

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON
THE NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT

OBSERVER COVERAGE PLAN

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) reviewed and discussed the conclusions presented in the report entitled, "Recommendations for U.S. West Coast Highly Migratory Species Observer Programs with Options for Levels of Significance," which was developed by an independent contractor at the request of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southwest Fisheries Science Center. The report authors reviewed the available data for West Coast HMS fisheries, and provide recommendations on the administration, oversight, and coverage levels for HMS observer programs. The proposed pilot observer programs were developed to provide statistically reliable indices of bycatch to assist managers in selecting coverage levels based on effort, fishery characteristics, and costs; the programs also include alternatives to stratify coverage proportional to fleet effort across port, vessel class, fishing area, season and fishing gear.

Program Administration

The HMSMT had a thorough discussion with Don Peterson, NMFS Southwest Region Observer Program Coordinator, about the administrative recommendations in the report. The HMSMT agrees with the recommendations presented in the report with regard to program administration, funding, observer assignment, and vessel selection; it is our understanding that these recommendations have been adopted and implemented by NMFS:

1. Program Administration – Establish a program utilizing the services of an outside contractor.
2. Program Funding – Observers are supplied by a federal contractor through NMFS.
3. Observer Assignment – Observers are assigned by contractor based on sampling plan.
4. Vessel Selection – The program administrator (NMFS) will randomly select vessels from those not yet observed and assign observers to those vessels until the desired level of coverage for a given fishing season is achieved or maintained.

With regard to program administration, the HMSMT notes that there are some state observer programs currently in place (e.g., California Recreational Fisheries Survey coverage of the California commercial passenger fishing vessel [CPFV] fleet) and recommends that these programs be used to supplement the HMS observer programs as much as possible.

Regarding the duration of observer coverage, it is our understanding that vessels will be required to carry an observer on a per trip basis. However, we want to ensure that the observed trip is as representative of effort occurring in non-observed trips as much as possible. To minimize changes in vessel effort when observed, a minimum number of sets (5) was used to determine the duration of individual vessel coverage in the drift gillnet fishery. The HMSMT recommends a similar approach for other HMS fisheries, based on an average number of sets per trip (which can be calculated using logbook and/or previous observer information).

Coverage Levels

The HMSMT agrees with the recommended coverage levels proposed in the report, with the exception of the pelagic longline fishery. The report recommends a 20% coverage level of the longline fishery; however, currently, this fishery is covered at 100%. The HMSMT recommends keeping the current coverage level in effect for both pelagic longline (100%) and drift gillnet (20%), and approving the proposed coverage levels for coastal purse seine (100%), albacore troll (5%), CPFV in southern California (10%), and albacore charterboats coastwide (20%) as coverage level goals; the HMSMT recognizes that, particularly at the outset of these programs, optimum coverage levels may not be achieved due to funding constraints. The HMSMT also agrees with the stratification recommendations in the report.

CPFV/CHARTER LOGBOOK PROGRAM

The HMSMT reviewed the current California CPFV logbook and the voluntary Washington charterboat logbook to develop a draft logbook for Oregon and Washington charterboats. The HMSMT recommends keeping the current California CPFV logbook for California HMS fisheries; however, the format and contents of this logbook provides for more information than what is needed from the Northwest HMS charterboat fisheries. Therefore, the HMSMT used the voluntary Washington logbook as a starting point and added some data fields to collect additional information for potential use in future HMS management. A draft logsheet is presented in Attachment 1. The HMSMT recommends using this draft in 2005; additional revisions may be made prior to the 2006 season.

PFMC
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