



Fish News

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Proposed Changes for the 2015 Observer Program

By Ernie Weiss, Aleutians East Borough Natural Resources Director

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Annual Deployment Plan (ADP) for the Observer program, reviewed each October by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC), calls for significant changes for small vessel participants in the Observer program.

NMFS proposes to use the trip-selection pool only to assign observers to vessels and will no longer use the vessel-selection method for smaller vessels in 2015. Since only single trips will be selected, the proposed method is expected to reduce the impact on smaller vessels.

The proposal calls for two categories within the trip-selection pool. The small vessel trip-selection (small t) pool is comprised of catcher vessels



Observer sampling fish. Photo courtesy: NOAA Fisheries

(CV) that are fishing hook-and-line or pot gear and are greater than or equal to 40 feet, but less than 57.5 feet in length. These vessels were in the “vessel-selection” pool for 2013 & 2014. The other category, the large vessel trip-selection (large T) pool is made up of three classes of vessels: 1) all CVs fishing trawl gear, 2) CVs greater than or equal to 57.5 feet, and 3) catcher-processor vessels exempted from full coverage requirements. These vessels were in the “trip-selection” pool for 2013 and 2014.

The small t pool vessels are likely to be selected for an observer 12% of trips in 2015, the same as in 2014, but large T vessels that were observed in 16% of trips in 2014 can expect to have 24% of trips observed in 2015.

Conditional releases will not be granted to the large T pool vessels in 2015, and only granted to vessels in the small t pool that do not have sufficient life-raft capacity to accommodate an observer. Vessels selected to participate in Electronic Monitoring (EM) Cooperative Research will be in the no selection pool, not subject to observer coverage, while participating in such research.

The NPFMC Observer Advisory Committee (OAC) met last week in Seattle. The OAC would like to see more information from staff about life rafts, conditional release requests & the ODDs system to log trips. The OAC views the 2015 ADP plan for outreach as critical for small vessels. The OAC agreed that insufficient bunk space can be constraining, but not necessarily related to vessel length. Hot-bunking is a term that describes a practice usually reserved for submarine crews in modern times, where crew members share the same bunk in different shifts. When hot-bunking is standard practice on a fishing vessel, an observer is subject to the same standard, a safety concern for all involved.

The draft ADP is available through a link under item C1 of the NPFMC agenda, found here:

http://legistar2.granicus.com/npfmc/meetings/2014/10/894_A_North_Pacific_Council_14-10-06_Meeting_Agenda.pdf



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Meeting Season for Fisheries Management Begins

Autumn marks the beginning of the fisheries management meeting season. The Alaska Board of Fisheries (BoF) and the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) both typically have 5 meetings annually, starting with meetings in October after a 3-month summer break.



The NPFMC will meet at the Anchorage Hilton beginning October 8th. The major item for NPFMC discussion in October is the GOA trawl bycatch management proposal (C7), but Observer Program reports and final action on 2 trailing crab rationalization community protection items are also of interest to the Aleutians East Borough. The NPFMC will also set the ABC/OFL for 7 crab stocks in October. Written comment on any agenda item submitted in the approved format to npfmc.comments@noaa.gov by September 30 will be included in the NPFMC packet. The public may also testify during the meeting.

Here's the schedule for the North Pacific Fishery Management Council during the next five meetings:

Oct 8-14	Anchorage
Dec 10-16	Anchorage
Feb 4-10, 2015	Seattle
April 8-14, 2015	Anchorage
June 3-9, 2015	Sitka

The BoF has their Work Session in Juneau October 15-16 to consider Agenda Change requests to the regular scheduled meeting cycle. The BoF does not take public comment at the work session as they do at their other meetings, but the public may submit written comments before October 1 to be considered for the record. Interested public should submit comments regarding ACRs by October 1 at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=process.comments>
or fax to (907) 465-6094.



The Board of Fisheries 2014/2015 cycle:

Oct 15–16	Juneau	Work Session
Dec 3–8	Cordova	PWS and Upper Copper/Upper Susitna Finfish.
Jan 21–27, 2015	Wrangell	SE and Yakutat Crab, Shrimp, and Misc. Shellfish.
Feb 23–March 3, 2015	Sitka	SE and Yakutat Finfish
March 17–20, 2015	Anchorage	Statewide Dungeness Crab, Shrimp, Misc. Shellfish and Supplemental Issues

There are numerous committee meetings scheduled to help inform the state and federal fisheries management process. The BoF Walleye Pollock Workgroup will meet at the Anchorage Hilton October 6th. The workgroup is looking into the possibility of establishing state-waters pollock fisheries. The NPFMC Observer Committee, Ecosystem Committee, Electronic Monitoring Workgroup, Enforcement committee, Science and Statistical Committee, Advisory Panel, Crab Plan Team and Groundfish Plan Teams will all meet prior to the October NPFMC meeting.

For more info go to <http://www.aebfish.org>

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