



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

September 13, 2013

Eric Olson, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 W. 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501-2252

Dear Chairman Olson,

At the June 2013 Council meeting, we shared with the Council our concerns with low participation in the NMFS pilot project for electronic monitoring (EM). The NMFS pilot project is a fundamental step in advancing our ability to use EM to collect the data necessary to estimate catch and discards in North Pacific fisheries in accordance with the EM Strategic Plan. We appreciate the Council's June 24, 2013, letter to fishery participants encouraging vessels to volunteer in this project. At the June 2013 meeting, the Council also requested that we explore ways to provide vessel owners and operators incentives to participate in the pilot project in recognition that vessel owners and operators incur some costs and inconveniences in complying with NMFS's protocols for installing and maintaining EM equipment.

For 2014, NMFS has the capacity to deploy EM on 14 vessels under the NMFS pilot project. The primary incentive identified by fishery participants in public testimony is for NMFS to not select a vessel for observer coverage if that vessel is participating in the pilot project. We propose to do this by moving the 14 pilot project participating vessels into the "no selection" pool. Vessels in the no selection pool would no longer have the potential to be selected for observer coverage for 2014.

This proposed approach would not require any changes in regulation, and is consistent with the Annual Deployment Plan (ADP) process described in the preamble to the final rule that provides NMFS with the ability to assign specific vessels to specific coverage pools through the ADP process (77 FR 70062, November 21, 2012). For example, we have used this approach to assign vessels less than 40 feet length overall or vessels using jig gear to the no selection pool. This approach would not result in changes to the anticipated coverage rates for the trip selection and vessel selection pools or the anticipated number of observer days presented in the draft 2014 ADP. We will provide additional details on the methods for selecting pilot project participants to the Council and potential participants prior to the Council's December 2013 meeting.


In the final 2014 ADP, we propose to expand the "no selection" pool to include vessels we identify as pilot project participants. To identify the participants, we would first send a letter to all vessels informing them of the opportunity to volunteer for the pilot project in 2014 and the pilot project requirements. We would like Council input on whether this opportunity



should be available to all vessels in the partial coverage category or just vessels in the vessel selection pool. Then, we would randomly select vessels from the pool of volunteers and work with those vessels to participate in the pilot project. Once we have identified 14 pilot project participants, we would move those vessels into the "no selection" pool for 2014. Based on what we learn in 2014, we will assess the best way to proceed for 2015.

We appreciate input from the Council on this proposal for providing incentives to participate in the NMFS pilot project under the 2014 ADP. We think this approach will provide industry members additional incentives to participate in the development of EM systems in Alaska and help us collectively improve the information base we rely on for management of Alaskan fishery resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Balsiger', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.
Administrator, Alaska Region

for J/B