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NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Partial Coverage Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee REPORT

September 15, 2026: 8:30am-1:00pm AKDT

Committee members present: Nicole Kimball (Chair), Haley Anderson, Kathy Hansen, Stacey Hansen, Chelsae Radell, Abigail Turner-Franke

Council/NMFS/ADF&G Staff: Sara Cleaver (NPFMC), Geoff Mayhew (NMFS AFSC), Jason Jannot (NMFS AFSC), Craig Faunce (NMFS AFSC), Karla Bush (ADF&G), Lisa Thompson (NMFS AFSC), Mike Vechter (NMFS AFSC), Josh Keaton (NMFS AKR), Pearl Rojas (NMFS AFSC), Joel Kraski (NMFS AKR), Jackie Smith (NOAA OLE), Cindy Tribuzio (NMFS AFSC), Steve Barbeaux (NMFS AFSC), Melanie Rickett (NMFS AKR), Jason Gasper (NMFS AKR), Phil Ganz (NMFS AKRO), Andy Kingham (NMFS AFSC), Adam Eno (NOAA GC), Sean Lucey (NMFS AFSC), Christian Gredzens (NMFS AFSC)

Other Attendees: Michael Lake, Heather Mann, Chad See, Sarah Williamson, Megan O'Neil, Pam Gale, Tamara Briggie, Jared Fuller

Introduction

The chair of the Partial Coverage Fishery Monitoring Advisory Committee (PCFMAC) opened the meeting and gave an overview of the agenda, and attendees introduced themselves. This was a hybrid meeting; it was hosted and available to join remotely and there was also an in-person option at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) in Seattle and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council office in Anchorage. The main purpose of this meeting was for the committee to review the draft 2027 Annual Deployment Plan (ADP). The Council will review and provide recommendations on the draft 2027 ADP at its October 2026 meeting. Opportunities for public input were provided throughout the meeting though no formal comments were given.

The final 2027 ADP with the final budget and resulting coverage rates will be provided to the Council under B reports in December 2026 as usual.

Scientific Review of the ADP by the Center for Independent Experts

Dr. Sean Lucey (NMFS AFSC Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division, FMA) provided a summary of the outcomes of the June Center for Independent Experts (CIE) review of the methods used in the draft ADP. The [CIE](#) is an external peer-review program that provides independent scientific reviews for NOAA. Scientific review by the CIE on the sampling strata and allocation strategy used to determine observer deployment in partial coverage fisheries was a recommendation from the SSC and Council and this was the first CIE review for the methods used in the most recent ADPs. This review provided an in-depth scientific evaluation of the proximity allocation method and annual reporting metrics used to evaluate the deployment plan for partial coverage every year. The CIE review panel agreed that the methods used and associated analyses are the best scientific information and are justified for the monitoring program in the North Pacific. The CIE review panel provided input on future research

directions and did not recommend any major changes to the methods currently used. The PCFMAC noted that undergoing CIE review was a significant undertaking and credited FMA with the successful review.

The committee also noted the high level of public interest in this type of external peer review and encouraged broader dissemination of relevant information. Specifically, **the committee recommended the Council explore opportunities to better communicate the groundfish fisheries monitoring conducted in the North Pacific to the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC).**

The final reports and all associated resources from the review can be found at: <https://noaa-afsc.github.io/CIE-Review-Observer-ADP-AnnualReport/>.

Draft 2027 ADP & Budget Information

Mr. Christian Gredzens (AFSC FMA) presented information from the draft 2027 ADP. More than 90% of Alaska's federal fisheries (by tonnage) are within the full coverage program. Monitoring resources are allocated amongst the remaining <10% (by tonnage) of partial coverage fisheries as described in the ADP and funded by the observer fee. The expected monitoring of retained catch in the North Pacific federal fisheries in 2027 under this ADP is as follows:

% of Retained Catch Monitored by FMP and Gear-type, Full & Partial Coverage		
	Trawl	Fixed-Gear
BSAI	99.96	88.74
GOA	86.42	14.25

Preliminary selection rates for Alaska's federal fisheries in 2027 are shown on p8 of the draft 2027 ADP:

Pool	Stratum	Selection Rate (%)	Number of Trips	Number of Trips Expected to be Observed
At-sea Observer	Fixed-gear BSAI	31.35	253	79
	Fixed-gear GOA	9.31	1,868	174
	Trawl BSAI	46.54	35	16
	Trawl GOA	15.34	305	47
EM Fixed-gear	EM Fixed-gear BSAI	42.99	92	40
	EM Fixed-gear GOA	15.24	1,010	154
EM Trawl GOA	EM Trawl GOA	100.00	894	894
No-selection	No-selection	0.00	1,427	0

Note: No-selection is for jig vessels and fixed gear vessels <40' LOA.

EM trawl GOA is vessels using pelagic trawl gear (pollock).

The draft 2027 ADP retains the same sampling unit (trip or delivery), stratification (8 partial coverage strata based on monitoring method, gear type, and FMP) and allocation method (proximity, except for trawl EM GOA) as the Final 2026 ADP. This is consistent with the Council's recommendation in June 2026. **The committee supported the agency recommendations on the draft 2027 ADP.** Additional committee discussion and recommendations are described in the following sections.

Budget Update & Cost Estimates

Dr. Sean Lucey provided a preliminary budget update. The prior year's fee revenue, carryover revenue from ex-vessel fees from earlier years, and federal funding comprise the total funds available for observer

and EM days in any given year. The estimated 2027 budget is \$5.45 million for partial coverage monitoring, with fee revenue comprising \$3.55 million. Community Directed Spending (CDS) funds (\$2 m) that helped support EM over the past 3-4 years will be fully expended in 2027. Recall the 2026 budget was \$4.75 million. The preliminary budget remains uncertain until December because fee revenue for 2026 landings is still being collected and the costs of trawl EM are still being refined.

Fixed Gear Vessel EM Minimum Effort Analysis

Mr. Geoff Mayhew (AFSC FMA) provided results from an analysis to provide a process to remove or deny fixed gear vessels in the EM program if they are inactive or have repeated issues (see [Appendix C, draft 2027 ADP](#)). This review was supported by the PCFMAC and the [Council's June 2026 motion](#). The agency evaluated vessels that had a full 3-year history and discovered that vessels that had taken fewer than 3 fishing trips were cost ineffective, meaning that they were not fishing enough to overcome the startup and maintenance costs associated with installation of EM equipment relative to the costs of a human observer. These vessels result in a significant cost to the program, and if those vessels were moved into the observer pool, funds could be reallocated to increase selection rates or to lower the budget while achieving the same rates. The committee supported an approach to improve cost effectiveness but had concerns about vessels that are unable to carry an observer, since there is no longer a waiver process for this.

The PCFMAC supported the agency's recommendation for an annual evaluation of vessel participation in the fixed gear EM pool. The committee recommended the following as part of this review:

- **In 2027, vessels who have not complied with requirements to update and submit EM Vessel Monitoring Plans (VMPs) for the past 3 years would be removed from the fixed gear EM pool.**

Beginning with the 2028 ADP:

- **Vessels would be removed from the fixed gear EM pool if they average less than 3 trips per year over the prior 3 years. These vessels will be placed in the at-sea observer pool and must return their EM equipment to be used on active vessels.**
- **Vessels requesting to rejoin the fixed gear EM pool need at least 5 trips per year over the prior 3 years.**
- **NMFS should establish a waiver process for active vessels that fish fewer than 3 trips that are proposed to be removed from the fixed gear EM pool if they can prove they do not have bunk space for an observer.**

The committee clarified that there should be no obstacles (such as prior trip history) to a vessel joining the fixed gear EM pool for the first time.

Evaluation of Low-Effort Fixed Gear Vessels for No-Selection Eligibility

Potential revisions to the no-selection (zero coverage) pool have been an ongoing priority for the PCFMAC and the Council. For fixed gear CVs currently in the observer partial coverage strata that have a pattern of consistently low or no fishing effort, Mr. Christian Gredzens evaluated whether any cost efficiencies could be gained by moving such vessels to the zero-coverage pool (see [Appendix D, draft 2027 ADP](#)). The results of this evaluation indicated that moving these vessels would not provide cost savings for the program nor result in any meaningful cost efficiencies. Vessels meeting the low-effort criterion rarely fish and are therefore rarely selected for monitoring, so removing their limited effort produces almost no change in monitoring rates.

The PCFMAC appreciated this evaluation and discussed that there are <40' vessels currently in the no selection pool (not required to have observer/EM coverage) who have substantial fishing activity. The Committee recommended that the agency review fishing effort among vessels in the no-selection pool to determine whether some have sufficient activity to warrant consideration for inclusion in the partial coverage pool. However, committee members noted that vessels unable to accommodate an observer due to size could apply to participate in the EM program.

ODDS Updates

Mr. Geoff Mayhew provided an overview of updates to the Observer Deploy and Declare System (ODDS) that are currently in development or planned. These include reminder emails intended to encourage ODDS users to close completed trips in a timely manner, as well as interface improvements to make it easier for users to identify trips that need to be closed or rescheduled to a future date. These changes will also be reflected in the ODDS User Manual.

Other Updates

Ms. Sarah Williamson provided a brief presentation on a project she is conducting as part of her master's research at APU's Fisheries, Aquatic Science, and Technology (FAST) Lab and supported by NFWF. The project uses machine learning and EM video to improve fish length estimation and species identification, with the broader goal of supporting more accurate catch accounting and integrating resulting data into stock assessments, especially for data-limited stocks. This technology was proven viable in detecting Pacific sleeper sharks in longline EM imagery and estimating shark lengths (to then estimate biomass), and the project is looking to expand to other species/fisheries. One of the applications discussed was in estimating small sablefish discards.

Ms. Williamson emphasized that industry collaboration and feedback will be important to developing a practical and useful tool. Through continued outreach, the project team hopes to gather additional industry input on how length data collection could be feasibly incorporated into existing EM workflows.

Mr. Eric Torgerson of Chordata, LLC provided an overview of an upcoming NFWF proposal focused on collecting real-time gear deployment and retrieval data for the shoreside AFA pollock fleet. The proposed project would transmit real-time sensor data and still images at one- to five-minute intervals from vessels equipped with Saltwater EM systems via Starlink. Machine learning would then be used to identify gear deployment and retrieval events.

Mr. Phil Ganz provided a draft update on the observer analytical task list, which is expected to be revised prior to the October 2026 Council meeting. The committee discussed how, following the Council's upcoming prioritization discussion, it may be useful to see some of the specific monitoring-related projects (i.e., those being addressed through E.O. 14276) separated out within the analytical task list.

Future Scheduling

The next monitoring committee meeting (FMAC) typically occurs in May to review the annual report. Due to the Council meeting schedule changes (moving the June meeting to May), starting in 2027, AFSC will be providing a presentation on the annual report at the FMAC May meeting, but the written annual report will be provided in B reports at the Council's October meeting. The PCFMAC will plan to meet in September 2027 as usual to review the Draft 2028 Annual Deployment Plan. **Committee members would like the opportunity for FMAC review of the analysis for modifications to Lead Level 2 endorsement requirements [tasked by the Council last October](#), either prior to initial review or final action depending on timing, to provide the Council with recommendations.**