

Problem statement and alternatives for an FMP amendment to establish a new program for observer funding and deployment in the NPGOP

Updated as of June 8, 2005

Problem Statement

The North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program (Observer Program) is widely recognized as a successful and essential program for management of the North Pacific groundfish fisheries. However, the Observer Program faces a number of longstanding problems that result primarily from its current structure. The existing program design is driven by coverage levels based on vessel size that, for the most part, have been established in regulation since 1990. The quality and utility of observer data suffer because coverage levels and deployment patterns cannot be effectively tailored to respond to current and future management needs and circumstances of individual fisheries. In addition, the existing program does not allow fishery managers to control when and where observers are deployed. This results in potential sources of bias that could jeopardize the statistical reliability of catch and bycatch data. The current program is also one in which many smaller vessels face observer costs that are disproportionately high relative to their gross earnings. Furthermore, the complicated and rigid coverage rules have led to observer availability and coverage compliance problems. The current funding mechanism and program structure do not provide the flexibility to solve many of these problems, nor do they allow the program to effectively respond to evolving and dynamic fisheries management objectives.

Alternatives

- Alternative 1.** No action (existing pay-as-you-go program expires Dec. 31, 2007).
- Alternative 2.** Permanent rollover of existing program with no change to the service delivery model
- Alternative 3.** New ex-vessel value fee program for GOA groundfish (vessels and processors) and all halibut vessels (BSAI and GOA). Rollover of existing program in BSAI.
- Alternative 4.** New ex-vessel value fee program for all Tier 3 and 4 fisheries (less than 100% coverage) in GOA and BSAI. Rollover of existing program for all Tier 1 and 2 fisheries (100% or greater coverage) in GOA and BSAI. (Major decision point involves determining the dividing line between Tier 2 and Tier 3 fisheries for CPs <125' and CVs \geq 125'.)
- Alternative 5.** New fee program for all fisheries. Tiers 3 and 4 (less than 100% coverage) would be funded by an ex-vessel value fee program. Tiers 1 and 2 (100% or greater coverage) would be funded by a daily observer fee.