A scoping paper identifying data concerns and potential solutions was prepared over the summer of 2017. The Council has asked stakeholders to provide input, and the OAC will discuss in September 2017.
13	Halibut deck sorting – regulatory analysis	In April 2017, NMFS informed the Council that the EFP work is approaching the stage where an analysis can be initiated to implement deck sorting in regulation.	NMFS staff have started initial work on an analysis to implement halibut deck sorting in regulation. Much of the analysis and implementation will draw on the ongoing EFP work. An update will be presented to the Council in October.
14	Observer provider insurance requirements	In May 2015, NMFS determined that some observer provider insurance requirements in § 679.52(b)(11)(vi) are inapplicable and should be removed or revised. NMFS National Observer Program (NOP) staff hosted a workshop in Nov 2016.	The NOP provided an update to the OAC in May 2017 and will publish a tech memo by the end of the year. Evaluate specific regulatory and analytical tasks after the tech memo is published.

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15	Observer disembark location	Analyze the proposal that a partial coverage category observer may be disembarked from a vessel in any community with a processor with a FPP or from a community from which the observer boarded the vessel, if that community has regularly scheduled air service.	In June 2017, the Council approved a staff recommendation to change the alternatives to better meet the Council intent. Initial scoping has begun, but no staff have yet been assigned to work on this project.
16	<40' vessels in EM Pool	In December 2016, at the recommendation of the EM Workgroup, the Council requested a discussion paper about incorporating vessels <40' LOA in the EM selection pool.	Demographic data have been prepared for this evaluation over the summer of 2017, but no staff have been assigned to work on this project yet.