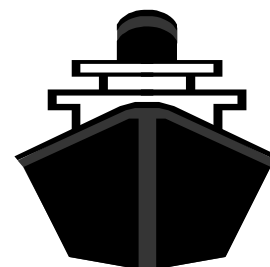




the
Mail Buoy

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**NORTH PACIFIC FISHERIES
MANAGEMENT COUNCIL UPDATE**

**OBSERVER ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES Summarized** (for a complete copy of the OAC Minutes, contact Chris.Oliver@noaa.gov or the APO)

Overview of Issues: Chairman Kyle, Sue Salvesson, and Dan Ito provided some opening remarks to review the Committee's charge, in the context of the primary issues facing the program. Each Committee member, as well as persons in attendance, was given an opportunity to speak briefly regarding their major issues of concern with the program. In summary, the recurring themes echoed by these comments included: 1) need for flexibility in placing observers where we can get the most efficient use for science and catch accounting; 2) need to clearly define baseline program goals and objectives; 3) need to have a work environment that encourages high quality observers (and therefore high quality data); 4) need to reconcile discrepancies between observer data and vessel data; 5) need to address observer availability issue.

CDQ Observer Issues: Sally Bibb reported to the OAC regarding the training and qualification requirements for CDQ observers, noting that NMFS does not feel that the current requirements can be relaxed, unless the Council is willing to alter the program management objectives. The OAC discussed whether there might be a compromise that stays largely within the Council's objective (hard caps), but is not so onerous. Several issues surrounding observer training and qualification were discussed, but the OAC was in basic agreement

that these requirements were appropriate in the context of the Council's October motion. However, the OAC was concerned that the current requirements do have disproportionate impacts to specific sector (even preclude some sectors from participating in the CDQ fisheries), and may provide incentives to avoid observer requirements by using smaller vessels. **Specifically, the OAC (consistent with previous Council action) recommends an analysis to examine CDQ observer**

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requirements for longline catcher vessels >60' which examines management trade-offs associated with potentially reduced coverage requirements. Such an analysis might also examine the use of video monitors as a supplement to on-board observers.

Observer Availability: Related to the CDQ training and qualification requirements is the issue of observer availability. Bridget Mansfield provided an update on this issue, including current estimates of the number of level 2 trained observers (~175) which indicates that the shortage of observers this year may not be as bad as last fall when this issue was brought to the Council's attention. However, even the number of trained observers can be misleading, as at certain times of the year these people decline observer deployments. Further, it is likely that some shortages in available observers (level 1 as well as level 2) will continue to be a problem, for the following reasons: (1) with the current economy and low unemployment, there simply are far fewer applicants being recruited for observer positions; (2) even with high pay, the contractors are not able to recruit nearly as many observers as in previous years; (3) except for a handful of people who enjoy the flexibility of observing, being an observer is not a career choice, but rather a stepping stone to other employment (making this more of a career path is something that may be addressed in discussion of longer-term solutions); (4) additional American Fisheries Act (AFA) and possibly other coverage requirements coming on line.

Options to address the shortage in the short-term include: (1) reducing training and qualification requirements; (2) reducing required coverage levels; and, (3) increasing the number of available observers. Reducing training/qualification requirements is not an option from NMFS' perspective (unless, again, we are willing to change the management expectations). Similarly, reducing coverage levels will likely require that we revisit goals and objectives and the coverage levels necessary to achieve those. **Based on recommendations from contractor representatives, as well as others in attendance, the OAC did identify the following possible areas, which, in combination, may alleviate the shortage in the near-term:**

- **Allow CDQ training after deployment, but prior to debriefing to take advantage of potential 'down time' while waiting for debriefing.**
- **Provide a list of CDQ certified observers to all contractors.**
- **Have CDQ training become part of the standard training class for all observers.**

- **Consider reducing AFA vessel requirements so that both observers do not have to be level 2.**
- **Allow flexibility regarding the 90-day maximum deployment rule – perhaps a plus/minus 10% to promote efficiencies and result in cost savings to vessels.**
- **Encourage more regular, formal contact (maybe workshops) between NMFS program staff and the observer contractors [and observers.]**

For the longer-term, some additional ideas were raised in the OAC discussions. **One specific recommendation was to encourage the Council to consider reduced coverage levels for vessels in the mid-water pollock fisheries.** It was felt by the OAC that, at least for vessels who do not sort at sea, there may be unnecessarily high coverage in this fishery, and that coverage may be duplicative to the plant observer. This is an area where available observer coverage could be freed up to alleviate the shortage problem, although the OAC recognizes that appropriate coverage levels for all fisheries has to be examined as long-term program issues. Other considerations relative to this idea include: 1) whether 2 observers are necessary or whether they need to be level 2 qualified; 2) consider only requiring the 100% coverage when fishing non-pollock fisheries; 3) statistical comparisons could allow post-op examination of whether the reduced coverage is resulting in data deficiencies; 4) critical habitat considerations could be addressed through VMS; 5) for GOA vessels in particular, reduced coverage in pollock fishing could result in increased coverage in other fisheries where data is lacking.

Amendments to current program: The OAC supports the rollover of the existing program to allow time for further development of long-term program structure changes. Regarding the ATLAS hardware requirements, the OAC supports implementation but did offer the following recommendations in connection with those discussions: 1) that NMFS provide bulletin board reports on amounts of pollock coming from Shelikof and 2) that, ideally, all observers should have their own ATLAS capable laptop computers.

Regarding the additional changes, the OAC supports the language drafted for shoreside plant logistics, concurrent assignment of observers to shoreside plants and confidentiality of observer personal information. The OAC added some additional options to be examined for shoreside plant reporting periods and pot observer coverage. See also AK Region Update.

Observer Seat on the Advisory Panel: This issue was raised and discussed a some length. While there was general consensus that an observer representative would provide an important perspective to the AP, there was discussion as to whether that seat should be allowed to vote. There was also advice from NFMS staff that such a seat should be currently, or recently, working observer, not be a NMFS employee, and not represent an agency perspective. **In summary, the OAC recommends that the observer seat on the AP be reinstated as a non-voting member.** *[There were 2 members who felt that the observer should be allowed to vote.]*

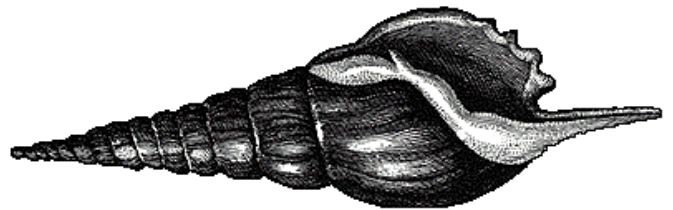
Long-term program change: Though the OAC spent most of its time discussing short or intermediate term issues, much of the discussion touched on issues underlying long-term program structural changes. Foremost among those is definition of goals and objectives, necessary coverage levels by fishery to achieve them and the appropriate funding and delivery model to place the observers. In order to further develop alternatives, the OAC needs additional information or updates of previous analyses, relating to program costs and available funds which could be generated under various options. The OAC is targeting mid-May for the next meeting, at which the focus will be on the long-term program alternatives. **To the extent possible, the OAC requests that staff prepare the following information to facilitate those discussions:**

- **Relative to the idea of reducing coverage in the pelagic pollock fishery, a quantification of the number of vessels affected, and the potential number of observers which would be freed up.**
- **Updated estimates of the costs of current observer coverage, exvessel values, and projected fee necessary. A side-by side comparison of the various primary alternatives, in terms of costs/revenues as well as other program issues, would also be very useful (primary alternatives include status quo, fee plan, TAC set-aside, subsidy programs).**
- **A comparison of the foreign observer program, and the legal framework which allowed NMFS oversight and flexibility in placing observers. This would include the issue of ‘who is the client’ and NFMS vs. contractor role in that system.**
- **Examination of necessary changes to the Magnuson Stevens Act (M-S Act) to allow each major alternative to be developed.**

- **Bar graphs depicting general observer needs in each major fishery on a weekly basis (based on most recent estimates of seasons in BASI and GOA).**

Additionally, the OAC recommends that analyses of necessary coverage levels by fishery begin on a parallel track with the above information requests. We also recognize that the MRAG review will be available by early May, which should also provide guidance to the OAC as it considers long-term program issues.

Other: The OAC discussed and supported the concept of the Digital Observer Project, M-S Act Reauthorization, and AK Board of Fish Resolution 2000-198-FB. *[Look for an article on Digital Observer Project for the next Mail Buoy.]*



NMFS-ALASKA REGION UPDATE

NMFS Intends To Extend The Current Interim Observer Program Through 2002

At the June 1998 meeting, the Council received notice that the third-party, Joint Partnership Agreement (JPA) program structure for the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program (NPGOP) could not be pursued further. The Council voted to extend the current interim observer program through the year 2000, to allow for the development of an appropriate fee-based funding mechanism and other long-term adjustments to the program. Progress toward this goal has been delayed, since implementation of the AFA and the Steller sea lion conservation measures resulted in postponement of any scheduled discussion on this issue at the October 1998 Council meeting and absorption of the NMFS staff resources.

With the recent NPGOP leadership transition completed and the Council’s OAC reconvening with new membership after a 1 ½ year hiatus, Observer Program focus returns to the resolution of the issue of finding an appropriate funding mechanism for observer coverage and other programmatic problems.

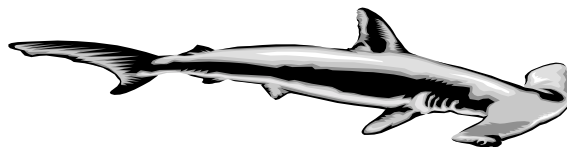
NMFS intends to extend the current interim Observer Program, which lapses 12/31/00, through 2002 to avoid a hiatus in program authority while a revised program structure is developed. Rulemaking to extend the interim program will not include any changes to facilitate timely review and implementation. A proposed rule is expected to be published by mid 2000 with an effective date of January 2001.

Additional Rulemaking Planned

In addition to the rollover of the Interim Observer Program, NMFS intends to address the following:

- Shoreside plant reporting periods – monthly projections of delivery weights which trigger observer coverage may result in costly observer coverage at shoreside plants during periods with reduced deliveries. Weekly triggers are being considered.
- Shoreside plant observer logistics – observers may miss deliveries to shoreside plants due to unreliable communication with the plant or unreliable transportation to the Plant. Additionally, occasional inadequate housing for observers assigned to plants may be experienced. NMFS is pursuing an alternative which may require plants/contractors to provide clean, dry, quiet housing; reliable communication equipment such as a phone, VHF radio or pager for notification of upcoming deliveries or other necessary communication, and safe, reliable motorized transportation to the plant if the observer's accommodations are greater than 1 mile away from the processing facility.
- Concurrent assignment of observers to shoreside plants – observers occasionally miss deliveries to shoreside plants due to concurrent assignment to 2 plants receiving simultaneous deliveries.
- Groundfish pot fishery observer coverage requirements – observer coverage does not accurately reflect fishing effort in the groundfish pot fishery when vessels purposely retrieve less gear when an observer is aboard.
- Confidentiality of observer personal information – personal information about observers distributed to industry by contractors has been used to intimidate observers at sea.

For further information on the various alternatives analyzed, contact Bridget Mansfield, NMFS AK Region, Bridget.Mansfield@noaa.gov.



NORTH PACIFIC OBSERVER PROGRAM UPDATE

Fisheries Observer Workshop Announcement by Vicki Cornish, National Observer Program

You are invited to attend the 2nd Biennial Fisheries Observer Program Workshop, to be held in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, June 26 - 29, 2000.

In 1998, NMFS and the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) co-sponsored a workshop in Seattle, WA, designed to bring together some of the key organizations responsible for the design, management and delivery of at-sea fisheries Observer Programs in the United States and Canada. This 2nd 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. More information about the workshop can be found on the workshop Internet site at:
<http://www.Seawatch2000.nf.ca/index.htm>.

The objectives of the workshop are to:

- Facilitate discussions on the role of observer programs as management, compliance and scientific programs
- Address some of the key issues related to the operations of observer programs, from the perspective of governments, observer contractors, the fishing industry and observers
- Explore the current applications, limitations, and future uses of scientific data collection from observer programs.

Jim Nance (NMFS SEFSC), Teresa Turk (NMFS NWFSC) and I are representing the US on the steering committee for the workshop. The steering committee has drafted a preliminary agenda for the workshop that includes:

- Brief program overviews of US and Canada fisheries observer programs

- Two industry panels, one focusing on general issues and one on how to fund observer programs
- Two observer panels, one on safety and one on maintaining an experienced observer corps
- A panel on the integration of management, compliance and science program objectives
- A panel on how sampling programs are designed to meet multiple objectives
- A panel on compliance issues
- Two separate breakout sessions, one on industry issues and one on crafting an observer "Bill of Rights", with an opportunity to report back to the full audience on the results of the sessions.

A more detailed agenda is posted on the website above.

Each panel will have a moderator to present a brief overview of the session topic. Panel members will also have an opportunity to present ideas related to the session topic. The moderator will then facilitate discussions between the panelists and with the workshop audience. The steering committee has identified the moderators for each panel and potential panel members, but we are still looking for other panel members from all disciplines to round out the discussions.

Registration for the workshop may be made through the Internet site as well. The registration fee for the workshop is \$200US and payment can be made by mail or via the secure Internet site. Registrations received after March 31, 2000, will be \$250US. NMFS has received authorization from NOAA for employees to attend this international workshop (if you are a NMFS/NOAA employee, contact Christine Lowe at 301-713-0155 for more info and for instructions on obtaining an official govt. passport). The registration fee includes attendance at all workshop sessions, the evening social events, daily workshop luncheons on site and a copy of the final proceedings. You are encouraged to pre-register for the workshop on the Internet site in advance of paying the registration fee - this will give the steering committee an early indication of who is planning to attend so that arrangements can be made accordingly.

It is highly recommended that you make air and hotel arrangements as early as possible, in order to ensure your arrangements for St. John's during this active summer tourism period. The workshop will be held at the Delta Hotel and Conference Center and there is a

block of rooms reserved for workshop attendees. These rooms are offered at a rate of \$120/nt CDN. Please indicate the group code GCDFO to obtain this rate (do not make reservations online as indicated on the website - you will not receive the group rate if you do).

For more information on the workshop, or if you are interested in being on a panel, contact me or any of the other US steering committee members by e-mail or phone at:

V. Cornish: Vicki.Cornish@noaa.gov, 301/713-2328, x160
 Jim Nance: James.M.Nance@noaa.gov, 409/766-3507
 Teresa Turk: Teresa.Turk@noaa.gov, 206/860-3460

To obtain a full color copy (or copies) of the workshop brochure, or a copy of the 1998 Seattle Workshop Report, please send me an e-mail with your full mailing address.

See you in St. John's!! [Please forward this announcement to others who may be interested in attending the workshop.]

Opportunity Knocks — 2nd Biennial Joint Canada-U.S. Fisheries Observer Workshop

by Dan Ito

Greetings Alaska Region Observers (groundfish, crab, and gillnet alike)! The 2nd Biennial Joint Canada-U.S. Fisheries Observer Workshop will be held in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, June 26-29, 2000. The workshop was announced in your last APO newsletter, and information is available on the web at <http://www.Seawatch2000.nf.ca/index.htm>. I recommend anyone who has the ability to attend this workshop to do so; this should be a very good conference.

Participation is open to all, so everyone is welcome. The 1st biennial workshop, held in Seattle, Washington (March 1998), was not well advertised. Many observers did not understand that their participation was welcome. This resulted, unfortunately, in only a few observers attending. Workshop participants at the last meeting agreed that while it was a very successful meeting, with much discussion and exchange of information regarding observers and observer program issues, the discussions could have been much improved with more participation from observers.

That having been said, we understand that it is very expensive to pay one's own way to St. John's,

Newfoundland. So, I want to let you know that the National Marine Fisheries Service's North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program (NPGOP) and the National Observer Program (NOP) have worked together to fund two observers from the Alaska Region. The NPGOP and NOP will pick up the tab for your airfare, hotel, meals, and yes, I'll even buy you a beer or two. We will be going through a selection process to determine which two observers will go. Please read the request for proposals below and submit a proposal no later than May 12. We will review the proposals and select the two best candidates by May 19.

If you are selected, support does not come without responsibilities! You will be provided with background materials from previous workshops. You will be required to read these materials to better prepare yourself to actively participate in the workshop discussions. It is very important that you get up to date on the many issues that managers are struggling with to correct and improve their programs, so that we do not spend valuable conference time going over past ground. My staff has tried to catch me up on a lot of the history behind the many issues we face, so I'll be doing the same thing! Other than that, you are being supported so that you come and express your opinion, and do your best to speak for observers from the Alaska Region. Help us to better clarify what the observers' viewpoint is on these issues, and help us make some positive changes. There are several panel topics that your input will be especially valuable on, such as methods of maximizing retention of prior observers. In fact, you may be appointed to be a panel member.

Read the RFP below, and get your proposal in! Give me or Shannon Fitzgerald a call if you have any questions. I can be reached at 206-526-4194. Contact information for Shannon Fitzgerald: phone in Anchorage, through 28 April, is 907.271.1314. Phone in Seattle, beginning in early May, is 206.526.4553 Good luck, and hope to see you at the conference.



Request for Proposal to Support Participation at the 2nd Biennial Joint Canada-U.S. Fisheries Observer Program Workshop

Date Due: May 12, 2000

Submit to: Dan Ito, North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program, AFSC/NMFS, 7600 Sand Point Way N.E., Seattle, WA 98115

Your proposal should consist of 3 parts.

Part 1: Your Participation. Please explain in one page or less (Times New Roman 12 pt font, 1 inch margin) why the National Marine Fisheries Service should support you for the workshop. You should review the conference agenda available at <http://www.Seawatch2000.nf.ca/index.htm> and note what specific skills you have that would support current agenda items and panel discussions. Let us know how your participation adds value to the proceedings.

Part 2: Observer Experience. Please submit a list of your observer experience. It would be best to itemize by categories, listing program (North Pacific Groundfish; ADF&G Crab; Prince William Sound Gillnet, etc.); gear type (longline, pot, gillnet, etc.); vessel type and class (catcher-processor: 150 ft, etc.); total cruises; total sea days (approximate); and other comments, such as if it was a CDQ cruise. For example, under North Pacific Groundfish Program have one line for your factory trawler experience, another for your pot vessel experience, etc. For each, note the total number of cruises and total sea days. Please also highlight your most recent experience. Follow this with a list of the different observer training sessions you have attended (groundfish observers need only list the 3-week training, not briefings).

Don't forget to include all your observer experience, regardless of whether it was with the Groundfish program or even within the Alaska Region. Also, if you have other work experience that directly applies, such as being a port coordinator for an Observer Company, please list that here as well.

Part 3: Public speaking and communication experience. Have you chaired meetings, been on the board of a volunteer group, participated in conferences, published scientific information, presented findings at conferences, or participated in workshops? All these count. If in doubt about whether some particular experience applies, go ahead and include it anyway.

You may want to include up to three letters of reference. These can come from any source, including past advisors or current peers. The letters should also address why we should choose you to participate. These are optional

Good Luck!

ATTENTION! Enhanced Data Collection Project and Pacific Whiting Observers

(Submitted by Teresa Turk)

The Northwest Fisheries Science Center & Region and the National Observer Program would like to sponsor two observers to attend the 2nd Biennial Joint Canada-US Observer workshop to be held in St. John's Newfoundland, Canada June 26-29th, 2000. Airfare, per diem, and hotel will be provided for selected candidates. Additional information on the meeting including the agenda is available on the web at <http://www.Seawatch2000.nf.ca>.

Selection of candidates will be limited to current and former observers that participated in the West Coast Enhanced Data Collection Project (1995-1998) or the Pacific whiting fishery. The NWFSC/R plans to select one observer from each program. Selected observers will be required to review and familiarize themselves with the topics and discussions from the 2 previous observer workshops (Galveston 1993 and 1st Biennial Joint Canada-US Observer workshop held in Seattle in 1998). Secondly, observers may be asked to assist in a variety of tasks at the workshop. Most importantly, observers are encouraged to actively participate in any and all discussions and express openly their opinions from the observer point of view. The observer's perspective was conspicuously absent at the 1998 Seattle workshop and we hope to rectify this oversight by providing funding.

If you would like to attend, please compose a 1-2 page summary of why you are interested in attending, your fishery observer and other relevant scientific experience, and how attendance at the workshop may be applicable to your current or future career goals. Please include within your letter if you are currently observing and in which fishery, the different types, sizes and fisheries you have observed, and up to 3 references (optional).

Please submit your proposal by May 15 by fax, email or snail mail to the address listed below. The two best candidates will be selected by May 22. If you have any questions, you can call Teresa Turk at (206) 860-3460 or by email at teresa.turk@noaa.gov.

Teresa Turk Ph (206) 860-3460
NMFS/NWFSC Fax (206) 860-3394
2725 Montlake Blvd. E. Email: teresa.turk@noaa.gov
Seattle, WA 98122



Update on the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Cadre

By Shannon Fitzgerald

Hi All! With all the interest in our implementation of the cadre portion of the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program, the APO editor invited me to submit an article describing progress we've made and the direction we are heading. I am still working out many of the details and specifics of what a cadre team member will be expected to do and how the program will provide the appropriate support. Look for further communications on status and progress, and certainly read the job announcement carefully once it opens (see below). Because I am still working on the details, your input now is extremely valuable to the process. Feel free to submit an email or letter with your suggestions or responses to the information in this article. Phone calls are also welcome, but it is easier for me if I have written documents (such as an email) to refer to.

This article will deal with three primary issues: (1) overview of the process and current status for implementing the cadre (milestones, mission, objectives, etc.), (2) our current view regarding duties and responsibilities, and (3) how you should proceed if you are interested. Before going on further, I'd like to thank the many observers, contractor staff, NMFS staff, industry people, and others who have provided input into the process thus far. Hearing from these many sources helps identify the many good things we could accomplish. Of course, it is nearly impossible to do it all, so part of the challenge we face is to set up the cadre to accomplish attainable objectives. The cadre will be a very dynamic program. We'll try to achieve some initial successes that we can build on later to continue finding ways to improve the program.

Developing and implementing the Cadre. I am currently on a detail (work assignment) to our Anchorage field office where I am tasked with coordinating the development and implementation of the cadre. I am mainly a focal point for that work — valuable input is coming from many quarters, and several program staff are working, or will be working, on specific tasks that support cadre implementation (see below for contact information). I am working on reviewing input on cadre tasks and Observer Program improvements and have used this input to develop a mission statement, objectives, and am developing specific duties and measurable goals we will try to

reach. These materials will be used to develop items necessary for the hiring process (job description, rating plan, etc.). Once these are completed we will advertise the positions and follow through with hiring actions. Concurrently, we are developing cadre training and evaluation materials and procedures, completing outreach activities, and developing support procedures such as internal processes and regulatory framework where required.

We are hoping to stay on track with this work, and advertise the jobs at a time that maximizes the opportunity for as many interested prior observers as possible to apply. The expected major milestones are:

1. Cadre positions should be advertised from about May 15 through June 15.
2. Candidate rating and interviews will follow in late June and throughout July.
3. Selections should be made, hopefully, by the end of July.
4. We are targeting August 14 for a start date.
5. Formal training for new staff should occur during August and September.
6. New cadre members should be trained and ready to do their work by September 30.

Staff will then be posted to their permanent duty station, begin carrying out their duties, and going through evaluation and perhaps some further training. We are working on developing opportunities to go to sea for this fall, but currently do not have the regulatory framework to guarantee that. Given the regulatory process and current workload of staff, if a regulation is required it will likely not be in place until August of 2001. I think that there will be lots of good opportunities for cooperation with the industry though, so I expect to be able to have people at sea this fall. There were many good suggestions at the March 20-21 Observer Advisory Committee meeting on how to proceed there. Even if we cannot get cadre members at sea immediately, there are a multitude of tasks that can still be done to achieve program improvements.

Our view of the mission of the cadre is to improve overall program effectiveness by focusing on three primary objectives: (1) improved data quality and integrity, (2) improved industry outreach, primarily to identify observers and the Observer Program as assets, and (3) support of critical program functions. By focusing on taking care of the program, we then better care for all those who depend on the program, including

various data users, industry, observers, management staff, and our many other clients.

Provisional Cadre duties, deployment schemes, and work status. I feel that over the past few years the quality and integrity of data has improved as a result of us being able to concentrate on hiring prior observers to serve as Observer Program staff in many capacities, including especially debriefing, inseason advising, and field office support. Current staff have direct experience on many vessels and plants, and act as resources to one another when dealing with a vessel they are not familiar with. This gives us a better ability to work with the observer to ensure quality data is added to the database, and to provide constructive criticism on areas for improvement. Although our staff now has a great deal of field experience, we do find situations where no staff member has direct experience on a particular vessel or plant. Unfortunately, once on staff our ability to get them out to sea is very limited. A cadre will bring more experience into the program and provide greater ability to deploy staff to vessels and plants.

Objective 1 (improved data quality and integrity) is really the cornerstone of the program; pretty much everything we do is with the objective of data quality and integrity in mind. An important key in reaching this objective is to properly support observers and Observer Program staff. Having more staff available for field activities, whether at current field office locations, other ports where we don't have a formal presence, or, as a sea-going component should enable us to achieve many improvements. Some potential tasks that might fall under this objective include: completing sampling duties on vessels or plants; doing vessel and plant profiles; evaluating work environments and relating them back to debriefing staff; providing input on data quality control procedures, mentoring of observers through inseason advising, midcruise debriefings, and site visits to vessel or plant; and deployment to sea as a lead observer on either particular assignments or to a vessel class. In short, the cadre can supply information to assist Observer Program staff to establish quality standards by fishery strata (region, area, fishery, fleet, observer company, and assignment).

With respect to objective 2 (observers and the observer program as an asset), we have a lot of work to do! The first step is to further promote the positive ties between observers and the Observer Program. Program staff feel very strongly that observers and the Observer Program are assets to the agency and industry alike.

Unfortunately, at times there seems to be little understanding of this, as evidenced by the way observers are treated on some assignments or sometimes referred to. Further, while Observer Program staff have a very high regard and respect for observers and the jobs they do, we do not seem to have adequately conveyed that to observers. Cadre members will be able to directly handle many outreach activities, and also to take pressure off of other staff so that they too can complete appropriate outreach activities. Some possible tasks here include one-on-one mentoring of new observers; more staff to handle inseason advising; more assistance in the field offices to further expand field office hours and activities, allowing more visits to shoreside plants and vessels in port to assist in troubleshooting difficult sampling or personnel situations; dockside visits available to skippers as well as observers to field questions or issues from skippers and crew; holding on-board pre-cruise meetings with the skipper and observer present; working with industry to address (and ultimately avoid) compliance problems; post-cruise interviews with observers and skippers; and other tasks such as participation in industry meetings and developing outreach presentations, brochures, videos, and other items.

Objective 3 (support for critical program functions) is also critical to the success of the program. Providing support to critical program activities includes those we are doing and those we would like to do. First and foremost is improved response to safety issues. The next most important is all cadre members will be trained to debrief observers. Cadre members can help to reduce the wait time for observers between debarking a vessel and starting debriefing during those periods when there is a large influx of observers. That is one of the biggest areas where we hope to improve service to observers, observer companies, and industry alike. We will try to maintain and even improve consistency among debriefers at the same time, a task made more difficult as more individuals are involved. While we are aware of some problems, and are constantly striving for improvements, I must say that I am very proud of the work staff have done to date; they have shown a great deal of dedication and commitment to the primary objectives of the debriefing process: ensure high quality data, enhance observer performance, and debrief as efficiently as possible. I'll discuss the debriefing process in greater detail in another article. There are other operations we are already doing where the cadre can assist, such as observer sampling station inspections and coordination with industry, and additional activities

the program needs to also take on, such as a greater research presence.

You would probably like some idea of what the job will look like. Cadre members will be in one of four possible status types over the course of a year. This includes being at sea (hopefully), at a field station or other port, in the office (Anchorage or Seattle), or on leave. Sea time will mostly include commercial operations, but may also include research vessels. Time off from the job is always important, and the job announcement will detail any special leave categories beyond the normal ones federal employees have, which includes accrued annual and sick leave for each pay period, shore leave accrued while you are at sea, and compensatory time (up to certain limits) chosen in lieu of pay when overtime is worked. Please be aware that leave is granted by a supervisor who must take program workload and other issues into account. While we always do our best to accommodate staff with leave requests, we must sometimes ask staff to request leave at a different time. You can also request leave without pay. Unfortunately, we are rarely able to grant leave without pay requests given the total workload expected of the program. Leave options are something you may want to discuss during the job interview.

Several observers felt that the job should be structured to be a very seasonal position, where you would be assigned to a vessel or plant, return to complete a debriefing (if appropriate), and then be on paid leave or in a non-pay leave status until it was once again time to do a vessel or plant assignment. This approach involved very little office-work. We considered this approach, but decided against it for two reasons. First, the ability to effectively mentor observers and communicate to industry is enhanced by having the broadest understanding of the program and issues facing the program. You do not get that broad understanding without being fully integrated into the program and involved in the types of tasks and issues we deal with in the office. Second, the total workload placed on the program is very great, and the cadre can assist with many critical tasks. The trick will be in balancing out all these needs to take care of the stated objectives, and also make this an exciting, challenging, and career-enhancing position.

How to proceed? If you are interested, contact me and start working on your SF171, which is an optional form (formerly required) used to apply for federal positions. It is available off the web at www.cybercomm.net/~digibook/ for a fee. Although it

is optional, the way the form is structured makes it much easier to properly rate your knowledge, skills, and abilities as part of the hiring process. What knowledge, skills, and abilities might we be looking for? These positions will be limited to prior observers in the North Pacific groundfish fisheries. There will be specific academic requirements, which will be identified in the job announcement. Beyond that, we will be looking for a combination of experience on a variety of gear and vessel types, good communication and interpersonal skills, strong personal organization, writing skills, ability to work both independently but with the goals of the organization in mind, and other such skills. The skills you will be rated on during the hiring process will be identified in the job announcement as critical rating factors.

Also, you needn't worry about missing out on this job because you committed to an observer trip, or have other commitments. Once the ratings are done we will have a list of people we can interview. While it is best to interview in person, we have in the past conducted phone interviews with prospective candidates all across the U.S. and on boats or in port. It would be a very unusual circumstance for us not to be able to conduct a phone interview with you. For example, if you are on assignment as an observer when we get to the interview phase, we will know what vessel you are on and will get a message to you. We would be able to call you and conduct a phone interview with you there on the vessel, at a pre-arranged time, or wait until there was an off-load when you could get to a land phone.

Also, although we are targeting August 14 as a start date, the actual start date will be individually negotiable, within some constraints. We do not have to start everyone at the same time. In fact, it may be advantageous to stagger the start date of new staff as they come on. We will, within reason, work with you to determine your start date once you are selected. I recommend that you keep your observer company fully apprized of your interest and application to the cadre. They will not pass you over for an assignment if you are interested, as long as they are fully informed and we work together to ensure you can complete your commitment. That having been said, be careful of the commitment you make. Committing to a 90-day contract at the beginning of May should not be a problem, whereas doing the same thing on August first, as we are making selections, is a different matter. Also, you should not commit to additional contracts or extensions beyond what you have agreed to this summer until you check with us on your status in the

hiring process. We will try to do our best to keep you informed at each step, and we should all coordinate to make sure observer companies are also kept informed, so they know what they can tell their industry clients and work to make sure vessels receive required coverage.

I hope you find this summary informative. Please feel free to ask for more details and to provide your input on how these new positions can bring about improved program performance. We are really looking forward to getting the cadre started, and hope you share that excitement and commitment. Those who come in at the start will also be depended on to help us further mold the cadre as time goes on. Thanks, and good luck with your applications!

Contact information for Shannon Fitzgerald: phone in Anchorage, through 28 April, is 907.271.1314. Phone in Seattle, beginning in early May, is 206.526.4553. Email is the same regardless:
shannon.fitzgerald@noaa.gov.

[Editor's Note: If you apply for one of these positions and then leave the country or are out at sea, check in frequently with Shannon to update him on how to contact you or when/how you may be contacted.]

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 that 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 April 30, 2000. Results will also be presented at the June Council meeting.

New Observer Contractor: The new contractor, certified earlier this year, has established an office in Seattle. The General Manager is Jim Greiner and contact information is as follows:

TechSea International
2360 W. Commodore Way, Suite 203
Seattle, WA 98199
(206) 285-1408
(206) 285-1535 FAX
(877) 980-1408 Toll Free



PHOTOGRAPHS OF KILLER WHALES COLLECTED BY FISHERY OBSERVERS

Under the recently re-authorized Marine Mammal Protection Act incidental mortality of marine mammals that interact with commercial fisheries is to be managed such that removals do not exceed a level referred to as the Potential Biological Removal (PBR) level. Killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) range throughout Alaskan waters and a few estimates of killer whale abundance exist for selected areas. Because killer whales are distributed within coastal waters, they commonly interact with commercial fisheries by taking caught fish and occasionally are caught incidental to commercial and subsistence fishing operations. The nature and magnitude of the [fish] take is generally unknown but could be significant as in some blackcod longline fisheries.

Beginning in 1989 staff at the National Marine Mammal Laboratory (NMML) in Seattle initiated surveys throughout Alaska to obtain minimum population counts for killer whales using photo-identification techniques. Between 1989-1999, researchers from NMML conducted dedicated surveys for killer whales in Southeast Alaska. To date, 264 Southeast Alaskan killer whales have been individually identified. In Prince William Sound (1984-1999), 352 whales have been identified (North Gulf Oceanic Society).

In 1992 and 1993, NMML conducted dedicated surveys from Kodiak Island west to Atka Island (eastern Aleutian Islands) and north to the Pribilof Islands, resulting in the identification of 289 whales. There has been no dedicated killer whale surveys in this area since the 1992/93 studies thus we have primarily relied on the collection of photographs from other sources. Photographic data on killer whales occurring in the Gulf of Alaska, Aleutian Islands, and Bering Sea are of extreme interest to the National Marine Mammal Laboratory.

While deployed on commercial fishing vessels, collecting data to support fishery management, North Pacific Groundfish observers have opportunistically collected killer whale photographs for the National Marine Mammal Laboratory. All photographs are logged, sorted, and then compared to NMML's master photo-identification catalogue. Matched photographs provide insight into the movement patterns of killer whale pods throughout Alaska. New whales are assigned a new number and then entered into the master catalogue. Through the efforts of the North Pacific Groundfish observers, NMML has acquired an extensive, photographic database representing the years 1980 to 1999. Based on these data, 100 whales, previously unknown, have been individually identified and added to the Bering Sea population of killer whales.

Those of us at NMML would like to take this opportunity to thank all observers for helping us with this project. Thanks to your efforts, we have gained valuable insight into Alaskan killer whale populations and whale movements. The combination of dedicated research and the collection of opportunistic photographs of killer whales has contributed significantly to marine mammal science. We are extremely grateful to those of you who have helped in this effort. Our sincere thanks to all of you!

If you are interested in more information about Alaskan killer whales, please don't hesitate to contact us at the National Marine Mammal Laboratory (Contact: Marilyn E. Dahlheim at 206/526-4020).

[Editor's Note: For more info. see: Dahlheim, M. E., 1997, Photographic Catalog of Killer Whales, Orcinus orca, from the central Gulf of Alaska to the southeastern Bering Sea. NMFS Tech. Report, 58p. A copy can be found in the NMML library on the 2nd floor of Bldg. 4.]

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 a report that provides recommendations based largely on input from observers. Throughout this winter and spring Merklein has been reaching out to observers during briefings, trainings, debriefings as well as through APO’s weekly Discussion Groups and phone surveys. Observers are welcome to contact Ms. Merklein directly. She will be collecting information through the summer. More information is 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”. The strength of the report will rely on the extent, interest, and quality of observer involvement. 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 hosted a series of brown bag lunch seminars during the first quarter to discuss current issues impacting North Pacific commercial fisheries and how observer data are used in fisheries management. Seminars were well attended by Observer Program staff, AFSC staff and a few observers. The APO encourages their continuation in the future. These informal get-togethers allowed about 15 to 20 minutes for the speaker to present their topic followed by a period of questions and discussion. The following are summaries from some of the talks, but not all of them, as well as an additional statement from Doug DeMaster regarding a summary published in the January, 2000 issue of the *Mail Buoy*.

Comments on “How Observer data is useful for Marine Mammal Studies” by Erika Acuna. Published in the Mail Buoy 2000. Vol. 4(1).

*By Douglas P. DeMaster, National Marine Mammal Laboratory, Alaska Fisheries Science Center
5 January 2000*

I think the summary of Erika captured the spirit of the talk, but there are a few statements that need to be corrected. Apparently, I went too fast during the talk or my handwriting on the board was worse than I suspected. Given the importance of this issue to many of our constituents, I wanted to make sure people got the story right (as possible).

First, only the western stock of Steller sea lions is declining. The eastern stock is actually increasing. (Par. 2).

In par. 3, bullet #1, the statement that “Some stocks of Steller sea lions are increasing. This simply is not true.” should have read “Some subunits of the western stock of Steller sea lion are increasing. This simply is not true.” In the last line in this paragraph, the statement “none of the population numbers of animals are above the normal line” should have read “none of the subpopulations have upper confidence limits on rates of change that are positive, using data from 1990 through 1998.” Later in the paragraph (bullet #2), the statement is made that “Steller sea lions are the largest stock listed under the ESA”. This should have read “the western stock of Steller sea lion is one of the largest populations currently listed as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.” In bullet 3 (par. 3), the “team” that is formed when incidental mortality caused by commercial fishing exceeds the PBR is called a “Take Reduction Team”. In the next sentence, it should have read “... but rather is thought to be caused by competition between commercial fisheries and Steller sea lions for the same food resource.” Under bullet #4, point 1, it should have read “10 to 20 nautical mile” (not 20 nautical mile).

In paragraph 5, as noted earlier, the decline in abundance applies only to the western stock of Steller sea lion.

In the first bullet under paragraph 6, two issues are being addressed that need to be clarified. First, while pollock is not the most energy dense food source available to Steller sea lions, it certainly isn’t the worst food source (in fact, it is pretty average). More importantly, given the complex trophic relationships in

the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska, removing pollock at a higher rate than is currently done will not necessarily increase the biomass of “energy dense” prey species, like herring and capelin. In the second bullet, the statement is made that “biological sampling of Steller sea lions is next to impossible”. This should have read, “because of the endangered status of this stock, it is no longer possible to kill animals for the purpose of collecting biological samples, as was done in the 1970s and 1980s.” Funding isn’t the issue here (even with additional funding, we would not propose such collections). Therefore, biological samples, such as teeth, reproductive tracts, and stomachs, that can be collected from stranded (dead) animals or animals killed incidental to commercial fishing are extremely valuable.

How Observer Data Is Used In P. cod Assessment Summarized by Sarah Gaichas

Dr. Grant Thompson presented the January 5, 2000 brown bag seminar. He gave an overview of the Pacific Cod stock assessment model, and how observer data are used in the model. Grant explained that the same assessment model is used for P. cod in the Bering Sea and in the Gulf of Alaska, and that this model is somewhat different from other assessment models used in the North Pacific because it is length-based rather than age-based (more on the distinction below). Although the mathematics behind stock assessment modeling can be difficult to grasp for the uninitiated, Grant used a simplified example to illustrate the relationships between the important parameters in the model, and how they are estimated in the Stock Synthesis program. In short, the stock assessment model is a mathematical representation of how fish growth, natural mortality, fishing mortality and other factors theoretically interact to determine how many fish there are in the stock. The length frequency and catch data collected by observers are used by the model to answer the following question: given our assumptions about P. cod growth, mortality, and how the fishery works (the model), how many fish must there have been in the population to produce the observed catch with the observed length frequency? Once we estimate how many fish there are in the population, we can recommend an “Acceptable Biological Catch”—some proportion of the total population—for the upcoming year, which is the goal of stock assessment. Of course, the actual modeling is much more complicated than that!

There was a great deal of interest in the cod stock assessment model, and many questions from the

audience. The biggest question was, why use lengths to assess cod when we use ages for most other species? And why are observers still collecting some cod otoliths? Grant explained the history of using length data instead of age data for the cod stock assessment. In the late 1980's, there appeared to be poor recruitments of cod, so catches were reduced and there were worries about the future of the fishery. Then, the 1989 year class appeared to be very good from survey information, giving hope for the future. Pacific cod recruit to the fishery at about age 3, so the 1992 stock assessment was expected to show a large influx of 3 year old cod which could help support the fishery. In 1992, the assessment was an age-structured assessment, and it did not show the expected increase in age 3 fish; instead, they appeared as age 2 fish. Pacific cod are difficult to age, especially young fish, and it was suspected that the age-structured assessment was performing poorly due to ageing error, so a length-based assessment was constructed. The length-based assessment, which fits a growth curve to length data within the model to estimate catch at age rather than relying on otolith readings, did confirm the strong 1989 year class which was predicted from survey data. It was decided that a length-based model performed better for Pacific cod assessments than an age-based model based on biased ages. However, age-based models are generally preferred over length-based models, so Nancy Robeson of the AFSC Age and Growth task is validating Pacific cod ages and developing more reliable methods for reading cod otoliths. This is why observers are still collecting some otoliths for cod, because ultimately an age-structured model may replace the current length-based model, and then otoliths collected by observers from all years of the fishery will be aged and used in the assessment.

Grant rated the importance of observer data in the Pacific cod assessment equal to that of the fishery-independent survey information. Without the catch information and lengths collected by observers, it would not be possible to use this type of assessment model.

FMI see stock assessment websites at www.refm.noaa.gov/docs/default.htm.

How Observer Data Aid Food Habits Research – Geoff Lang (Summarized by Kim Dietrich & Sandi Neidetcher)

The Resource Ecology and Ecosystem Modeling Program at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center focuses on the collection and analysis of data relating to

trophic interactions in the North Pacific and incorporation of these data into environmental assessments and single-species and multispecies models. Systematic collection and analysis of groundfish food habits (stomach samples) data is performed. Quantifying food web linkages is essential to increase our understanding of how climate and fishing may affect ecosystems. The importance of this research is also elevated given the increasing emphasis on fishery-mammal interactions: groundfish predation interactions are an important part of knowing the true nature of resource availability to mammals and birds.

Stomach samples are collected by groundfish observers aboard commercial vessels and during existing stock assessment cruises. Since research cruises typically occur only in the summer, observers provide invaluable data from other times of year, times of day and in areas not surveyed. Samples are analyzed in the laboratory and entered into a food habits database. These data allow assessment of factors influencing individual species food habits, including interannual changes. Predation effects by groundfish populations are then quantified and incorporated into various models.

Observers collect stomachs mainly from Pacific cod, pollock and arrowtooth flounder. The food habits lab typically processes 10,000 stomachs/year although very few of those have come from observers in recent years. In the past, stomach sampling from observers has been inconsistent because stomach collection assignments were made to specific observers and vessel assignments frequently changed. There was no guarantee that if an observer were assigned the stomach project, they would even encounter the species they were supposed to sample. Changes have been made to improve this system. Stomach collections are assigned to specific vessels and every effort is made to have the appropriate gear on board those vessels. The assignments are relayed to the observers through a spreadsheet provided during briefing/training. Inseason ATLAS Advisors are also instrumental in providing assignment instruction.

In the lab, stomach contents are separated into major prey groups. If possible, fish and crab prey are identified to the species level, and all other prey are identified to the lowest practical taxon. Both full and empty stomachs are collected and become part of the database. The percentage of empty stomachs varies by species and time of year. Accurate estimates of food consumption rates by groundfish require good estimates of the true proportion of empty stomachs relative to those stomachs containing food. Collection of stomachs from fish that may have partially or totally regurgitated stomach contents can bias these estimates. Some fish (walleye pollock and arrowtooth flounder) are more susceptible to regurgitation than others. Regurgitation can be caused by stress, decompression, pressure of other fish in the codend

and possibly as a defense mechanism. Accurate field identification of fish that have regurgitated their stomach contents (and rejection of those samples) is necessary to eliminate errors.

Because stomach collections require Formalin (37% formaldehyde), the observer program requests observers familiarize themselves with the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) and follow the recommended handling procedures.

For more information on how observer stomach collection data is utilized, contact:

Pat.Livingston@noaa.gov or see <http://www.refm.noaa.gov/reem/>

See also:

Buckley, T. W., G.E. Tyler, D.M. Smith and P.A. Livingston. 1999. Food habits of some commercially important groundfish off the coasts of California, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. NMFS Tech. Report. 190p.

Hollowed, A., J. N. Ianelli, and P. Livingston. 1999. Including predation mortality in stock assessments: A case study for Gulf of Alaska pollock. ICES J. Mar. Sci. (In press)

Lang, G. M. and P.A. Livingston. 1996. Food habits of key groundfish species in the eastern Bering Sea slope region. NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-AFSC-297, 119p.

Lang, G.M., R.D. Brodeur, J.M. Napp, and R. Schabetsberger. 1999. Variation in groundfish predation on juvenile walleye pollock relative to hydrographic structure near the Pribilof Islands, Alaska. ICES J. Mar. Sci. (in press).

Yang, M-S. and B.N. Page. 1999. Diet of Pacific sleeper shark, *Somniosus pacificus*, in the Gulf of Alaska. U.S. Fish. Bull. 97:406-409.

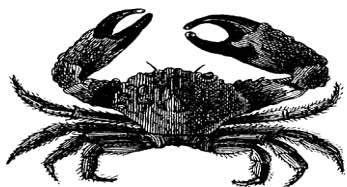
For a full list of food habits publications visit <http://www.refm.noaa.gov/reem/doc/Pubs.htm>



NATIONAL OBSERVER PROGRAM Update

Vicki Cornish, NOP staff, would still like your photos! Development of the website for the National Observer Program is underway. It will be located at: <http://www.st.nmfs.gov/st1/nop/index.html>. 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.



APO NEWS

APO 2/5/00 Letter to Steve Pennoyer, AK Regional Director

Since the regulations implementing the Interim Observer Program expires at the end of 2000, the Association for Professional Observers (APO) would like to take the opportunity to make suggestions to improve any future regulations.

At the inception of the Domestic Groundfish Observer Program (DGOP), it was understood the Program had flaws and needed to be replaced as soon as possible. Unfortunately, ten years have passed under the flawed system and the status quo continues. All of the problems that initially afflicted the observer program are still with us. Section 301 of 16 U.S.C. 1851 (a)(2) states "conservation and management measures shall be based upon the best scientific information available." The current observer program in Alaska is not fulfilling its obligation to collect the best information possible. Therefore, its continuation under the status quo is a violation of a National Standard for Fishery Conservation and Management.

The MS-CDQ program has forced industry to realize the importance of collecting quality data. However, the MS-CDQ program accounts for only 7.5% of the TAC. The MS-CDQ regulations have not begun to address the bulk of the DGOP's overall shortcomings nor do they go far enough to create a truly effective observer program. The most sound solution is to revisit and implement the North Pacific Fisheries Research Plan. Since we realize this is an unrealistic proposition within the next year and under the current management process, the APO believes that NMFS needs to make a number of regulatory changes to fine tune the roles between NMFS, the contractors, observers and the fishing industry. The following is a list of concerns that

the APO would like NMFS to address in future regulations regarding the DGOP:

1. **Modify current certification arrangement between NMFS DGOP and the contractors.**

Background: NMFS has exhibited minimal oversight of the contractors to date. Some uncertainty exists as to whether NMFS lacks the authority or to whether NMFS has chosen not to exercise its authority over the contractors. Regardless, NMFS' input concerning the treatment of their data collectors has been insignificant. NMFS publicly recognizes the potential for conflict of interest under the current system. Yet, the current contractor certification process has never been enforced. In fact, evaluation of contractors by NMFS was discontinued in 1991 and did not resume until 1997. The 1998 evaluations were a rubber-stamp to the status quo and offered little information regarding the contractor's ability to perform their duties as required by NMFS nor did they adequately address the contractor's responsibilities to the observers.

At a national workshop on NMFS Observer Programs held in 1993, guidelines were recommended for all Federal observer programs. One recommendation stated, "Contractual arrangements will only be successful if agency authority and responsibility is adequately defined by legislation, regulation and/or contract. Contractors must contract directly with the agency responsible; when contractors contract with vessel or plant owners to provide observer coverage, agency oversight is inadequate and the potential for conflict of interest is unacceptably high." Similar conclusions and recommendations were drawn at the most recent US/Canada Observer Program Workshop held in Seattle, WA, March 11-13, 1998. *Proposal:* Establish a contractual agreement for the certification process between NMFS and the contractors. NMFS could solicit bids for a no-cost contract (which was originally proposed under the "Third Party" alternative). The Contract could be awarded annually and for a period of one year with biannual evaluations. Certification could expire after 2 consecutive negative evaluations. A decertified contractor could reapply during the next annual certification review period. We suggest no contractor additions should occur once the annual cycle has begun for a given year. The year need not be based on a calendar year.

2. **Establish protocol for when an observer refuses an assignment for safety reasons.**

Background: Regulations state that observers have the right to refuse a vessel for very specific safety reasons. If an observer refuses a vessel for safety reasons related to mechanical problems or related to the behavior of vessel personnel (i.e. drug use or unsafe deck practices), the reality of the situation is that the observer gets replaced with a less fussy observer and the refusing observer is likely out of a job. There is significant financial disincentive for an observer to refuse a vessel.

Proposal: If an observer refuses a vessel for safety reasons, the contractor, NMFS Observer Program staff and the U.S. Coast Guard should be notified. If available, Coast Guard personnel should go to the vessel immediately to evaluate the situation. If a vessel is at sea or in a port where there is no Coast Guard presence, the situation can be evaluated over the appropriate communication system. Vessels should not be held up without cause. However, NMFS should take the responsibility for making the decision and **NO observer should be allowed to ride the vessel until the problem is resolved.**

3. **Establish equity for observers in the decertification process.**

Background: Under the current system an observer or observer contractor has 30 days after receipt of notice to submit in writing any evidence and/or argument in opposition of the proposed decertification. The NMFS decertifying officer has no such time limit to come to a final decision. An observer can wait months after disputing a proposed decertification for the decertifying officer to reach a final decision. The observer is not allowed to work (as an observer) while the decision is being made. There is at least one observer who has been forced into more than 8 months of unemployment while the decertifying officer is making a final determination.

Proposal: APO recommends a 30-60 day limit after which the observer is either decertified or not. This would establish a 90-day limit on the amount of time the observer is out of a job. A specific time line would also strengthen NMFS' position if an observer who is eternally waiting for that decision pursues legal action against NMFS.

4. Data quality is often questioned in the current program. **Data quality could be improved by decreasing the turnover rate of observers** and by providing extensive, supplementary training to the

existing observers. The more consistency there is in data collection, the better the data quality.

Background: For several years the ADF&G Shellfish Observer Program has required through state regulations that 65% prior shellfish observers be deployed on an annual basis and no crab vessels have been prohibited from fishing due to an observer shortage. This is also the minimum stated by the current contracts between the Alaska Fisherman's Union (AFU) and four certified contractors. All contracts will be re-negotiated for the 2001 season and all contract language is up for negotiation. Relying on the AFU is not a guarantee that experience will be retained in the future.

Proposal: Establish a minimum 65% retention rate for observers in the DGOP. Some of the contractors already maintain a higher retention rate indicating this is possible. The APO's preferred definition of "Prior Observer" is an observer who has successfully completed 90 sampling days. The three week training of new observers is currently unlimited and free of charge. Tax dollars would be more efficiently spent with increased training for prior observers. In general, priors collect better data because they are more confident and have had sampling experience on a variety of vessel types. Many observers do this job not only for the money but because they enjoy the lifestyle and they genuinely care about the management of the North Pacific and Bering Sea resource.

5. **Restrict distribution of personal information.**

Background: Resume requests have been a vessel/contractor negotiation factor for one fishing company in particular. A contractor's unwillingness to distribute resumes can result in a threat for a vessel to change contractors. Resumes include personal information such as hobbies, outside interests and political associations which can be used to intimidate observers. NMFS Observer Program policy, as per a memo to contractors dated April 15, 1994, is to request the contractors not release this information without the written permission of the observer. The APO finds this unacceptable. In addition to this practice being an invasion of privacy, release of personal information by contractors potentially compromises NMFS' ability to meet the DGOP's objectives and obligations. If observers feel that fishing company personnel can contact them or their family directly, discouraging the observer from making reports which might lead to enforcement action, observers are likely to feel pressured to not file such reports. NMFS receives

copies of resumes/transcripts and is responsible for determining if the applicant complies with the experience and education requirements in regulation. Industry doesn't need or have a right to any personal information unless the observer shares this information directly.

Proposal: Enact a regulation stating contractors will not distribute personal information such as resumes of observers to the fishing industry. Dissemination of resumes should be grounds for decertification of the contractor. Industry can receive from their observer and/or NMFS a copy of the certification letter which states that the observer is qualified.

6. Sample station guidelines, not regulations, need to be established for all vessels. An appropriate sample station should include a small table, adequate light, a place to hang a scale or position a platform scale, adequate space, and access to a source of water. NMFS should notify contractors when they feel a vessel has sampling problems that could be addressed by the contractor. A summary of observer sampling problems could be provided prior to each new year for all the vessels the contractor will work with. The APO feels many sampling problems could be resolved if there was increased outreach by NMFS to both the industry and the contractors.
7. The DGOP needs the regulatory flexibility to place NMFS Observer Program staff, especially in light of the establishment of the Cadre, on any vessel at any time. NMFS also needs to establish a protocol regarding the deployment of staff. Displacement of observers to accomplish this task is not acceptable to our membership.

Policies which benefit observers, benefit the Observer Program. Technically, observers may not be NMFS employees, but we are in effect agents of NMFS. The work observers perform and its quality reflects directly upon NMFS. Observers need NMFS to propose regulatory changes that will have a positive effect on the DGOP.

David Edick's Response to APO's Letter to Pennoyer (Dated 5 April 2000; Dave is General Manager for AOI)

The APO's February 5th letter to Steve Pennoyer contained a suggestion that NMFS establish a 65% retention rate for observers in the DGOP, and it suggested that a "Prior Observer" be someone who has successfully completed 90 sampling days. I appreciate

the APO's desire to encourage observer contractors to retain prior observers, but I don't consider this particular proposal fair or useful.

First, the question of fairness. Certainly, "Prior Observer" is only a label, but labels mean something when they're earned. We've had observers embarking on third contracts, who have completed cdq training, are qualified as lead cdq observers in a gear type, and have previously spent 130 or more days in the field, who would not be considered "prior observers" under this definition. I think any definition of a prior observer needs to include people in this situation—one that is going to grow more common given the shortened deployment lengths that have resulted both from level 2 coverage requirements (which restrict where we can place new observers) and shorter fisheries.

Second, the question of usefulness. Contractors are currently obliged by regulation to consider potential cdq qualifications in making vessel assignments and reassignments. In other words, in an effort to create a lead catcher-processor trawl observer, a contractor needs to deploy inexperienced observers to those catcher-processor trawlers that do not already require Level 2 observers as a result of AFA coverage requirements or cdq coverage requirements, no matter how difficult these assignments might be. Please consider what you've just read for a moment—and consider what you did not read. You did not read, "Contractors are forced to consider data quality when making vessel assignments." We no longer have that luxury. The regulation you propose, if it were in place, would create a competing set of demands on contractors when they make logistics decisions. We would have to single out boats and gear types that have a high ratio of sampling days to field days to create prior observers. These demands would never have anything to do with data quality, and they would at times conflict with the demands we're under to create particular types of Level 2 observers.

Designing regulations that don't have unintended consequences is a difficult proposition. Consider a situation where a contractor has two people unassigned to vessels, but with time left on their contracts, and only one new assignment available. One of these two people has completed 60 sampling days, the other 260 sampling days. If the contractor is under pressure to create prior observers, then the observer with only 60 sampling days experience may well get the assignment simply because she has less experience—a hair-brained reason to make an assignment, but one that would be

entirely rational if your proposal were regulation. Even the reverse of this situation is unacceptable. Say, for instance, that you managed to design a regulation that resulted in the observer with more sampling days getting the assignment in every case. That's not always going to be best for the fishery either—for instance, it might make more sense to debrief the more-experienced observer in this case, so that she will be free to begin a new deployment two weeks hence on a cdq vessel.

It seems there has been a lot said and written about observer availability and experience lately, and the assumption behind most of what is passing for accepted wisdom is that the experience of the observer corps is declining. I don't think the situation is that simple—it's more accurate to say that the experience level of the observer corps is not increasing as quickly as it needs to given the industry's needs for level 2 observers. Consider that in 1997, our groundfish observers spent about 9600 deployed days in the field. In 1999, we were up to about 12,300 days, and of these, 9100 were provided by observers who had already spent 65 days in the field (this at a time when the average field deployment was about 62 days). In other words, had coverage demands remained static between 1997 and 1999, we could have provided 95% of 1999's coverage using prior observers, and done very little training indeed.

Our success doesn't count for much, however. We know that contractors who are unable to find a way to retain prior observers at rates that surpass even the highest retention rates historically obtained in the observer program will not be successful in the years ahead, and they may not survive. I don't see where more regulation is needed as regards this subject. If the APO disagrees and is going to put energy into encouraging NMFS to create another layer of such regulation, I think it is reasonable to ask that care be taken to make sure that it jibes with what regulations already exist, and that it doesn't create a class of non-prior prior observers.



90-Day Letter Is Available For those of you who feel the 90-day rule has impacted your ability to work longer, the APO has a letter formatted which you can sign as is or modify to your liking. For a copy, contact the APO or Kim Dietrich.

Pros/cons of 'voting' on AP (KD)

There has been some lively discussion regarding the recent elimination of the 'observer' seat on the Advisory Panel to the Council. At the most recent OAC meeting, the OAC recommended that the Council reinstate the seat but make it a non-voting seat. The OAC and various APO members have discussed the pros & cons of voting as follows:

PROS

- No pressure to 'pick sides' on allocation issues. Lobbying the representative for that vote is no longer necessary.
- Observers remain in the information loop and can provide valuable suggestions on all the issues.

CONS

- Because the representative doesn't have the power to vote, their (hence the observers') opinion is minimized and has the potential to not be taken seriously.
- If we have no vote, the same logic should be applied to other AP members (i.e. they shouldn't vote on any biological or observer-related issues.)
- We would be the only entity that would be barred from voting on issues that relate directly to our employment such as the restructuring of the observer program.
- Creating AP non-voting seat sets a bad precedent. Who will be next? The environmental seat since they have no direct financial interest in the fishery?

Solution? There likely isn't a solution that will satisfy all sectors. However, the APO's official stance is that we want the ability to vote on all issues but have an understanding that the observer representative will only vote on non-allocation issues. In other words, the AP observer seat would be granted latitude to abstain from voting on some allocation issues.



Differing Goals of the AFU and APO (Revised from 9-98 *Mail Buoy*-KD)

Through the weekly discussion groups and talking with observers in general, I've become aware that most new observers and many others do not fully understand the difference between the APO and the Alaska Fisherman's Union (AFU). Therefore, it is worth distinguishing between the functions of the

AFU and the APO on a more frequent basis. The AFU is your labor ally, while the APO operates in the political realm addressing data quality issues and regulatory actions which affect the integrity of the OP. The roles each organization plays are complementary, but they are not identical.

The AFU's accomplishments are easily highlighted. Since 1998, the AFU contract has increased observer wages by 20-30% depending on your level of experience. It has established a contribution toward health insurance. It has re-established pay for training/briefing/debriefing which disappeared in the early 1990's. It has created a gear allowance (NMFS issued gear in the past but the cost was passed on to the observer between 1993-1997). The contracts have given observers an ally with some power if you are wronged by your employer; and in theory, it has created a level playing field for the contractors so they can compete based on their service to industry NOT on their ability to cut observer wages and benefits or maintain a high attrition rate to keep profits up. A contractor's service to industry should include supplying reliable, quality, professional observers who know the job well and are prepared for all at-sea situations.

With the AFU contract also comes an increase in responsibility for observers. If we're paid professional wages and want to be treated like a professional, we need act appropriately. I expect everyone to be giving 110% out there. Be safe but be diligent. You are not only representing yourself on a vessel but also me and every other observer. As observers, YOU are the liaisons between the fishers and NMFS. In many ways our job is one of diplomat and educator. You should be willing to answer all of the fish & management types of questions, or to know where to send someone to get answers you don't have. If the industry understands your job and the data, they will be more likely to assist (or at least not impede) the collection of quality data. Also, to be fair to the contractor's, I suggest that if you intend to negotiate an individualized contract addendum with your employer, it would be appropriate to do so

before you commit to work, not a day or two before you start briefing.

Additions/modifications are allowed as long as they do not conflict with the contract or diminish your wages and benefits. I'd also suggest that both you and the contractor sign the addendum and **KEEP A COPY FOR YOURSELF.**

While the AFU's accomplishments are familiar to most, if not all, observers, the APO's accomplishments are probably less known. This doesn't make them less important. The APO has been working on improving the working conditions and rights of observers which the AFU doesn't have the legal right to do. At the Observer Program (OP) level, many APO members have met with NMFS observer program staff or written letters voicing their concerns with the program and suggesting improvements. Change is frustratingly slow but it does occur. For example, the regulation to prohibit the release of resumes to industry should be finalized by January 2001. Many times each year, I or other members of the APO, write letters to the OP discussing issues and events which occur and which, we hope, will improve the program. In a way, the increase in communication between observers and NMFS staff that has occurred since the inception of the APO is itself valuable, since it inevitably makes the staff more attentive to observer needs and concerns. Staff attendance at the APO Discussion Groups held weekly since September are a prime example of a renewed willingness to reach out to observers. The APO also lobbied for NMFS to provide funding to get observers involved in the Observer Program Workshop.

At the NMFS Regional level, the APO has initiated several successful letter writing campaigns to change or modify federal regulations that affect observer's job duties and/or observer well being. In fact, when we provide public comment on the regulations to rollover of the observer program until 2002 this summer, we'll be asking all interested observers to sign. We also talk to observers about old and new issues as they're returning from sea to get an idea what the comments

should be in the first place. Ultimately, we're representing the observers' opinions with the goal of keeping the integrity of the OP at a high level.

The APO has been active at the Council level as well. The APO secured a seat for 2 years on the Advisory Panel and continues to maintain representation on the Observer Advisory Committee. In the past, the Council acted on matters without ever considering observers and their concerns. The fact that this is no longer the case is in itself a major accomplishment. APO members (>15 observers) have testified at several Council meetings over the past 5 years. Even now the APO is pressing for changes and improvements to the program.

Clearly, the AFU through its contract has made significant improvements in observer labor conditions, and the APO through its advocacy on behalf of observers has given us a voice in policy matters that we never had before.

Observers who are new to the program should know their input and involvement is welcome by the APO. Indeed, for the APO to remain vital and continue in its efforts, we need more, not less, participation by observers. The APO has made impressive accomplishments but has the potential to accomplish much more. For instance, in addition to maintaining and strengthening its advisory role vis-à-vis NMFS, I would like to see the APO develop an advisory role vis-à-vis the fishing industry. It is possible for us to work with both government and industry. I would like to see observers nationwide learn from one another and use our collective experience to improve all U.S. observer programs. This past year the APO has had a drastic increase in communications with observers from other programs. There are a lot of similarities & differences among programs but the observers are more or less the same—we're alone out on commercial fishing vessels collecting independent data. I'd like to see observers take pride in their job. It is one of the most challenging (both physically and psychologically) and important

field biology jobs that I've had. The APO is YOUR organization. Nothing gets done unless an observer takes the initiative to do it.

I thank all of you for your efforts and support and hope that more of you will participate in the future. Feel free to contact the APO any time. Our general email address is APO_obs@hotmail.com.

[You can always reach me directly at kdiet@aa.net. However, don't be discouraged if I don't respond promptly the next few months. I'll be in the field for most of the summer.]

APO Discussion Group

Who should come? Anyone interested in observer issues.

Why participate? This is an opportunity to share ideas, ask questions, voice opinions about the Observer Program, observing in general, & the APO. Typically, there's no formal agenda. These were initiated because the APO membership would like to support honest feedback/dialog between observers and with the agency. We gather in a non-threatening environment, respect everyone's opinion/perspective and abide by a standard that anything we say won't be held against us individually. We've had some candid discussions ranging from harassment to the lack of reporting violations to training. Although observers and staff may frequently have differences of opinion, we are all working with the same goals in mind. These Discussion Groups have provided a great opportunity to bring observers together with NMFS staff. Observers hear the Agency side of the story and staff frequently get more honest feedback within this forum than they do during briefing/debriefing.

When: 7 pm

Where: Rotating dates & locations below—

- April 26 (Wed)—Big Time Brewery, 4133 University Way, NE
- May 3 (Wed)—Fiddler's Inn, 9219 35th NE
- May 10 (Wed)—Gorditos Healthy Mex. Food, 213 N 85th
- May 17 (Wed)—Rainbow Bar & Grill, 722 NE 45th

Keep your eyes peeled for announcements regarding meetings in late May & June. They are typically posted at NMFS and in the bunkhouses.



LETTER TO EDITOR:

Are We Really Safe Out There? by Gillian Stoker

I spent my most recent contract on board a crab catcher vessel fishing brown kings. During my time on the vessel there were several mechanical problems which, when added to the information I had gotten from the crew and previous observer, left me feeling quite nervous about the maintenance of the vessel and my safety while on board.

When I flew into Dutch Harbor the vessel was in the process of having a new gen-set and centrifuge installed. Vessel personnel claimed that this was the last repair the vessel needed even though the boat had been broken down most of the previous three months. Every time they had gone out to fish something had broken down and sent them back into town for repairs. Crew members hired in October told me that they had not managed to run through the gear more than once a trip before returning to port for another 'repair'.

When the install was done I happened to be in the wheel house when the vessel's port engineer came up to tell the captain that the new gen-set had no oil pressure alarm or automatic shut off. He said that they could rig up an alarm but that it would take a day or so and that if the captain wanted to leave now (they had planned to leave town around January 5 and it was now the 16th) as long as someone went down to the engine room every few hours to check on it should be fine. Fortunately, the captain opted to wait and have the problem corrected but I found it disturbing that the company's port engineer would allow a vessel to leave town without the alarm, especially since all crew members take wheel watches and several of the crew members were completely inexperienced.

The observer on board the previous October to December told me, that among other problems, the vessel had at one point begun taking on water in the engine room. Apparently the cause had been a simple

repair (once back in town) but it had created the potential for a very serious safety problem. I heard from the crew that the vessel had not been in dry dock for five or six years and although they all seemed to feel that everything had been fixed (because everything had broken down in the last three to six months) I felt nervous that normal, scheduled maintenance had not been done on the vessel.

We left Dutch Harbor and had no problems on the four-day trip to the vessels gear. We pulled pots for approximately twenty-four hours and then stopped to sleep. In the morning the newly installed generator would not start and we had to steam back to Dutch to have it overhauled. Once it had been overhauled, the vessel was started up to leave. We were heading to the fuel dock when the second generator died. It also needed to be completely overhauled before we could head out to fish. At this point I had no faith in the vessel. It appeared that even newly installed or repaired equipment could not be trusted which made me wonder if repairs weren't being done cheaply as opposed to well. During the next trip there were no problems that sent us into town. However, the new centrifuge was not working and there were problems keeping fuel pressure to the port main.

I am not claiming any knowledge of marine engineering nor do I mean to imply that the vessel was inherently unseaworthy. What frightened me while on board was that regular maintenance had obviously not been done and that even newly installed equipment was not necessarily of high quality. While I was on board the vessel was fishing approximately 200 miles from any port and there were no other vessels (except passing cargo ships) in the area. If anything had broken down that seriously jeopardized our safety, we were a long way from any help.

Another concern for me was that there was no safety orientation given when I boarded the vessel. I asked the captain if he could go over safety procedures with me and he told me where the survival suits were located, as if that was all I could possibly need to know. I had to specifically ask for any information I wanted. I also found out towards the end of my time on the boat that one of the green crew members had been on the boat for a month in the fall without knowing even the

location of the survival suits and undoubtedly without ever having tried to get into one. On a vessel with a small crew like this I feel it is especially necessary for everyone to know emergency procedures well and found it disturbing that the attitude towards such matters was so lax.

On returning to Seattle I discussed my concerns about safety issues on this vessel with my contractor. I was informed that the companies policy with vessels regarding problems like this is not to drop them immediately but rather to try and pressure the parent company to improve conditions as dropping them would simply send them to another contractor who might not even try to get them to improve. While I understand and respect this logic and indeed do think that the new captain of the vessel was pushing for repairs and improvements, I did not like being part of the experimental stage. I don't know how to change the situation but reality is that in the period of time between when a legitimate complaint about safety is made and the time that the necessary improvements are made the observers on board are at increased risk.

With this particular vessel my contractor had questioned the observer on board before me and had been told that improvements were being done and that the boat was on the upswing. While I agreed with this assessment, I did not yet feel that it was a boat I felt safe working on. Also, because of my experience on this vessel I would be extremely uncomfortable getting on any vessel owned by its parent company. What I saw is that they do not hold their boats to any set maintenance schedule. I do not feel that this is an acceptable policy and if any company does not show that they maintain their vessels in a consistent and timely manner I think that all contractors should seriously consider no longer providing them with observer coverage.

[Editor's Note: Observers are responsible for checking if the vessel has a Safety Decal BEFORE you board. See also relevant pages in the manual for the required safety equipment to ask about if the captain does not give you a thorough safety orientation.]

Letter to the Editor: I attended most of an Observer Advisory Committee (OAC) meeting on 3/21/00. One of the comments I heard was along the lines of "Maybe we should blow the whole thing up and start over." It sounds like the Research Plan - or some alternative plan - will be revised. Also,

there were a lot of ideas being kicked around for basically what amounts to saving money. I have an idea that will do just that. The scenario (albeit simplified for brevity), goes something like this:

Create a sophisticated regional interactive Web Site, which would act as a centralized clearinghouse for observers. Lets say there is an observer available for work out in Mosquito Junction, Iowa. He or she logs onto this fictional web site and is assigned an anonymous number to the observer's entry email and date available. Meanwhile, a fishing boat in Kodiak wants an observer for next week. Industry logs onto the same website, and the web site also employs the same technique making them anonymous too. It gives them 1, 2, 3 (maybe more) of those "numbers" and dates – that represent available observers. The computer program makes the initial "connection" between observer and boat.

Let say it's for a 3-week trip, starting next week. The boat "connects" with an observer - through the web site. The observer then goes back to the web site finds a listing of the latest briefings, and makes an appointment with NMFS (through the web site or by phone). The observer also checks the travel section (on the same web site) - and books a flight to reach the appropriate destination on the appropriate date. These of course are the same cut-rate flights we've been flying for years - not first-class or business. The best airline deals are just uploaded to the web site every few days. And maybe the observer even books a discount motel too, in Seattle or Anchorage. When the observer has gone through briefing and has arrived at Kodiak, s/he again logs onto the web site telling the site itself the basic particulars. The site forwards this information to NMFS for tracking information and to an insurance company, which automatically "covers" the observer. The database lists the observer as "working". A week or so before the trip is up, the observer again logs back into the web site while out at sea, (you can input faxes, email, even voice into web sites nowadays). He/she leaves an estimate as to when they are back on dry land. They are listed back in the "active" database, so that when they get back in (or shortly before) they already have a number of boats, plants etc. in contact with them for further work through the web site. The whole process could be continuous and ongoing. Not to mention the fact that it just might add more "randomness" and less conflict of interest.

Observer candidates would also send their resumes to the same web site, and it's handled like most large Corporate HR Departments today, software within the

web site scans the resumes, leaving it to maybe one or two outside persons to make the final choices, and those of course get signed up for a training session with NMFS.

Yes, - there are many small and not-so-small details not included in this scenario. But the Internet is tailor-made for removing the "middleman", and thus decreases costs. It's already happening in other industries. The technology to do the above-described scenario (or something very similar) is already available. And it need not be all that expensive (unless you're doing it using the proverbial \$500 government pencils). If done right, it would only take a handful of people to maintain such a site.

Yes, both observers and boat owners would carry a little more responsibility. (What? Observers aren't capable of making travel arrangements?) Some small boat owners don't have a computer? And so on. But if observers could stand to make a little *more* money (yes, I know insurance is exorbitantly expensive), and boat owners could *save* a little money on observer costs - both from the extinction (or consolidation) of the contractors; - I think that would give them a *pretty good* incentive. The main problem is killing off a few sacred cows - the contractors.

Mel Kahn

Comments from a "Bad Guy"

After several years as Captain and Mate of Bering Sea factory trawlers and longliners, it's time I spoke up on some observer issues. After all, observers are a necessary and important part of Alaska fisheries. It is only right that someone from the other side give their perspective for your benefit and therefore ours.

A few observations on previous observers would be a good start. I believe I have seen just about every type of observer available to us. Some have walked aboard with the mindset that we can not fish without you. This is incorrect. While we are required by law to carry an observer, we are not required to carry you. Others have been plainly scared to come aboard and become part of our floating community. This is probably the biggest mistake you could make. In the Bering Sea weakness has no place. And then there are those who realize that they have just signed a contract as a scientist to observe, collect and transmit timely data for the people who rely on the managed biomass from which we harvest. In my opinion, if you forget why you are here, we all lose.

Unfortunately, there are all too many things, and people, that want to trip you up.

So how do you think you will do after being thrown into a mix of Bering Sea fishermen? Let me give you a hint. There are not many "fishermen" on factory vessels. You will find all types of human beings here. Most are good people. Some are not. How is your Spanish? Your Tagalog? Your Japanese? Mine is still rough. Can you converse in Vietnamese or Polish? No?! Well you are in for a treat, or at least you should be. Factory vessels require hard-working, dedicated (you think **you** have been there too long?!) people with a goal in mind. Most fit this description. And because of the strong dollar and strong economic times, lots of the crewmen aboard these vessels come from foreign countries. This is a good thing. What better way to study and learn about other cultures.

Do you think you will be safe while aboard your assigned vessel? People die in Alaska (and other) fisheries every year. Why should you be exempt from that danger? You're not, but you deserve all the safety advantages that the crew gets. Did you get a GOOD safety/familiarization walkthrough from either the Captain or Mate shortly after you came aboard? If you are a female observer, did the Captain/Mate address this situation for you? Where you shown your observing station and the dangers of that area? Was there a GOOD safety orientation with the crew? Where there observer issues discussed during that meeting? Was the crew told of their requirements to help the observer? These are questions that should be answered prior to departing. It is up to you to ask them and it is required of the Captain to answer them.

Will you fall for the foolishness that is bound to present itself to you and will you and your data be corrupted by it? Do you know how to play "Hide the halibut?" The crew does. Will you turn your head as a crewmember eats a herring? It's just one small fish, right? If you tell the gaffer to save bycatch and he doesn't, will you let it go unreported? Do you know the ship's position? Are there any rookeries or closed areas nearby? You should always know the answers to these questions. What species are open for directed fishery? Which are on bycatch or prohibited status? You should be able to get the answers to these questions on the bridge.

And lastly I have to say this. You cannot come to the Bering Sea to save the world. Just ask those who have tried. What you can do is provide data for those who manage the fisheries of Alaska. You can do it to the

best of your scientific ability and leave at the end of your contract knowing you have contributed to managing one of the worlds' largest sources of protein. The world requires fish from Alaska to feed itself. NMFS requires your data to manage these fisheries. The families of the men and women who harvest these fish rely on NMFS to manage these fisheries wisely. This is a good thing. Being part of this is something to be proud of.

These observations are from a Captain who has seen a lot of things in the fishing community. Observing is a serious science. How will Alaska be after you leave it? Will you have helped it or.....

I wish you luck.
Captain Bill Chace

ALASKA FISHERMAN'S UNION NEWS

by Harold Holton

Greetings from the Alaska Fisherman's Union

For those of you who haven't been in the "information loop" over the past 2 months, Mark Coles is no longer with the AFU. Members and AFU officials would like to take this opportunity to thank Mark for all of his hard work and years of service to the AFU. Mark was with the AFU for 18 years and made a significant impact on the labor movement, most recently the organizing of all 5 observer contractors. Without his efforts the observers would surely not be where they are today. Thanks, Mark, from all of us.

The transition seems to be going along smoothly. Duke and I (Harold) are starting to get a firm grasp on the task at hand. I am currently the AFU President. My office is located in Anchorage, AK. All members are invited to call or drop by when they are in town. [See contact info below.]

Duke Bryan has recently come on board as an AFU representative and will be the point person for observer issues. He is working hard to get up to speed and solicits any input from the membership. Duke is presently working out of the Anchorage office but in May he will return to Washington. We will notify you of his location when it is determined. Duke says, "He is committed and determined to be visible and accessible to our members." We are hoping to have an E-mail address and are exploring other lines of communication. Please keep in mind the AFU is comprised of over 1700

members and we will be servicing that group this summer. However, some of you will be in a lot of the same shore-side plants that we will be in and we will make a point of seeing you at any plant we visit.

Please remember, this is your union and we are committed from SIU headquarters to all of us in the UIW and AFU, to make this union work well for you.

Contract Negotiations Are Coming Soon

By the end of 2000, the current contracts expire. If the new contracts are going to improve upon what you already have, the Union will need your help. Remember, **YOU ARE THE UNION**. We have had two meetings with members in Seattle, one in Kodiak and met with one prior observer in Anchorage. Although these numbers are small, the quality of input from the members was excellent.

A rough plan of strategy is in the works, which includes the following:

- Attending meetings wherever and whenever we can get a group of observers together;
- Getting our new 800# out which is 1-877-491-3425;
- Utilizing the *Mail Buoy* and the grapevine. We will be putting a questionnaire together to allow us to prepare a priority list of your issues and concerns;
- Organize a negotiating committee. There are already 2 volunteers but more are better!

Due to the transient nature of this occupation and the extremely widespread demographics of the membership, this will be a real challenge. We are committed for you to have your say. Please participate in any way you think you can help.

Contact Harold Holton or Duke Bryan at:

Alaska Fishermen's Union
721 Sesame St., #1C
Anchorage, AK 99503
Ph: 907-561-4988
Toll free: 1-877-471-3425

Who Are Your AFU Representatives

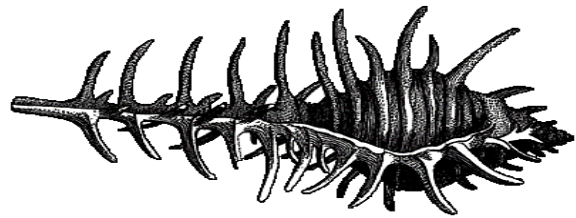
Harold Holten was born and raised in Ketchikan, AK. He joined the Marine Corps where he served for six years, a 13-month veteran of Viet Nam. After being honorably discharged, he joined the Alaska State Trooper where he served for 3 years in SE Alaska.

Harold joined the AFU in 1976 as an engineer on a salmon tender. He moved up to captain on a tender and worked in the industry until 1986 when he came aboard the AFU as a business agent. In 1992, Harold was appointed Vice-President of the AFU. While a union member, he was involved on all committees related to the union to prepare him for his career as a union official. As an official he has been very active in the labor movement, affiliating and working with the Washington and Alaska AFL-CIO as well as being elected Vice President of the Alaska AFL-CIO. He has been involved in various political campaigns and was sponsor of a bill that was introduced and passed successfully in the State & House in Alaska. Harold has been to the George Meany Center for organizing and for grievance procedures. He also attended the Oregon State University for additional labor classes. Harold is excited with the new challenge of leading the AFU into the 20th century. This is not a union that belongs to one person. It is your union and we need your input and participation to make it "all that it can be."

Duke Bryan was born into a union family. His father was a union cement finisher starting in the 40's. His mother's family started fishing in 1907. Duke worked as a union Hod carrier and cement finisher in high school. He completed his union apprenticeship as a master auto mechanic. He moved on to build and run his own business and managed a new car dealership. In the early eighties he began working in the fishing industry as a union Port Engineer for fish canneries in Alaska. He joined the AFU in 1988 as a chief engineer and later as a captain on salmon tenders.

Duke has been an active union member throughout his career. He has been in strikes, lockouts, walkouts, union organizing, contract negotiations, federal audit committees, and nearly all aspects of union life and work. Duke believes that when we pull together as union brothers and sisters we have a voice and can make a difference. Duke is looking forward to his new career as a union representative.

[Editor's Note: Copies of contracts are available from the contractors, the AFU, the APO website and they should also be posted on the BB at NMFS (if someone hasn't removed them).]



JOB OPPORTUNITIES

NMFS GROUND FISH OBSERVERS

NEEDED... To carry out research on testing seabird bycatch deterrents in Alaska longline fisheries. We require the services of highly experienced and highly reliable fishery observers to record data aboard freezer longline vessels targeting P.cod. Observers will collect traditional NMFS required data during the haul (tally and weights), but also data on seabird abundance and behavior during the line setting.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE: 2-4

Start Date: 7/25/00 or 8/25/00

Contract Length: 25-30 days in August or September.

Salary: Depends on observer experience but at a minimum will comply with union standards.

All candidates must:

- Be NMFS certified groundfish observers in good standing during the last 2 field deployments.
- Agree to work under the protocols of the research program. At a minimum this will include executing the project research plan which last year required 14-16 hour days. Observers will agree to maintain the confidentiality of aspects of the project; they will not discuss the project with the media and all photographic images taken will be the property of the project.
- Have demonstrated ability to work cooperatively on a fishing vessel as part of a team.
- Participate in a pre-deployment training on the project experimental design and project seabird data collection requirements. We anticipate this to be a one-day training with the 1st day of fishing designated for training purposes.
- Have current First Aid and CPR certification.
- Be able to perform all duties on small vessels without debilitating seasickness.

Candidates with the following attributes are preferred:

- Have a minimum of 336 at-sea days as a groundfish observer (grade 4 or above under union contract) including at least 150 days working in groundfish longline fisheries.

- Training or work experience in seabird identification, research and/or behavior.
- Have completed the 4-day, predeployment briefing for NMFS in 2000.

Observer Selection: Individual observers will be selected by the Project Investigators in consultation with the NMFS Groundfish Observer Program and Alaskan Observers, Inc.

Candidates will submit resumes and three references by May 30 to:

Ed Melvin
 Washington Sea Grant Program
 206B Fishery Sciences Building
 Box 355020
 1122 Boat Street
 Seattle, WA 98195
 Voice (206) 543-9968; FAX: (206) 221-6937
 Email: emelvin@u.washington.edu

Sea Scallop Observer Positions Available: Individuals interested in becoming sea scallop observers will be required to attend and pass a one week training session to be held in or near Woods Hole, MA. There will be approximately 4-5 training sessions beginning around 8 May and running until the week before the first area opens 15 June. Observers will be directly contracted by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center or through a 3rd party provider. Most deployments will also be made from central and southern New Jersey and other ports from ME to VA. It is anticipated that trips will last 7-10 days. NEFSC is looking for and additional ~30 observers. In the summer of 1999, observers were paid a flat rate of \$200 per day at sea. Compensation for 2000 has not yet been established. Observers were contracted individually. They were not government employees and no benefits were provided. The primary duty of sea scallop observers will be the daily weight estimation of the catch of scallops and bycatch of several fish species. Scallop and fish sizes are also recorded, along with data on fishing location and gear. If interested, send resume to: patricia.yoos@noaa.gov and access the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's website for updates.

More Observing... The Northeast Fisheries Science Center has a contract with Professional and Technical Services, Inc. (PTSI) to provide observer coverage of certain Northeast U.S. fisheries. PTSI currently employs about 30 observers full time year around. Additional funding and expansion of the program this year will likely require additional hiring of observers. Professional and Technical Services, Inc. seek highly motivated individuals to serve as Certified Fisheries Observers on board commercial fishing vessels from Maine to North Carolina. Observer candidate

selection will be based on education, work experience, and knowledge of fish, marine mammals, and sea turtles. Candidates must attend a 2+ week training course in Woods Hole, MA. Participants will be trained in various data collection protocols covering several geographical regions. Certification as a Fisheries Observer will be based on successful completion of training, passing scores on written and practical exams, CPR and First Aid certification, interviews and security background checks. Duties include biological sampling and reporting of catch and discard, vessel/gear characteristics information collection, and marine mammal dissections for biological sample collection. Requirements include attention to detail and timeliness in data collection/reporting, ability to respond to short notice assignments, out of state travel and a reliable vehicle. The work involves strenuous physical activity in adverse conditions at sea. The positions are full time. Benefits include: contributory health benefits, 401k retirement plan, paid holidays, vacation, and sick leave. Please fax, E-mail, or mail resumes to: David Martins, Observer Program Manager, 166 Water Street Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026 david.martins@noaa.gov Fax: 508-495-2258 Phone toll free: 1-888-404-9966

Keys Marine Laboratory (KML) Coordinator

The Florida Institute of Oceanography/ University of South Florida seeks a manager for the Keys Marine Laboratory located on Long Key in the Florida Keys. The KML is a general service education and research center operated jointly by the FIO and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The KML facilitates and supports education and research projects dependent on South Florida habitats or resources. The manager is responsible for coordinating operations and maintenance of the KML on a daily basis. This includes, but is not limited to, scheduling facilities (dorms, labs, holding facilities, boats, etc.), maintenance, repairs, and new construction. The manager coordinates 6 staff members and is the immediate administrator responsible for monitoring expenditures and revenues, and setting task priorities. The operations of the KML are diverse including boat support for field sampling, specimen collection and transport for on-site and off-site use, a running seawater system for maintaining organisms for education and research use, laboratory equipment purchase and maintenance, and public outreach. A minimum of a Bachelor's degree in the natural sciences or related fields is required and preferably 2-3 years experience in laboratory management. The manager must have strong

organizational skills, the ability to communicate well both verbally and in writing, skill and experience with small boat operations, SCUBA use, and experience with subtropical/tropical marine habitats. The manager will be employed as a non-tenure track faculty member by University of South Florida, the administrative host for the FIO, which is a statewide consortium of the State University System of Florida. This position is limited to U.S. citizens or foreign nationals with appropriate visas permitting them to work in the U.S. The salary range is \$32,000 - \$35,000 depending upon experience. To apply send your letter of application, resume' and the names of three references to:

Dr. Sandra Vargo
Florida Institute of Oceanography
830 First Street South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701
(727)553-1100
(727)553-1109 (Fax)

Application Deadline: May 5, 2000

Marine Conservation Biology Institute (MCBI), a non-profit organization working to advance the science of marine conservation biology to protect, restore, and sustainably use marine biological diversity, is looking for a **summer intern** to work in its Washington DC office. Duties include: contributing to a report on opportunities for federally-funded research in marine conservation, helping to advance legislation on Capitol Hill, attending congressional hearings, assisting with data entry, and other tasks as appropriate. We are looking for a graduate-level intern with background in sciences such as ecology, marine biology, or related field and a strong interest in public policy and environmental advocacy. Previous advocacy or public education experience a plus. Stipend: \$1,000 per month. To apply: send cover letter, resume, and names and contact information for 3 references by May 15, 2000 to: MCBI, 1725 K St. NW Suite 212, Washington DC 20009 attn: intern.

Fish Biologist URS/Dames and Moore, Seattle. Closes 5-1. Salary commensurate with experience and qualifications. Conduct field surveys, write reports and technical analysis and communicate technical information. Emphasis will be on

protected salmonids in the Northwest. Travel and field work in remote areas, both in and out of state. Requires degree in fisheries or related field. Knowledge of environmental regulations; excellent oral, written and interpersonal skills. Experience preparing ESA documentation and consultation with agencies and other stakeholders; habitat restoration; project permitting; mitigation. Experience must include working knowledge of issues affecting salmonids and their habitats, knowledge of land management and conservation practices and patterns of water use for the conservation of salmonids. Submit resume to Rob Nielsen, URS, 500 Market Place Tower, 2025 1st Ave, Seattle, WA 98121. PH: 206-728-0744; email: Robert.Nielsen@urscorp.com.

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): Essential Fish Habitat & Ecosystem considerations- <http://www.refm.noaa.gov/docs/pubs/efh/techmemo.htm>

ONE-STOP FISHERIES SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL COMING OUT THIS MONTH: Blackwell Science has announced it will begin publication this month of a new journal Fish and Fisheries. According to the publisher, its is a "peer-reviewed journal focusing on topics of major importance internationally within the area of fish biology, fisheries and aquaculture, bringing together subjects including physiology, behavior, ecology, genetics and evolution of fishes, conservation and exploitation." For information on this quarterly, visit

Blackwell Science's website at: <http://www.blackwell-science.com/faf>.

Websites of Interest:

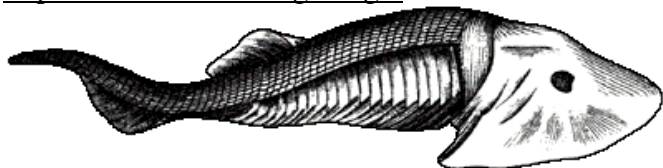
North Pacific FMC: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/>

-- <http://www.calendars.net:8194/NPFMC>

Pacific FMC: <http://www.pcouncil.org/>

Age & Growth Lab--

<http://www.refm.noaa.gov/age/>



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

- UW School of Fisheries Quantitative Seminar every Friday, 12:30-1:20pm, Rm. 203, Fishery Sciences Building, 1122 Boat St. Visit <http://www.fish.washington.edu/people/arnima/seminar.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>

27 April John Horne, Research Assistant Professor, UW Fisheries "Quantifying Distributions and Dynamics of Aquatic Animals"

- The Joint School of Marine Affairs/Industry/NMFS Seminar Series meets monthly during the school year. 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 4pm in NW Fisheries Science Center Auditorium, 2725 Montlake Boulevard - E. Hamlin Rd. entrance. The next seminar is on April 26.
- Fisheries-Oceanography Coordinated Investigations (FOCI) Lunchtime Seminar Series. Thursdays, Noon, Bldg 4, Rm. 2039. For topics see www.pmel.noaa.gov/foci/seminar.html
- Oceanography/Astrobiology Spring 2000 seminar series, "Oceans in Our Solar System". This Seminar series is devoted to exploring data, processes, insights and models that bear on existing or

potential Oceans in Our Solar System. Presentations will range from Earth, to Mars, to the satellites of Jupiter and Saturn. Speakers have been requested to be both informative and provocative. The goal is to initiate a vigorous dialogue about conditions and processes associated with planets or satellites where large bodies of liquid may (have) exist(ed). Opportunities for interested students and faculty to meet the speakers following the talks in an informal setting will be available. **LOCATION:** ROOM 14 OCEAN TEACHING BUILDING **TIME:** 3:40 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOONS

April 26 - Jeffrey Kargel - U. S. G. S., Flagstaff, AZ CHEMICAL EVOLUTION of EUROPAS CRUST & OCEAN FROM COSMIC SOURCES

May 3 - Rick Thomson - Institute of Ocean Sciences, Sidney, B.C. SEAFLOOR HYDROTHERMAL VENTING IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM: EARTH AND EUROPA ARE OCEANS APART

May 10 - Bruce Jakosky - University of Colorado, Boulder, CO THE MARS HYPOTHESIS: OCEAN, CLIMATE, AND LIFE

May 10/11- Bruce Jakosky, 2nd LECTURE - MGG/ASTRO EXTRATERRESTRIAL LIFE? SO WHAT? PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF THE SEARCH FOR LIFE BEYOND EARTH

May 12 Everett Shock Washington University, St. Louis, Mo THERMODYNAMICS OF PRE-LIFE

May 17 - Arnold Gordon, Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory, Palisades, NY, THERMOHALINE CIRCULATION ON EARTH AND ITS APPLICATION OFF PLANET

May 24 - Jonathan Lunine, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ CASSINI MISSION AND THE OCEAN (PAST AND PRESENT) OF TITAN

May 31 - Bob Pappalardo, Brown University, Providence, RI, DOES EUROPA HAVE A SUBSURFACE OCEAN? THE

GEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE, AND THE
ROLE OF DUCTILE ICE

- <http://alerts.sciencewise.com/swalert/doc/opp/fr03300001.htm>

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 NPFMC (Council) 907-271-2809

OPENERS & MEETINGS

Apr 25-29 Western Groundfish Conference, Sitka, AK
[www.cf.adfg.ak.us/geninfo/announce/grndfish/11wgcon.htm]

Mid-May Observer Committee, No official announcement yet.

June 5 North Pacific Fisheries Mgt. Council, Portland, OR

June 26-30 Pacific Fisheries Management Council, Portland, OR

June 26-29 2nd Biennial Observer Workshop FMI:
<http://www.Seawatch2000.nf.ca>

May 1 G. Turbot opens in BSAI

Briefing/Training Schedule

Visit <http://www.refm.noaa.gov/observers/briefing.html> for more up to date information on Briefing/Training.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Location</u>
May 1	4-day	Seattle
May 4	1-day	Anch.
May 5	L2 brief	Seattle
May 8	L2 train	Anch.
May 8	1-day	Anch
May 29	3 week	Seattle

May 18	1-day	Anch.
May 22	4-day	Anch.
May 25	1-day	Anch.
May 26	L2 brief	Anch.
May 30	1-day	Anch.
June 5	4-day	Anch.
June 5	L2 train	Anch
June 9	L2 brief	Anch.
June 9	1-day	Anch.
June 12	3-week	Anch.
June 13	1-day	Seattle
June 19	4-day	Seattle
June 23	1-day	Seattle
June 26	L2 train	Anch
July 3	1-day	Kodiak
July 7	1-day	Anch
July 10	1-day	Anch.
July 13	1-day	Seattle
July 14	L2 brief	Anch.
July 17	L2 train	Anch.
July 17	1-day	Anch.
July 24	4-day	Seattle
July 26	1-day	Seattle
July 27	1-day	Anch.
July 27	L2 brief	Seattle
July 28	L2 brief	Anch.
July 24	3-week	Anch.

* MSCDQ briefings will now be written as "Level II" briefings.

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 letter writing/editing, insurance research, grant writing, taxes, database management, attending meetings & taking notes. The **SUBMISSION DEADLINE** for the next issue is **July 5, 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, Gillian Stoker, Mel Kahn, Bill Chace, Teresa Turk, Dan Ito, Shannon Fitzgerald, Doug DeMaster, Marilyn Dahlheim, Sandi Neidetcher, Pat Livingston, Sarah Gaichas, Vicki Cornish, Liz Mitchell, Dave Edick, Harold Holton, Duke Bryan for your articles/comments, your prompt answers to questions and/or your editing contribution. Your efforts are greatly appreciated. (KD)

