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# *the* Mail Buoy

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**In this issue…**



## NORTH PACIFIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL UPDATE

### Observers Silenced Again by Erika Acuna

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council, in a closed executive session, has decided to eliminate the Observer representative seat on the Advisory Panel. The Advisory Panel is currently composed of commercial fishing industry, native community, recreational fishing and environmental representatives. The AP's role is to discuss and vote on various fisheries management issues such as fishery allocations, license limitations, and implementation of the American Fisheries Act. These recommendations are subsequently given to the Council along with recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee and public testimonies. Observers were given a seat on the Advisory Panel in 1997.

The APO's response to the Council decision has been one of profound disappointment. The elimination of the observer representative is a step backward in the movement to improve fisheries accountability and monitoring for management and stock assessment. The natural resource that is being managed in the North Pacific belongs to the citizens of the United States. It needs to be managed in a manner in which all issues are considered: sustainability, conservation, and socioeconomic. Not only has representation from the observer community, an important stakeholder indeed, been eliminated but also the perspective of a biologist who can bring valuable insight and input from a scientific point of view to the discussion of all issues.

Initial observer response at the weekly discussion meetings have been of outrage. “This is a “shot across our bow” exclaimed a fellow observer; “a call to arms for all observers”. The North Pacific has the largest resource for fishing ventures. Observers at sea during these fishing operations are the largest contributors to fisheries data and are on the front line of monitoring. Their data represents accurate and immediate information for in-season management. Without observer data, industry representatives and managers would lack information on total catch amounts, catch and bycatch compositions, biological data on commercially significant species, and vessel safety regulation compliance issues. Yet it has been a typical attitude by industry to downplay our role in fisheries management and to deny us the respect and consideration we deserve as biologists.

The growing nationwide (and worldwide) interest is in improving the fisheries accountability and monitoring for management and stock assessment. We believe it is critical to have observer representation serving on the Advisory Panel in order to provide input on all fisheries management decisions that affect observer data collection. The industry is moving toward management plans that require higher levels of monitoring (i.e. MS-CDQ, Co-Ops) and it is therefore crucial to have input from a representative who is familiar with the Observer job requirements as well as its data limitations. Observer data are in high demand, highly scrutinized, and held to an extremely high standard (particularly in the MS-CDQ fisheries).

In addition, NMFS has contracted the M-RAG corporation to conduct an independent study and analysis of the entire North Pacific Groundfish Observer program. The results will be presented to the Council in the spring 2000. It is very likely that this survey will generate discussion and possibly changes to the current program. Again, we feel it is critical to have representation at the Advisory Panel level for input at that time.

Although no formal notification was given to our Advisory Panel representative, through personal communications the following have been eluded to as possible reasons for eliminating the seat: 1.) “The Council wants to reduce the number of seats on the AP back down to the original 20 members” citing expense as a reason. Interestingly enough no other seats on the AP were eliminated. There are still 22 seats on the AP. In addition never has Council heard report from accounting that the AP’s budget was being exceeded. 2.) “Conflict of interest between our representative’s employment at NMFS and her role as an Observer Representative” which completely disregards the APO’s letter of support for re-nomination of our representative and our complete confidence that her employment at NMFS was not a concern to us. If it was such a concern to the Council it would have been more diplomatic to grant us a grace period to come up with an alternate representative. 3.) “Now that observers have Union representation as well as the newly reconstituted Observer Committee, observers have sufficient forums for discussion of issues”. This reasoning fails to take into account that our Union only deals with wage and contract issues strictly between observers and contractors, and that in the past the OAC meetings have been repeatedly postponed for more pressing council issues such as the Steller Sea Lion concerns and the American Fisheries Act issues. Therefore, we do not have great confidence that we will have a forum available to us when we need it for discussion of observer program issues.

These poorly defined reasons only leaves us questioning if there is a deeper reasoning not being made evident at this time, such as: Is this repercussion for Unionization activities in the past? Are Council members protecting their own interests? We will be strongly urging the Council to reconsider its decision and to re-instate an Observer seat on the Advisory Panel. We suggest the Council schedule an executive session during the February Council meeting to discuss granting an Ad-Hoc seat for an Observer Representative for the remainder of the 2000 year session.

If you would like to show your support, contact the APO. We have a letter you can sign and send to the Council.

**OBSERVER COMMITTEE ANNOUNCED** (info. from Dec. 1999 Council News & Notes)
The Council announced the appointment of a new Observer Committee (formerly the Observer Advisory Committee), to be chaired by Council member Joe Kyle and vice-chaired by Chris Blackburn. That Committee is expected to be active in 2000--though the first meeting is not yet scheduled it is likely to be in late February. The Committee’s activities will be coordinated with the review being conducted under NMFS contract to Marine Resource Assessment Group (MRAG), while also addressing more immediate issues regarding the observer program. The full list of committee members is as follows:

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|---|---|
| Joe Kyle (Chair) | Pacific Associates |
| Chris Blackburn(VC) | AK Groundfish Databank |
| Paula Cullenberg | UAA Observer Training Center |
| Kim Dietrich | Observer |
| John Gauvin | Groundfish Forum |
| John Iani | Unisea |

| | |
|---|---|
| Trevor McCabe | At Sea Processors Assn. |
| Mandy Merklein | Observer (Alternate) |
| Bob Mikol | APICDA |
| Kathy Robinson | Saltwater, Inc. |
| Jeff Stephan | United Fisherman's Mktg. Assn. |
| Arni Thompson | Alaska Crab Coalition |

## NORTH PACIFIC OBSERVER PROGRAM UPDATE

**Highlights of 1999** From the AFSC 4th Quarter Report (submitted by Bob Maier)

CDQ and AFA FISHERIES: Implementation of an expanded Community Development Quota (CDQ) program and implementation of provisions of the recently enacted American Fisheries Act (AFA) continued during 1999. The CDQ program was developed for the purpose of allocating fishery resources to eligible Western Alaska communities to provide the means for starting or supporting commercial fishery activities that would result in ongoing, regionally based, commercial fishery or related businesses. CDQ was initiated in 1992 with pollock and expanded to include fixed gear halibut and sablefish in 1995. In 1998, it was further expanded to include multiple species of groundfish and crab (MSCDQ). In 1999, NMFS was responsible for monitoring the groundfish (including pollock and sablefish) and halibut CDQs and the State of Alaska was responsible for monitoring the crab CDQs.

The AFA, enacted by Congress in late 1998, made changes to the pollock fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. These changes included reallocation of fish among industry segments, provided for the formation of fishing cooperatives, and increased observer coverage levels on some components of the fleet. The offshore component of the fleet has organized a fishing cooperative this year and has been receiving increased, mandatory observer coverage. More recently, the Observer Program has been involved in implementation of aspects of the AFA related to shoreside pollock. The shoreside component has proven to be more complex then offshore and will involve possible NMFS regulatory actions and a changing role for the observer.

MSCDQ and AFA catch accounting for offshore processors is based entirely on data collected by observers and, unlike the open access fisheries, where observer data is used to manage a fleet wide quota, industry participants in the MSCDQ and AFA fisheries require individual accounting of fish harvested in each haul or set. This change in expectations placed on observers, their data, and the Observer Program in general, has required much Observer Program staff effort in the development of special selection criteria and training requirements for observers, development of new sampling strategies and regulations to enhance the observer's working environment, and changes to the data collection and data management software systems.

OBSERVER PROGRAM REVIEW: An extensive, independent review of the Observer Program began in late 1999. The review is being carried out by Marine Resources Assessment Group (MRAG) Americas, Inc. MRAG is an independent consulting firm which provides professional advice and services for the management of marine fisheries throughout the world. The purpose of this review is to provide recommendations for changes in Program operations and organization which might improve the Program's ability to meet its mission and goals. Their final report is due sometime next year.

NEW OBSERVER CONTRACTOR: A new observer contractor was certified by NMFS in late December 1999, to provide observer services for the North Pacific groundfish fisheries. The company's name is TechSea International. The company's principles are Dr. Harry G. Benson and Mr. Jacob I. Chabinka. Dr. Benson operates SeaWatch Inc., a Canadian company that has been providing observer services to the government of Canada since 1981. Mr. Chabinka also has experience providing observer services, his company, JAVITECH, Ltd., has been contracted to operate the Scotia-Fundy Observer Program on the Canadian east coast from 1995 to 2000. TechSea will most likely be establishing a Seattle office

in the near future, but for the time being they are operating out of Mr. Chabinka's office in Canada. *[Editor's Note: Mr. Chabinka has verbally agreed to honor the a Union contract similar to AOI & FOA's]*

The statistics for the entire year of 1999 are as follows:

Observers trained or briefed at AFSC = 258
Observers trained or briefed at UAA = 384
Observers briefed in Kodiak = 13
Observers briefed in Dutch Harbor = 22
Observers excused from briefing = 57
Total observers trained or briefed = 734
Individual vessels covered by observers = 363
Individual plants covered by observers = 20
Percent of observers with prior experience = 75%
Observers debriefed in Seattle = 438
Observers debriefed in Kodiak = 18
Observers debriefed in Dutch Harbor = 25
Observers debriefed in Anchorage = 102
Total observers debriefed = 583

**New Staff Coming Soon…**The observer program will be completing 2 hiring actions in early 2000. One will be to add another staff person in Seattle to take part in inseason advising and debriefing of observers as their core work, and completing other assignments as tasked out. The second position will be the post vacated by Troy Martin when he transferred to Dutch Harbor. That position will also primarily be to complete inseason advising and debriefing of observers, but also backs up the other responsibilities handled at the Anchorage field office.

Hopefully, the announcements for these positions will be posted in the next week or two. NMFS and the APO will send out a notice when that will occur. Prior experience as a North Pacific Groundfish Observer will be required for both of these positions. Interested parties can contact Shannon Fitzgerald at (206) 526-4553 or Todd Loomis at (907) 271-1313.

**Cadre position**s….aren't open yet but Shannon Fitzgerald will be spending the next 3-6 months in the Anchorage office with the intention of making it happen. Stay tuned for details.

## PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR OBSERVERS

NMFS is currently evaluating the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program and investigating ways to improve the program through a variety of means . As part of that effort NMFS will be gathering input from observers on ways the program can better provide support for observers both in the field and during the debriefing process while they transition back to "normal life". Mandy Merklein, a fisheries consultant and an experienced, prior observer, has been contracted by NMFS to draw up at report that provides recommendations based largely on input from observers. Throughout this winter and spring Merklein will be reaching out to observers during briefings, trainings, debriefings as wells as through focus groups, phone surveys, and informal gatherings such as the on going APO observer discussion groups organized by Kim Dietrich. Observers are welcome to contact Ms. Merklein directly after January 10th (see contact information below). More information will be posted on the bulletin boards in the training/debriefing offices. "This is a solution oriented effort", Merklein explained. "The intent is not to generate a laundry list of problems, rather to come up with ideas and solutions that can be implemented to support observers in their work". "We are encouraged that the agency is interested in working with observers proactively to address issues of concern" mentioned Kim. "Of course the strength of the report will rely on the extent, interest, and quality of observer involvement" said Merklein. She encourages interested observers to become involved. Observers can reach her at:

Mandy Merklein
7305 9th Ave., NW
Seattle WA 98117
(206) 782-8273
Mandym@compuserve.com

**Brown Bag Lunch Seminar Series**

The Groundfish Observer Program is hosting a series of brown bag seminars to discuss current issues impacting North Pacific commercial fisheries and how observer data are used in fisheries management.

Seminars will be held from 12pm to 1pm on Wednesdays during December and January in Building Four. These informal get-togethers give the speaker about 15 to 20 minutes to present their topic followed by a period of questions and discussion.

The seminar schedule is:

- January 5th - Use of Observer Data in the BSAI and GOA Pacific Cod Stock Assessments with Grant Thompson (Status of Stocks) in room 2079
- January 12th - The Importance of Observer Data in Pollock Stock Assessments with Jim Ianelli (Status of Stocks) in room 2079
- January 19th - The Mackerel Fishery and Essential Fish Habitat with Lowell Fritz (Status of Stocks) in room 1055
- February 2nd - How Observer Data Aid Food Habits Research with Geoff Lang (Food Habits Lab) in room 1055

So... mark your calendars, tell a friend, bring your lunch, and hope to see you there!!

*[**Editor's Note**: If you attend and would like to write a summary for the next MB, your submissions are more than welcome. I'm happy to work with you as well. ]*

## How Observer data is useful for Marine Mammal Studies

Report on Groundfish Observer Program Lunch Seminar #1-December 15,1999
by Erika Acuna

The first seminar speaker in the series was Dr. Doug DeMaster , Division Director of National Marine Mammal Lab (NMML). His topic emphasized the current Steller Sea Lion issue. For observers going to sea it is important to have information on current marine mammal issues. Confusion often arises between agencies and the fishing industry regarding regulations. This situation may put fishermen and observers at odds in which case a well informed observer can tactfully clear up misunderstandings of regulations, or help explain current endangered species issues.

For those of you that couldn't attend Dr. DeMaster's lecture, here's a re-cap:
Lots of uncertainty surrounds the current status of the Steller Sea Lions. The North Pacific range of the species are divided into two stocks for management purposes: the Western stock, which extends from the Gulf of Alaska area to the Bering Sea, and the Eastern stock of Steller Sea Lions which ranges from South East Alaska down to California. Although both stocks have been declining, it is the Western stock that is listed as Endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and is the focus of recent heated debates. The Eastern stock is currently listed as Threatened under the ESA.

Many rumors surround such a controversial issue, and at sea you may hear plenty more. In effort to dispel some of the more common ones, Dr. DeMaster addressed the following misconceptions:

- "Some stocks of Steller Sea Lions are increasing". This simply is not true. The confusion arose when a NMFS report showed that data from 1990-1998 indicated an "increase in the rate of decrease" of the Western stock of Steller Sea Lions. This does not mean that the total population numbers are increasing, it merely means that the numbers are not dwindling as fast as they were in previous years! There are variations in numbers among sub-areas, but overall none of the population numbers of animals are above the normal line; all are declining.
- Another rumor is that "NMFS is hiding data". Technical memos are available to the public, and there is no way that the agency could hide numbers even if it wanted to. The problem arises because there are lots of ways to characterize how numbers are counted: pup counts, seasonal, aerial counts (which often don't account for animals in the water when counted). Numbers may differ slightly depending on which method is used. There is no perfect method for abundance estimation. But in any case, results show that the conservative population estimate is at least 39,000 animals. People assume numbers are in the 100's since they are listed as endangered. Steller sea lions are the largest stock listed under ESA.
- Another rumor circulating is that the agency is double counting mortality numbers since a "take" may be recorded by an onboard observer as well as in the skipper's vessel logbook. This also is not true. If an observer has reported the same incident as the log book data, it is only counted once. Observers record both mortalities and injuries. A "serious injury" in other words is one that would very likely lead to the animal's death and is therefore considered a mortality for population estimate purposes. The confusion arises because under the MMPA a "take" is strictly defined as anything ranging from the actual killing of a marine mammal to as non-lethal an interaction as harassment. However, for management purposes, the agency uses a number known as PBR (Potential Biological Removal) which is a guideline for the numbers of animals that can be removed by human related mortality where the population will still remain healthy. If, for instance, the numbers of animals being killed each year is less than PBR then the stock should recover. The PBR was first called "Maximum Allowable Take" when it was first introduced into congress but it sounded too much like a fish quota which is a number at which harvest stops when reached. Current statistics indicate that the Steller Sea Lion PBR is 234 animals per year. If more are taken, the Endangered Animal Take action team intervenes. But reports show that only 30 animals per year are actually taken by the commercial fisheries. Therefore, it's become clear that the problem with the Steller Sea Lion decline is not incidental takes by fishermen, but rather due to an unproven, non-negligible problem of competition for the same food resource.
- This leads to anther rumor that "commercial Pollock removal is too high and is causing the decline of the Steller Sea Lion". The answer is not that simple. Evidence now is leading toward the belief that **localized depletion** of Steller Sea Lion food resource has the greatest effect on their decline. Lack of foraging success leads to a decline in survivability of juveniles and a decline in reproductive success of females. Therefore, the revised Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives (RPA's) the agency has proposed includes: 1). Minimum 20 nautical mile no fishing zones around all rookeries and certain haul out sites, 2). Temporal distribution of commercial fishing efforts by dividing up the commercial Pollock fishing seasons into 4 distinct seasons, and 3). Spatial distribution of fishing efforts.

This is where the 5 day standdown period between the A1 and A2 seasons came about. It was the result of a compromise from fidgeting of the original idea of two weeks or more between seasons. The thought was to break up the fishing effort into 4 seasons, with enough time in between to let the fish schools coalesce, which would increase foraging success for the sea lions.

Life history data has indicated that the declining juvenile sea lion survival is driving the overall population decline of the Steller Sea Lions. The average size of juvenile animals has decreased according to data from 70's and'80's which indicates that they are nutritionally stressed. Satellite tag information showed that females with pups will venture out to approximately 20 nautical miles to forage before returning to the rookery, hence the 20 nautical mile buffer zones. The ESA mandates a "risk aversion approach" which means: take the worst case scenario and try to improve it. Therefore,

assuming that commercial fishing near rookeries and haul out sites is depleting the forage fish for juveniles, the RPA's should be effective in recovering the Steller Sea Lion population.

- Yet another common rumor is known as the "junk food" theory which arose from information stating that Pollock is not as nutritionally significant for marine mammals as other forage fish which are no longer available to them such as Capelin and Herring. Therefore if Pollock harvests increased it would allow these higher nutritionally important species to come back. This is also a false statement. Pollock is a huge protein source for marine mammals and sea birds. Data collected over the last few decades shows that Pollock has always been a significant component of Steller Sea Lion diets. Removing additional quantities of Pollock now would only add insult to injury for an already stressed species. The agency is, however, required to work with State agencies toward state management that is consistent with Federal management in the recovery of the Steller Sea Lion which means that the Herring industry will soon be sharing the burden in endangered species management.
- Finally, Orcas have been rumored to be the cause of the Steller Sea Lion decline. This has not been substantiated by scientific studies. Many more Steller Sea Lion carcasses with Orca-caused injuries would be seen on the beaches if this were the case. There is no current accurate population estimate of Orcas in the North Pacific, and the feeding frequency on Steller Sea Lions by Orcas is also not well understood. This is an area of scientific study where observer data is critical. Biological sampling of Steller Sea Lions is next to impossible. The animals are huge and dangerous and their haul out sites are remote. Current funding simply does not allow for effective biological collecting, therefore sampling on dead animals is the only way. Dr. DeMaster urged observers who encounter dead marine mammals in fishing nets to collect any kind of biological data possible. Data such as body measurements and collection of teeth for aging are very important. Tags and skin samples are extremely valuable, even a small plug of skin frozen in a zip lock while on board can be used for important DNA studies. Distribution information is necessary for stock identification and abundance, life history data, and population dynamics.

I hope this information is valuable to you going out to sea in 2000. Any of you observers in town during the Wednesday lecture seminar series are welcome and encouraged to attend. They are informal and provide an excellent opportunity to ask all those burning questions you may have! Hope to see you there.

*[Editor's Note*: If you're interested in reading more, Dr. DeMaster had a nice handout which is available from Carrie Nordeen, Observer Program. ]

**So…What Happens to those Otoliths Anyway?** (Kim Dietrich, Janelle Zimmerman & Erika Acuna)

On Dec. 29 Betty Goetz from the Age & Growth Lab spoke at the 2nd brown bag lunch seminar for observers. Betty has worked at Age & Growth Lab since 1982. She was an observer before that on foreign vessels. The A&G Lab ages approximately 20 species and there are more to come in the future. Betty is the team leader for a group which concentrates their efforts on reading pollock, hake and rockfish otoliths.

At the end of the year, each stock assessment scientist prioritizes otoliths to be aged by season, area, and number. Once the A&G Lab starts reading the otoliths, each sample annulus count is repeated until same count is achieved twice. More than 20% of the samples are aged by a second person for verification. There is also a coast-wide calibration workshop which occurs every 2 years so that the various agencies that work on ageing otoliths can compare and standardize their techniques.

Ms. Goetz discussed some differences and problems that are encountered depending upon the species from which the otoliths were taken. P. Cod, for example, is very difficult to read because the annulus (or growth rings) of those otoliths are extremely faint. For this reason, there are reliability concerns with the aging technique for P.cod. Because the A&G lab wishes to pass along the best results possible, these otoliths are being stored until a more accurate reading technique may be accomplished. Currently, they are working on a new approach of suspending the otoliths in a black resin to improve the contrast, and then performing thin slicing to view the otolith. For now, she appreciates that observers continue to collect P. Cod otoliths so that when they are able to read them more accurately, there will be a time series available to the lab and to stock assessment teams.

There are a number of techniques used to age an otolith. The following were briefly discussed:

- Surface reading is the least time consuming but is typically accurate only for young fish. Young pollock and hake are frequently aged by just looking at the surface and counting the extremely visible annuli.
- Break and burn is a technique where the otolith is cut through the nucleus and burned over an alcohol flame to enhance the annuli. Then the annuli are counted from the center outward. Pollock over 7 years usually have to be read with this technique. In using this technique, she mentioned the importance of collecting two good otolith samples per fish because sometimes readers need to burn 4 pieces to get a good sample. In addition, in some species the two otoliths actually differ from one another.
- Thin section—The otolith is embedded in resin, a section is cut through the nucleus and mounted on a slide. This is a more uniform application than break & burn (i.e. it's more consistent) but it is also more time intensive.
- Radiometric validation. Uses radioactive isotopes to verify age on fish that are very old such as rockfishes. This technique has been developed by Craig Kastell and is also used in helping to age some mammals.

Betty also discussed potential problems with otoliths collected by observers and provided the following tips:

- Ethanol is the hydration medium for most otoliths collected by observers. It is very important to use ethanol and not denatured alcohol (sometime accidentally used) which causes chalkiness and lack of readability. She also noted that it takes about 6 weeks for an otolith to be readable once it's been hydrated, therefore providing a date when stored in alcohol can expedite the reading process.
- Otoliths which are broken in many pieces are not readable. A perpendicular cut needs to be made through the nucleus. If you've never collected otoliths from a given species before, practice on a few that aren't in your sample.
- Crystallized otoliths are not readable. Ask your briefer or in-season advisor how they would like you to deal with crystallized otoliths. You can also go to the A&G Lab to see what crystallized otoliths look like.
- Cleaning otoliths is important. Once otoliths are collected, rinse and return to vials. Once the membrane dries onto the otolith, it is difficult to remove even after rehydration and leaves a black blob which may cover annulus during the break and burn..
- Pay extra attention to vial number and data sheets. If the vial numbers don't match your data, it is likely that they get thrown away because they don't want to second guess which otoliths are which.

A lot of work still needs to be done with otoliths and ageing fish which the Age & Growth lab has planned once staffing and budget are increased. Validation of true ages of the fish is still not being performed on a regular basis. Generating true ages of fish using Radiometric Validation is very time consuming and expensive. Currently debated in the scientific community is the question of how many annuli (growth rings) does a fish lay down per year as their otolith develops? In the warmer tropical waters more than one ring per year develops. This still needs to be verified in the North Pacific species. Temperature regime changes in the environment can cause noticeable anomalies in the growth rings of the otoliths. Perhaps this can be used as an indicator for significant environmental events. Finally, crystallization of otoliths is not well understood and almost not described at all in the scientific literature. Although it does not seem to affect the performance of the fish, there seems to be no external indication of a crystallized otolith. Perhaps a good graduate project for someone out there and something to think about while collecting all those little otoliths?

## Halibut Viability Changes in 2000

Observers have been collecting halibut viability data using condition codes of Excellent, Poor, and Dead for close to 20 years. Hold on to your seats, as changes are coming for 2000. The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) has made several changes, according to Gregg Williams of IPHC. The first is a change to injury codes for longline bycatch, using Minor, Moderate, Severe, and Dead/Sand Fleas as the injury categories. To accommodate this new approach, the NMFS Observer Program has revised Form 7US, adding dedicated columns for an injury code for longline observations and a condition code for trawl and pot fishing. You will no longer record condition in the sex column.

IPHC recently completed analysis of a tagging study on halibut caught and released from groundfish longline gear. They found that some of the head and jaw injuries halibut frequently receive during release were not as life threatening as they had previously assumed. In addition, injuries were found to be a better indicator of survival compared to condition code.

Also new for 2000, IPHC has written dichotomous keys to aid in determining the halibut injury or condition code. These keys work in the same manner as fish identification keys, in that you work their way through a series of yes or no statements that result in the appropriate code. The objective is to improve the uniformity of viability determination among observers, reducing the subjectivity inherent in the previous criteria. You may also find that disagreements with crew about a fish's

viability are easier to handle, as you are merely following the key rather than applying a larger set of subjective criteria. You might even have a crewperson try using the key if they disagree with your result. You will be provided the three keys on plastic sheets so they can be taken on deck or in the factory – you no longer need to memorize the definitions!

Williams sees three benefits to these changes: (1) the injury codes will give better estimates of mortality of longline bycatch; (2) the keys will make it easier to collect the necessary data; and (3) the keys will also result in greater uniformity and consistency among observers. Gregg is looking for feedback on these changes, so give him a call (206-634-1838, ext. 209) or email (gregg@iphc.washington.edu) when you return, or have your debriefer forward any comments.

## SEABIRD/FISHERY INTERACTIONS AND THE ROLE OF OBSERVERS

by Kim Rivera, NMFS Seabird Coordinator, Alaska Region

Since 1989, observers have played a role in monitoring interactions between the U.S. commercial fisheries that occur off Alaska and the seabirds that can be found around the fishing vessels. In the ten years that have followed, that role has been greatly expanded and is critical to our gaining a better understanding of what levels of bycatch occur, how seabirds interact with the vessels, and how the impacts of the fisheries can be mitigated.

History of Seabird Data Collection In 1989, observers continued recording the incidental take of seabirds as they had been doing in the foreign and joint-venture groundfish fisheries. All birds counted in an observer's sample were included in the single category of "unidentified birds". At the time there was no program expertise on seabirds and no requests for seabird data had been received. Concurrently, NMFS and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) were coordinating in an international effort to monitor the high seas squid and large mesh driftnet fisheries operating in the North Pacific Transition Zone. It became apparent that a need existed for the collection of more extensive seabird bycatch data in the groundfish fisheries as well. A pilot project was implemented in 1992, focusing on the hook-and-line fisheries. Results of this project were promising and in 1993 all groundfish observers had expanded seabird duties and training, including the recording of: number of each species taken (or highest level taxa possible) for all gear types, sightings of sensitive species, detailed information found on leg bands, notes on gear-related mortalities, and intentional or direct mortalities. Duties were expanded further in 1997 when observers began recording information on an ad-hoc basis about the use and types of deterrent devices on vessels. In 1999, observers were asked to provide detailed comments in their logbooks, when possible, about the frequency of use of seabird deterrent measures during each fishing trip and to describe specific characteristics of the different avoidance measures. For example, what line weighting regimes are used (number and size of weights, weight spacing on the groundline), construction and deployment characteristics of towed streamer lines and buoy bags, and if offal is discharged for the purpose of distracting seabirds away from baited hooks. This information is recorded in observer logbooks at sea, and captured during debriefing in the vessel survey questions (#6011). Important seabird additions are also being incorporated for year 2000.

How are the Data Used? Why is it so important? Given the types of data collected, it is used both quantitatively and qualitatively:

1) estimation of seabird bycatch numbers and rates by species;
2) summaries of types of seabird avoidance measures used;
3) USFWS sightings database for the endangered short-tailed albatross and several other specific seabird species of concern;
4) indication of efficacy of avoidance measures (through using bycatch numbers and written seabird notes);
5) industry compliance with regulations regarding seabird avoidance measures and observer sampling;
6) preparation of reports to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and other organizations such as the United Nations Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The USFWS and NMFS have been coordinating the development of statistically valid extrapolation procedures to estimate the total seabird bycatch in the Alaska groundfish fisheries. Standard statistical procedures for extrapolating from your species composition sample are used. Estimates of total bycatch use your sample information and the total commercial fish catch as estimated by the NMFS Blend program. Preliminary

USFWS estimates of the annual seabird bycatch for the Alaska groundfish fisheries, based on 1993 to 1997 data, indicate that approximately 14,000 seabirds are taken annually in the combined BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries (11,600 in the BSAI; 2,400 in the GOA) at the average rates of 0.090 and 0.0568 birds per 1000 hooks in the BSAI and in the GOA, respectively. Of the estimated 14,000 seabirds that are incidentally caught, the species composition is: 67 percent fulmars, 16 percent gull species, 9 percent albatross species, and 8 percent shearwater species. This information was first presented to the Council in December 1998 and the information has also been included in the FAO's report, "*The Incidental Catch of Seabirds by Longline Fisheries: Worldwide Review and Technical Guidelines for Mitigation*". The FAO has undertaken a worldwide effort to have countries develop national plans to reduce seabird bycatch in longline fisheries. The U.S. has begun the development of its national plan and observers will likely provide key data that is necessary to, first, determine if a bycatch problem exists, and second, to monitor the use of avoidance measures and their effectiveness.

Besides the bycatch estimates, some of the uses of observer data are more qualitative—what are observers seeing in terms of different avoidance measures that vessels are experimenting with, do they appear to be effective, is bird abundance around the vessels a factor in whether or not birds will be hooked, etc.—yes, you guessed it, I do read your seabird daily notes! They are a very important source of descriptive information that will help us as we plan for changes to current regulations that require the use of seabird avoidance measures. Information you provide, in conjunction with results from experimental studies being conducted by Ed Melvin of the Washington Sea Grant Program, will all be considered for improvements to the current requirements. In fact, NMFS-certified observers have participated directly in Melvin's studies onboard IFQ vessels and freezer-longliners and have provided key insights and assistance in this important work.

Changes in 2000 You will hear more about this during your training or briefing sessions but briefly, beginning in 2000, vessel personnel will record the type of seabird avoidance measures being used by the vessel on a haul-by-haul basis. You will be asked to transcribe this information from the vessel logbook to your haul form. In addition, another column on your haul form allows you to note which sets you were able to monitor and verify the measures being used. Bottom line, what better way to measure the effectiveness of an avoidance measure but to relate its use to the number of seabirds that are caught while the measure is being used? NMFS will also be making some modifications to the seabird avoidance regulations but we will keep you posted on that. The Observer Program Office will keep you informed of any changes once they are final.

You have a lot to do while at sea which includes completion of a suite of very important activities relating to the conservation and management of the EEZ fisheries. Your various seabird-related responsibilities are all very important, but may be a higher or lower priority than another task. Please check your manual to make sure where each task falls, and check with your inseason advisor or field office personnel if you have questions.

I started out writing this because I wanted to say thank you! Thank you to all observers for your conscientious and dedicated collection of unbiased, objective scientific data. You do make a difference! You are professionals and your work, often carried out in rough and adverse weather, is critical to efforts to reduce the number of seabirds being taken in the hook-and-line fisheries. Check out the NMFS Alaska Region website link on seabirds (**http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seabirds.html)** and feel free to contact me directly about seabird issues in the groundfish fisheries; **Kim.Rivera@noaa.gov,** 907-586-7424.

**NATIONAL OBSERVER PROGRAM Update**

Vicki Cornish, NOP staff, needs photos!!! She is developing a website for the National Observer Program and any shots of observers doing their thing would be great. Any format is fine, she can adapt. Full credit will be given to the photographer. Send them to: Vicki Cornish, NMFS Office of Protected Resources, 1315 East-West Hwy, SSMC3 145552, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or via email: *vicki.cornish@noaa.gov*.

## 2nd Biennial Observer Program Workshop Scheduled for 2000

Background: In 1998 the Canadian DFO and the U.S. NMFS, co-sponsored a workshop designed to bring together some of the key organizations responsible for the design, management and delivery of at-sea fisheries Observer Programs. Delegates from Norway, Argentina, Trinidad & Tobago also participated.

The second biennial workshop is scheduled to be held in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada from Jun 26-29, 2000. This workshop will again be co-sponsored by DFO and NMFS and will expand in scope to include greater representation from the fishing industry and Observers, and greater international participation from countries with responsibility for conservation and management of marine resources.

Workshop Objectives:

- To facilitate discussions of the role of Observer Programs as management, compliance and scientific programs, within the broader context of alternative fisheries monitoring systems.
- To address some of the key issues, related to the delivery of OP's, from the perspective of governments, service providers, the fishing industry, and from Observers themselves.
- To explore the current applications, limitations and future uses of scientific data collection from OP's.

Format & Themes: The objectives of the workshop will be developed through the presentation of papers, panel discussions and open discussion format. The major themes of the workshop will be focused on issues related to the compliance objectives of the Program, scientific data collection, fishing industry concerns and Observer issues. These may include such topics as:

- the integration of compliance and scientific roles of OP's
- the determination of appropriate levels of Observer coverage
- integration of data collected by Observers with other sources
- the use of data from observed vessels to track fishing activity among fleets
- program design and objectives
- issues related to observer safety, professionalization and training

***[APO Note***: It is likely that there will be 1-2 observers from each region selected (and subsidized) to participate in this workshop. If you are interested (and can spare the time), please contact Dan Ito, Shannon Fitzgerald and/or Kim Dietrich. You may be asked to write a brief statement describing your qualifications and why you want to represent observers in the North Pacific. Experience in multiple programs is a plus. If selected, you will be asked to do some preparatory reading to familiarize yourself with what has already been discussed and what kinds of observer programs exist elsewhere. The workshop website should be accessible soon at *http://www.seawatch2000.nf.ca.. ]*

## APO NEWS

### APO Submits Comments for Consideration in SEIS (APO w/ excerpts from AMCC Member Bulletin)

One way to begin answering the fundamental question of how fisheries affect our marine environment is through an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This is a tool for fisheries managers and the public to disclose information about the impact of fisheries and to explore alternative ways of managing fisheries. The only EIS ever done on North Pacific fisheries is 20 years old.

Given the extraordinary changes in the marine environment and the rapid expansion of fisheries in recent decades, it is long past time to take a broader look at what our fisheries are really doing to the North Pacific marine ecosystem. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has a legal obligation to do exactly that. The agency will be working over the next year to develop a Supplemental EIS (SEIS) to comprehensively assess this issue.

The APO asked that NMFS address the following questions in the SIES:

1. How do the current groundfish fisheries affect the marine ecosystem including but not limited to essential habitat for **all** species throughout their range, pollution caused by fossil fuel emissions (do more boats have a larger impact than a smaller number of vessels), impacts of discards in high discard areas, long-term impacts on species composition, and impacts on the various trophic levels? What are the environmental effects of bycatch, including both economically valued species (such as salmon, crab, herring and halibut) and other marine life (such as corals, sponges, juvenile fish)?

2. Evaluate how current and alternative management strategies for the existing fisheries may affect the environment. Have current management strategies been successful for all species? For which fisheries would marine refugia work as a management tool? Are there clear goals and guidelines for bycatch management and are the goals being met?
3. Discuss current limitations regarding the "best scientific information available" and what kinds of approaches can make the information better. Observer data is a prime example of where improvements could be made easily. The current observer program has a procurement system wrought with conflict of interest and lack of accountability to NMFS. Data quality has suffered due to high turnover rates of observers, lack of support by NMFS, NMFS' inability to place staff and/or observers on vessels based on a sound statistical design. Some of the most damaging fisheries have an *effective* sample rate of <20%. For longline groundfish between 1993-1997, the effective sample rate averaged 27% in the BSAI and 10% in the GOA. Observers are biologists and should be collecting information on ALL catch to the species level (when possible) not just collecting information on commercially important species. Data quality could improve drastically by simply increasing effective sample rates and increasing the amount of detail observers collect.
4. Current observer procurement system is not flexible and places a larger economic burden on small vessels. NMFS has the authority to implement a fee system to fund data collection essential to management. Fees should be based on total catch (not on total fish retained). How has the current system biased management data and to what extent?

**APO Discussion Groups** continue….they were a great success in the fall so we've added more.
Who should come? **Anyone interested in observer issues. Typically, there's no formal agenda. These meetings were a success in the fall. NMFS staff, contractors, an AFU representative and observers participated.**
Why participate? This is an opportunity to share ideas, ask questions, voice opinions about the Observer Program & APO.
When: **6 pm**
Where: Rotating dates & locations below—

Jan 5 (Wed)—Gorditos Healthy Mex. Food, 213 N 85th
Jan 12 (Wed)— Rainbow Bar & Grill, 722 NE 45th
Jan 19 (Wed)—Potluck at Kim's house, 5026 9th Ave, NE
Jan 26 (Wed)— Fiddler's Inn, 9219 35th NE
Feb 2 (Wed)— Pig-n-Whistle, 8412 Greenwood Ave N

**ADF&G UPDATE**-Larry Boyle, Coordinator Shellfish Observer Program

This past March the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) addressed shellfish observer proposals in the tri-annual cycle. The BOF gave ADF&G full authority and responsibility for deploying observers on any vessel participating in the BSAI crab fisheries as necessary for fishery management and data-gathering needs. Vessel pre-registration will be required for each fishery to determine observer coverage levels. The previous observer requirements applied only to catcher-processor and floating processor vessels for most fisheries. This resulted in crab fisheries that were under-observed or had no observer coverage. Conversely, there were fisheries that had 100% observer requirements in regulation for catcher vessels with no option for reducing coverage. The new flexibility will improve the department's research and management programs and insure the department's compliance with data collection provisions in the M-S Act and the BSAI king and Tanner crab FMP.

The BOF also established an Initial Crab Observer Program Oversight Committee at the March BOF meeting. The permanent Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Crab Observer Oversight Task Force was established by the BOF in October. The 15-member committee is composed of vessel owners, vessel operators and industry representatives. The Task Force will report to and be advisory to the BOF on all aspects of the development, implementation, and continued operation of the BSAI crab observer program. This will include funding mechanisms for observer coverage, budget and research priorities; types of observers to be used in the crab fisheries [ADF&G employees and/or contract observers], issues of observer coverage, and duties and responsibilities of observers. The department is tentatively planning to meet with the Task Force in February in conjunction with the NPFMC meeting in Anchorage to begin discussing these issues.

The department's proposal to fund all Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) crab observer deployments from its harvest and sale of crab was modified at the meeting. Neither the industry nor the BOF was comfortable with funding the entire estimated $2.6 million cost of the program from cost recovery fishing. Industry spokesmen testified that vessels were willing to pay a portion. The department committed to capping the cost recovery at

$650,000 for the coming fiscal year. The revenue will be used to pay for some of the crab observer deployments while vessels in some fisheries will continue under 'pay-as-you-go'. The amount of observer coverage is not related to the size of the cost recovery allocation.

The department met with the Initial Oversight Committee four times between the March and October BOF meetings. The committee advised ADF&G that the cost recovery revenue collected in 1999 come from Bristol Bay red king crab, after the open access fishery ended. This would forward-fund the crab observer program when the new regulations go into effect on July 1, 2000. The department then solicited bids to charter a crab vessel to harvest the crab and bids from processors to purchase the crab.

The charter was conducted from October 25 through November 10 with two landings of crab. Total harvest was 105,934 pounds of red king crab, less than 1% of the total open access and CDQ harvest. A significant aspect unique to this cost recovery program is that any unspent funds can be carried into the following fiscal year.

The department will be meeting with Task Force in the future to discuss which fisheries, or vessel types, will pay for their observer coverage and which will have coverage paid for with the cost recovery receipts. Issues such as specific numbers of observers in each fishery cannot be assessed until crab seasons are determined after the summer trawl surveys.

## LETTER TO EDITOR:

In reviewing the last Mail Buoy, I came across the piece headed "Judge Says Fishery Not Protecting Steller Sea Lions (from Sea Web Ocean Update 9/99)". I was bothered by this a bit since the article is taken right out of a Greenpeace news release and completely mischaracterizes Judge Zilly's ruling. GP's spin notwithstanding, the Judge did not find that sea lions were not being protected. He found that NMFS had committed a "procedural violation" by not explaining in their action document exactly how the RPAs they were proposing accomplished the goals of temporal and spatial dispersion of the fishery, thereby avoiding jeopardy. In his order, the judge directed the agency to rewrite the document in a way that explained for him how the RPAs accomplished those goals. Once the agency responds to the Judge's order (which they have now done via the report they delivered to him last week), he will be in a position to decide whether or not the agency is adequately protecting sea lions. If Greenpeace wants to characterize that ruling as a "victory", so be it--but they failed to mention that the Judge denied their
motion for an injunction and allowed the fishery to proceed under the RPA's that NMFS promulgated for the B and C seasons.

Given the role that observers play in this whole process, it is critical for the Union to remain "above the fray" on sensitive issues such as the sea lion/pollock fishery interaction debate. Obviously, your members are entitled to their own individual opinions on this issue, but for the Union to be disseminating what I view to be GP propaganda in its newsletter is somewhat troubling to me. Especially when the newsletter directs the reader to contact the Greenpeace lawyers and spokespersons if they want further information on the litigation. Remember, GP is the organization that has been waging a multi-million dollar campaign to have the catcher/processor fleet banned from the North Pacific fishery. In my opinion, your members would be better served if you were to direct them to a less biased source of information if they really want to know what is going on in the case.

Paul MacGregor, General Counsel for the At-Sea Processors Association

*Editor's Note: I agree to a certain extent; I should have done a better editing job and should have modified the article to reflect additional points of view. However, I have limited time and have to make do with the resources available to me when it's time to publish. I will be more sensitive to SeaWeb articles in the future. I greatly appreciate the feedback.*

*I would also like to clarify that the APO is not the Union. The difference is best discussed in an article published in the Mail Buoy in 9/98*

## ALASKA FISHERMAN'S UNION NEWS (Submitted by Mark Coles, AFU President)

The year 2000 is significant for a number of reasons. A big one is that the Union observer contracts expire at the end of the year. A new round of negotiations will begin in the fall. The Union is going to need your input and help beginning now.

One of the tasks that needs to be done at every opportunity, is for prior observers, especially those who were around before the Union, to educate the new observers. Newer observers need to know what conditions were in the industry that prompted observers to begin the union organizing effort. They need to know that there was a decreasing trend in wages and benefits in the mid-90's prior to the Union contract. Figure 1 illustrates this downward tend in wages but does not account for benefits (which took an even larger hit during this time period). For example, in 1997, observers regained some pay for briefing and debriefing, reimbursement for raingear and a partial reimbursement for health insurance. These were all benefits observers had in the early 90's but were slowly taken away. Figure 1 also illustrates two levels of the federal pay scale for comparison.

New observers need to know how hard people worked to finally get a contract. It is vitally important we are together when the next round of negotiations begin. Some of you remember how hard it was getting those first agreements. We would be foolish to think it is going to be easy next time. It would be tragic to lose what was won with so much effort.

Input from observers prior to bargaining is extremely important. The AFU needs to know what issues are paramount to you. What contract language worked, what didn't. What did we miss the first go round? Some of you have already called with problem areas that need to be addressed. One issue has been brought up to me over and over is pay for waiting time. I will also need observers to serve on negotiating committees. It is highly effective to have observers participating directly in the bargaining process. So please give some thought to volunteering time next fall to participate on a bargaining committee.

Lastly, please feel free to call me collect at 206-441-3425 or write to 2620 3rd Ave., #400, Seattle, WA 98121 with any questions, input, problems, requests or anything else. The Union is here to assist you so please take advantage of it.

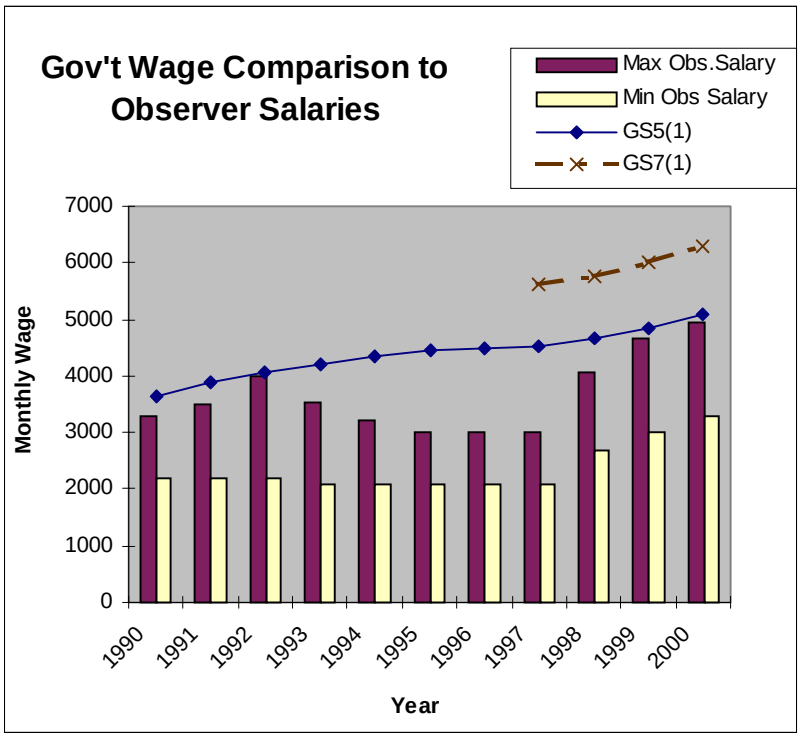


**Figure 1**

## PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL UPDATE (From 11/99 Pac. Council News)

West Coast groundfish observer program moving forward. The NW Region and the NWFSC of NMFS have developed generic draft proposed regulations to implement a West Coast groundfish observer program. The proposed regulatory package, including draft regulatory impact and environmental impact review, will be available for Council consideration at the April 2000 meeting. NMFS is also moving forward on an analysis of observer coverage options. Currently, information from Oregon's Enhanced Data Collection Project is under review and will be incorporated into the coverage analysis. The observer coverage analysis will be completed in time for Council

consideration at the April 2000 meeting. At this writing funding for the West Coast observer program was not included in the federal budget for FY2000.

## WHY FISHERMEN SHOULD SUPPORT A WEST COAST GROUNDFISH OBSERVER PROGRAM by Elizabeth Mitchell [Submitted to Fishermen's News, January 2000 issue, Observer Program Op-Ed]

An observer program for the West Coast Groundfish fishery fell through the cracks this year, even with strong support from fishermen, marine conservation groups and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Clinton requested two million specifically for the West Coast last year but it fell dead at the Congressional level. Yet, without basic data collection systems like the observer program, there is no way to know what level of catch is sustainable until it is too late to prevent a crash. Now, more than ever, support is needed to find a way to fund the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program.

**How will an observer program help fishermen?** The current loss of harvest opportunities is a direct result of a shortage of data. Innovative methods need to be explored to find a way to fund more surveys, data analysis and a bona fide coast-wide observer program. Although groundfish fishermen are hurting this year, if everyone pulls together now, perhaps in 10 years the West Coast groundfish fisheries will be worth something.

Answers to three basic questions are required to manage a fishery: 1) How many fish are there? 2) How many can be taken and still sustain the fishery? and 3) How much of each species is being removed by fishing? For West Coast groundfish fisheries, all three questions remain largely unknown. If we don't implement observer programs in our fisheries to determine what's being removed, there won't be a future in any fishery. Without observer data and under the current trip limit management strategy, the fishery simply cannot be properly managed. Keeping our heads in the sand regarding bycatch is not going to make the fish come back to a sustainable level. Good data may also show whether the current drastic closures are even warranted.

**What's been done toward implementing a West Coast Observer Program?** An observer program for West Coast groundfish fisheries has been in the development stages for over a decade. From 1995-1998, a voluntary pilot observer program was developed for the trawl fishery by the Oregon Department of Fisheries and Wildlife (ODFW) and the Oregon Trawl Commission, with assistance from the Pacific States Fishery Management Commission (PSFMC) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). However, because of the voluntary nature of this program, called the Enhanced Data Collection Program, placement of observers was sometimes difficult. This also made data analysis complicated. However, the EDCP got the ball rolling and worked out some bugs for the implementation of a coast-wide observer program. It should be formalized, expanded and, most
important, fully funded.

Although the EDCP data has yet to be fully analyzed, preliminary data shed light on bycatch issues with the trawl fishery and revealed a major hole in the management equation. Currently, this is the only source of data on discards from this fishery besides a study done in the mid-80s, (referred to as the Pikitch study). The Pikitch study is what NMFS and the Pacific Fishery Management Council still use to determine discards for this fleet. However, the West Coast trawl fishery has undergone some major changes since the 1980s. What remains unknown is whether the bycatch rates from either data set accurately reflect the rest of the fleet. Because West Coast groundfish fishermen are not required to record discards, no one has a clear picture of what is being removed from West Coast stocks.

More comprehensive data, that could be gathered through a mandatory observer program, is urgently needed to follow up on the smaller scale efforts of the Pikitch and EDCP studies. With it, there will be more certainty regarding management, instead of operating on guess-work. Without it, NMFS and the Council will have no other choice but to continue to take the precautionary approach, resulting in lowered quotas, which may not be necessary. Without observer data, there will certainly never be a
sustainable fishery.

**What can fishermen do?** The West Coast Groundfish Observer Program is now ready to get started,
but funding remains uncertain. According to Vicki Cornish, a fisheries biologist with the National Observer Program at NMFS in DC, Congress is "attempting to maintain some equity in funding observer programs nation-wide. NMFS is now working toward standardizing the funding source,
whether it be from Industry or fully funded from the Congressional level." This is where fishermen, observers and conservationists all need to make our voice heard (SEE BOX). Contact your fishing association and make sure they are up on this issue. Tell your Congressional Representatives, the

Council, and NMFS administrative officials to provide full funding for a coast-wide groundfish observer program. Of all groups, fishermen are most affected by a fisheries collapse, and should be leading the charge for data collection programs to prevent a collapse from occurring and to maintain a sustainable future.

To get full funding for a West Coast observer program:

1. Call your fishing associations and the Pacific Fishery Management Council and make sure they are on this issue.

2. Get the funding request in Clinton's 2001 budget request--write and/or call:

Penny Dalton, Director of the National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Springs, Maryland 20910
Tel: 301/713-2239
Fax: 301/713-2258

3. Urge the Chairs of the Appropriations Committee and the Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary Appropriations Sub-Committees to accept Clinton's budget request to fund the program. These are the people who hold the purse strings. Call, fax and send the hard copy to:

Ted Stevens, Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Senate, SH-522
Washington, D.C. 20510
Tel: 202/224-3004, Fax: 202/224-2354

Judd Gregg, Chair of the Senate Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary Sub-Committee
United States Senate, SR-393
Washington, D.C. 20510
Tel: 202/224-3324, Fax: 202/224-4952

C.W. Bill Young, Chair of the House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives, 2407-RHOB
Washington, D.C. 20515
Tel: 202/225-5961, Fax: 202/225-9764

Harold Rogers, Chair of the House Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary Sub-Committee
U.S. House of Representatives, 2470-RHOB
Washington, D.C. 20515
Tel: 202/225-4601, Fax: 202/225-0940

4. Call your local Senate or Congressional Representative. To get their contact numbers, call the US Capitol Switchboard at 202/224-3121. They'll ask for your home zip-code and connect you to your Representative.

## JOB OPPORTUNITIES

**Fishery Biologist (Management), National Observer Program** NMFS is searching for a motivated and energetic current or former fisheries observer to join the agency's National Observer Program team at NMFS Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. The National Observer Program's mission is to provide a formalized mechanism for NMFS to address observer issues of national importance and to develop policies and procedures to ensure that NMFS observers and observer programs are fully supported. The policies must reflect the diverse needs of regional observer programs while enhancing data quality and achieving consistency in key areas of national importance. Closes 1/10/2000. The vacancy announcement can be found at: *http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/a9noaa.htm*

**Fisheries Data Analyst** We are looking for an individual to assist us in providing catch and bycatch monitoring services to fishing fleets operating in Alaskan groundfish fisheries. The job involves working with data generated by at-sea or processing plant observers and providing a variety of reports and maps used by various trawl fleets to optimize their harvests. The ideal candidate would have an undergraduate or masters degree in fisheries or some related science, and experience as either an Alaskan groundfish observer, fisheries biologist, or experience on a commercial trawler. In addition, computer literacy is essential. Experience with MS Excel is required. Familiarity with MS Access, Visual Basic and some form of GIS a plus. Our office is located on Vashon Island. Send resumes to Sea State, Inc., P.O. Box 74 Vashon, WA. 98070.

Position is with **Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission** in Forks, WA. Closing date is February 15th. Salary:$33,026+ DOQ. Responsible for monitoring and evaluating populations of marine fish species. Species involved include rockfish, halibut and other flatfish, and round fish such as sable fish, lingcod and Pacific whiting. Will work closely with fisheries managers and technical staffs of the Quileute, Quinault, Hoh and Makah Tribes according to appropriate direction of the Commission's supervisory staff. Will also work closely with state, federal, and regional agencies dealing with coastal marine issues. Participate with scientific advisory bodies such as the Pacific Fishery Management Council Groundfish Management Team and stock assessment teams. Duties of position include evaluating resource status, modeling population trends and evaluating the appropriateness of harvest quotas or other harvest management options. Requires Master's degree in fisheries or other related biological science and two years of pertinent experience, or a Bachelor's degree in fisheries or other related biological science with coursework in statistics and/or population dynamics and three years of pertinent work experience. Must possess knowledge of groundfish population models and methods and techniques used in stock assessment analysis, including an understanding of age-structured and population synthesis models for groundfish. Knowledge of Washington coastal marine issues desirable. Ability to communicate clearly in written and oral form. Ability to use Windows-based word processing and spreadsheet computer software. Must possess or have ability to possess Washington State driver's license. Send resume and cover letter to James R. Anderson, Executive Director, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, 6730 Martin Way East, Olympia, WA 98516. Phone 360-438-1180.

## Additional Fed. Gov't positions:

**Fisheries Biologist**. Closes 1/18. Silver Spring MD
*http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/wfjic/jobs/BO5683.HTM*

**Fishery Biologist (Management)** Closes 1/20. Silver Spring MD
*http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/wfjic/jobs/BO6031.HTM*

**Fishery Biologist**, Portland Oregon. Closes 1/19
*http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/wfjic/jobs/II0780.HTM*

**Fishery Management Officer**, Portland, OR, closes 1/25
*http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/wfjic/jobs/IH9703.HTM*

## MISC. NOTES & TIDBITS

**NEW MEMBERSHIP**: if you want to become a member of the APO, please write, email or call Kim Dietrich. An annual donation of $10 is required. Donations are used to publish and distribute the *Mail Buoy* and to pay for costs of testifying at Council meetings out of state. Also, if you are not an observer but would like to receive your own copy of the *Mail Buoy*, there is an annual charge of $15.

**APO T-SHIRTS** are available. Size options: L or XL. Color options: Black, Teal, but others can be ordered. The price is $15 (sales tax included).

**Publications (Observers & their data in the News):**
"Observers Count." National Fisherman, Nov. 1999, p.20-21.
"Observers Welcome but Who Pays?" Pacific Fishing, Dec. 1999, p.38-39.
"Trawl Design: Trawl Associations Lead Bycatch Efforts." Pacific Fishing, Dec.1999, p.32.

**Websites of Interest:**

New England Fishery Management Council (FMC): *http://www.nefmc.org/*
South Atlantic FMC: *http://www.safmc.nmfs.gov/*
Mid-Atlantic FMC: *http://www.mafmc.org/mid-atlantic/mafmc.htm*
North Pacific FMC: *http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/*
Gulf of Mexico FMC: *http://www.gulfcouncil.org/*
Pacific FMC: *http://www.pcouncil.org/*
Western Pacific Regional FMC: *http://www.wpcouncil.org/*
Caribbean FMC: *http://www.caribbeanfmc.com/*

Interested in some fishy clothing for yourself, friends or family? Check out the **Fish Line Co**. based in Kodiak, AK. Fish Line is operated by a long-time observer and specializes in pants and shorts made of a variety of fish print material. For more info., contact Fish Line at: PO Box 1654, Kodiak, AK 99615 or *fishline@ptialaska.net* or 907-486-1488.

**THINGS TO DO (if you're a Fishhead)**:

- UW School of Fisheries Quantitative Seminar every Friday, 12:30-1:20pm, Rm. 288, Fisheries Center. Visit *http://weber.u.washinton.edu/~calvarez/qua~nti.html* for more information.

- UW School of Fisheries Department Seminars (Fish 520) every Thursday, 3:30-4:20pm, Rm. 201, Fisheries Center. Contact School of Fisheries for an itinerary. *http://www.fish.washington.edu/seminars*

- The Joint School of Marine Affairs/Industry/NMFS Seminar Series meets monthly during the school year. The next seminar will be held on January 19, 2000. The title is "West Coast Groundfish: Path to Recovery?" FMI contact Edmund Enomoto at SMA (206) 543-7004 or *eenomoto@u.washington.edu* or visit *http://www.sma.washington.edu/fish_seminar/join.html.* All seminars are held at NW Fisheries Science Center Auditorium, 2725 Montlake Boulevard - E. Hamlin Rd. entrance at 4:00 p.m.

- Fisheries-Oceanography Coordinated Investigations (FOCI) Lunchtime Seminar Series. Thursdays, Noon, Bldg 4, Rm. 2039. For topics see *www.pmel.noaa.gov/foci/seminar.html*

- Jan 18, 5:30-8 pm. Women's Fisheries Network General Meeting at Ray's Boathouse, 6049 Seaview Ave, NW. FMI call WFN at 789-1987. (Join the **Women's Fisheries Network.** WFN's Northwest Chapter sponsors monthly dinner meetings on various fisheries related topics. The NW chapter of WFN generally meets the 3rd Tues. of each month at Ray's Boathouse. Non-members are welcome. Attendance and membership are not limited to women. )

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**IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS/email**

| | |
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|---|---|
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| | |
|---|---|
| OTC | 907-257-2770 |
| NPFMC (Council) | 907-271-2809 |

## OPENERS & MEETINGS

| | |
|---|---|
| Jan 1 | Fixed gear P.cod opens in BS/AI |
| Jan 20 | Trawl Poll & P.cod opens in BS/AI |
| Feb 7 | North Pacific Fisheries Mgt. Council, Anchorage, AK |
| late Feb | Observer Committee, No official announcement yet but tentatively looking at late Feb. |
| Mar 6-10 | Pacific Fisheries Management Council, Sacramento, CA. |
| Mar 15 | IFQ Halibut & Sablefish opens |
| Apr 10 | North Pacific Fisheries Mgt. Council, Anchorage, AK |

## Briefing/Training Schedule

Visit *http://www.refm.noaa.gov/observers/briefing.html* for more up to date information.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Dec 27-Jan 14 | 3 wk train | Seattle |
| Dec 27-Jan 14 | 3 wk train | Anchorage |
| | | |
| Jan 3-7 | Level II train | Seattle |
| Jan 6-7 | Level II brief | Anchorage |
| Jan 6-7 | Level II brief | Seattle |
| Jan 10-11 | Level II brief | Seattle |
| Jan 10-13 | 4 day brief | Seattle |
| Jan 10-13 | 4 day brief | Anchorage |
| Jan 11-14 | 4 day brief | Seattle |
| Jan 14-15 | Level II brief | Anchorage |
| Jan 17-21 | Level II train | Anchorage |
| Jan 24-Feb 11 | 3 wk train | Anchorage |
| Jan 31-Feb 4 | Level II train | Anchorage |

* MSCDQ briefings will now be written as "Level II" briefings. All previously MSCDQ-certified prior Observers will have to attend a Level II, 2 day briefing prior to deployment on a vessel requiring a Level II certified Observer.

In addition, all certified Observers must attend and pass a 4 day annual briefing before their first deployment of any type in the calendar year 2000.

**INTERESTED IN WRITING/PUBLISHING THE MAIL BUOY?** Volunteers needed--talk to Kim or Erika. We're always looking for extra help with some insurance research, grant writing, taxes, database management. The **SUBMISSION DEADLINE** for the next issue is **March 31, 2000**.

The APO continues to be interested in your ideas - if you have an idea for an article or story, would like to respond to a previous article, or think the APO has overlooked some issues, drop us a letter or call any time. Contributions from all sectors are welcome. Thanks to Erika Acuna, Janelle Zimmerman, Gillian Stoker, Bill Monheimer, Liz Mitchell, Teresa Turk, Mark Coles, Mandy Merklein, Shannon Fitzgerald, Carrie Nordeen, Bob Maier, Kim Rivera, Gregg Williams, Vicki Cornish, Larry Boyle and Paul MacGregor for your articles/comments, your prompt answers to questions and/or your editing contribution. Your efforts are greatly appreciated. (KD)