

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
OBSERVER PROGRAM

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the report of the Ad-Hoc Observer Program Implementation Committee (Attachment G.7.a.). The committee report outlines a first-year plan for observer coverage in the West Coast groundfish fishery. Fifteen to 20 observers would be deployed at an annual cost of approximately \$2,000,000. The goals and objectives of the program are set forth in the report, and two alternative first-year implementations are suggested. The SSC offers the following comments and recommendations regarding a West Coast groundfish observer program:

- Reliable total catch estimates are critical for both stock assessment and economic analyses. Sampling programs needed to derive these estimates should be an integral part of the routine fisheries data collection infrastructure, resulting in a consistent time series of total catch estimates. Thus, the duration of an observer program, if needed for total catch estimation, should be long-term. There is little advantage to a one-year program, for example, in that startup costs are likely to be greater than benefits derived.
- Clear scientific objectives should be used to guide a statistically valid, cost-effective sampling program.
- An observer program should be viewed as a statistically-based sampling program. Its statistical design should be well thought out in order to achieve clear scientific objectives in a cost-effective manner. Observer coverage and deployment decisions should naturally follow from the statistical design.
- The data from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife pilot observer program should be useful in designing a long-term observer program, e.g., for sampling stratification. Analysis of these data may also be beneficial in choosing between Alternative 1 (focused coverage of mainly the limited-entry trawl fishery) and Alternative 2 (broad, but limited coverage over all fishery sectors) for first-year implementation. Other logical alternatives, consistent with overall design goals, may also emerge from such analysis.
- Once established, an observer program should undergo periodic peer review (say every three to five years) to improve performance, to ensure that original objectives are being met, and to formalize any redesign that may be needed. The Council's Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel framework may be an appropriate model for such periodic review.
- Complementary logbooks (as suggested previously by the Ad-Hoc Total Catch Determination Committee) are supported by the SSC. However, logbook design and implementation should be an integral part of the overall observer program statistical design, including observer coverage, allocation, and deployment issues.

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