

Division of Marine Fisheries

Observer Budget Overview

Marine Fisheries Commission

May 30, 2013



Current Observer Program

Provides at least seven percent coverage for large mesh gill nets in areas outlined in the Sea Turtle Settlement Agreement

- Have provided limited observations for other fisheries

Budget is pieced together from several sources (recurring and non-recurring funds)

In fiscal year 2012, a total of 2,609 gill net observer trips were taken



Current Observer Budget

\$296,174 State Appropriations (recurring)

- Redirected from the Fisheries Resources Grant Program in July 2010
- This is the only dedicated recurring budget to place observers in the field.
- Funds three full-time technicians, two temporary technicians and temporary agency staff

\$211,009 State Appropriations (recurring)

- Supports the observer program, but also supports other division programs (Mid-Atlantic Council fisheries management, analysis, permit drafting, technician assignments, reports, etc.).
- Funds three full-time positions (section chief, biologist, technician III)



Current Observer Budget

\$ 510,836 Commercial Fishing License Receipts (non-recurring)

- Since 1999, commercial fishing receipts are 100 percent obligated to division operations (Marine Patrol, Trip Ticket Program, fish house sampling).
- At the end of a fiscal year, any unspent obligated funds roll over as unobligated and are retained to meet other division needs. This is the money we use to fund the observer program.
- Funds 1.3 full time positions and temporary agency staff



Current Observer Budget

Federal grants are used on a limited basis to supplement other funds.

- No long-term grant program
- Currently uses two different non-recurring grants:
 - \$111,816 funds 0.7 full-time employee; and
 - \$ 44,990 operational funds (temporary agency staff)
- Uses:
 - Short-lived projects (one or two years) with specific goals and objectives (e.g., only for specific gear, area, species, etc.)
 - Pilot new techniques such as alternative platforms or other methodologies or fisheries
 - Gathers baseline data on directed fisheries using different fishing techniques (e.g., gear research)
 - Competitive application process



Marine Patrol

Supplements observations through alternative platform method to meet required seven percent coverage

- Required to observe one trip per week
- Tries to incorporate observations into routine patrols, but sometimes have to forego other patrols in areas with no gill net activity to ensure this requirement is met.
- Actual cost to Marine Patrol is difficult to calculate but the estimated cost is \$435,000, annually.
- Observations were to be interim. Need to find a permanent solution to remove this supplement.



Observer Program Needs

Additional dedicated staff and operational resources to meet current level of observer coverage

- Fill current non-recurring funding needs
- Remove supplemental duty from Marine Patrol
- Dedicated source of funding will be needed for Incidental Take Permits to be granted

Additional dedicated staff and operational resources to increase observer coverage throughout the state as requested in the current Incidental Take Permit application.

- Need to achieve at least 10 percent large mesh and two percent small mesh observations
- Lower percentages disadvantage fishermen



Observer Program Needs

Additional staff needs include:

- Additional endangered species observations, such as sturgeon interactions
- Develop Protected Resources sections in Fishery Management Plans
- Develop comments, management strategies and potential permit applications for possible species to be listed in the future (river herring, eels, dusky sharks, etc.)
- Marine mammal interactions
- Collect baseline data before federal mandates

Takes away from other division activities such as stock assessments, fishery management plan development,



Future Funding

Requested license/permit fee increase to generate \$1.3 million.

- Fund four technicians, two biologists, and fund shift nine other positions

The Governor and Senate have made various recommendations on how to fund the program including one-time appropriations, fee increases, and public input on how to fund the program.

The division will continue to piece together a contingency plan this next year.



Considerations for Level Funding

If no additional dedicated funding is available, will have to consider other alternatives:

- Implement management measures to maximize current funding (e.g., rotating closures, other, etc.);
- Implement user-pay system (requires legislation);
- Continue to submit expansion requests;
- Continue to request license fee increases; and
- Defer to the National Marine Fisheries Service (last resort).
- Other?



Additional Issues

Additional requests requiring observer coverage, permit application submission, research, etc. are difficult to achieve with existing limited resources:

- Sea Turtle Advisory Committee requests (pound net incidental take permit, gear research);
- Regional committees' sturgeon recommendations (enhance observer research);
- Shrimp bycatch (additional sampling and analysis); and
- Recreational hook-and-line interactions

