

**National Marine Fisheries Service  
Science Report to the November 2004 Meeting of the  
Pacific Fishery Management Council**

**Commercial Cost-Earnings Survey of the Limited Entry Trawl Fleet**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), in cooperation with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC), will be conducting a cost-earnings survey of the west coast's limited entry trawl fleet. Data collected by the survey will be used for economic analysis of fisheries management policies.

This survey is needed because existing cost-earnings data are incomplete. Economic analysis of many key issues, such as vessel profitability and fleet efficiency, requires data on both vessel earnings and vessel costs. PacFIN provides excellent data on earnings from landings in Washington, Oregon, and California. However, data are generally not available on other sources of earnings such as landings in Alaska or at-sea deliveries. Cost data is also generally not available. As a result of these data gaps, much of the quantitative economic analysis needed to support sound fisheries management cannot currently be performed.

This survey seeks to minimize the burden on survey respondents while collecting the most essential data needed for economic analysis of fishery management policies. In support of this objective, the survey does not request information that can be reliably obtained from existing data sources. Experience gained from the 1999 limited entry trawl fleet cost-earnings survey has been incorporated into the design of this survey. While the 1999 survey provided data on some vessels, the overall response rate was insufficient for purposes of fleet-wide economic analysis. As a result, the length of this survey is considerably shorter than the 1999 survey. The current survey focuses on collecting four types of data --- information on annual costs for major cost categories, information on annual earnings for major earnings categories not provided by PacFIN, information on vessel characteristics (physical characteristics and fuel usage rates), and crew compensation methods. Information on cost and earnings categories will be collected on an annual rather than seasonal basis in order to minimize the burden on survey respondents.

The survey will contact all owners of commercial fishing vessels that have limited entry permits and trawl gear endorsements. Owners of these vessels will first be contacted by mail. This initial mailing will contain information about the survey as well as the survey questionnaire. This initial mailing will be followed by a telephone call to schedule an in-person interview. Discussions with fleet members have indicated that in-person interviews will yield a higher response rate than mail or telephone interviews. The survey will be fielded during the first quarter of 2005.

The success of this survey depends entirely upon cooperation between industry and science. Over the past decade, the fishing industry has frequently called upon the Council and NMFS to improve the economic analysis of proposed management actions. However, the ability of analysts to predict or document the economic effects of management change is directly dependent upon the reliability and completeness of the data available to them. This is true for major structural shifts, such as implementing Individual Quotas, as well as for more routine management changes. With a sufficient response rate, this survey will greatly improve our ability to provide reliable economic analysis to support sound fisheries management.