

OBSERVER PROGRAM

Situation: In November 1999, the Council reviewed draft regulations to implement a West Coast groundfish observer program presented by the Northwest Region, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). At that time, NMFS indicated the proposed regulatory package, including draft regulatory impact and environmental impact reviews, would be available in April 2000. At this meeting, NMFS will present the draft regulations for Council consideration. In step with development of the regulatory package, the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, NMFS is analyzing results of Oregon's Enhanced Data Collection Project. Preliminary results and implications for observer coverage options will be presented to the Council at this meeting.

NMFS Attachment B.12.a. is a comprehensive package of generic regulations. The purpose of these generic regulations is to set in place the process for deploying at-sea observers. This rule would establish notification requirements for vessels that may be required to carry observers and establish responsibilities and prohibited actions for vessels that are required to carry observers. When funding for a West Coast observer program becomes available, these regulations would be in place to quickly implement an at-sea observer program for groundfish fisheries that land catch shoreside. The draft regulatory package does not pertain to at-sea observers for offshore fisheries, e.g., the at-sea Pacific whiting fishery.

The observer coverage analysis is still in the initial stage and has focused on examining data from Oregon's Enhanced Data Collection Project to determine patterns of bycatch in groundfish fisheries. Results from this analysis will be used to demonstrate the types of information and levels of detail at-sea observer coverage can be expected to provide. NMFS will discuss the results of the initial analysis. Notably, the analysis has provided insight to the informational differences between observer coverage of a small number of vessels over the length of the cumulative limit period and a random sampling of a larger number of vessels throughout the cumulative limit period.

Council Action:

1. **Adopt for public review and publication in the *Federal Register* the draft regulatory package for an at-sea observer program.**

Reference Materials:

1. DRAFT Proposed rule to provide for a West Coast at-sea observer program (NMFS Attachment B.12.a.).
2. DRAFT Environmental assessment/regulatory impact review for a West Coast at-sea observer program (Supplemental NMFS Attachment B.12.b.).

PFMC
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