

Southeast Fisheries Science Center
Miami Laboratory
75 Virginia Beach Drive
Miami, FL 33149

April 11, 2006

TO : Gerry Scott,
Chief, Sustainable Fisheries Division

FROM : Dennis Lee,
Pelagic Observer Program

SUBJECT: First quarter (2006) observer coverage summary.

The Pelagic Observer Program (POP) achieved a 6.3% coverage rate for the first quarter period of 2006 (January 1 to March 31). Selection letters were sent by certified mail service (return receipt) on December 15, 2005 to 31 vessel permit holders (owners and/or operators) for notification of observer coverage. Due to damage by two hurricanes in 2005 in the Louisiana delta area and the displacement of the owners of the Vietnamese-American pelagic longline fleet, deliver of 9 of the letters were accomplished by either SERO/OLE field agent or by observer personnel. The POP had the responsibility of the regular coverage requirement in the Northwest Atlantic, including the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea. During this quarter the POP was not involved in any cooperative research projects.

Of special note, there was one (1) vessel (Eagle Eye II) selected for the quarter in which coverage began in quarter 4 (2005) and carried over into quarter 1 (Table 1). Additionally, another vessel (White Water) was selected in quarter 4, but finally began coverage on January 8 of 2006. For the purposes of this quarterly report, only vessel effort observed during this quarter period (number of sets observed, days at-sea, animals caught) will be included in this summary. Of the 16 vessels boarded and observed for quarter 1, three made multiple trips in order to complete their minimum effort requested. Overall, observers spent 224 days at sea, which resulted in 121 sets observed and a coverage rate of 6.3% During the 20 observed trips (Table 1), set effort occurred in the geographical areas of the Gulf of Mexico (GOM), the Florida East Coast (FEC), the South Atlantic Bight (SAB), the Mid-Atlantic Bight (MAB), the Sargasso Sea (SAR), and the Tuna South (TUN). Although coverage was required in the geographic areas of the Caribbean Sea (CAR) and the North Central Atlantic (NCA), no observed vessels fished in those waters.

Of the pelagic longline trips covered by observers under the

8% fleet requirement, a total of 86,621 hooks were fished during the 121 sets recorded by the SEFSC program. The total catch from the 20 pelagic longline trips observed consisted of 3,323 fish representing 46 species of fish. The catch data was comprised of 1,310 swordfish, 250 bigeye tuna, 431 yellowfin tuna, 44 bluefin tuna, 154 albacore tuna, 29 other tuna species, 79 dolphin fish (mahi), 23 wahoo, 100 billfish species, 260 other finfish (escolar, lancetfish, etc.), 81 skates/rays, 11 small coastal sharks, 328 large coastal sharks, 210 pelagic sharks, and 13 unidentified fish species. During the quarter, observers also recorded incidental takes of protected species (Table 2) which included seven(7) marine mammals (7-Pilot whale-alive), nine (9) sea turtles (6 leatherback-alive; 3 loggerhead-alive), and no(0) sea birds.

Although occasional communications by telephone and faxes do occur from owners of selected vessels prior to and during the quarter, in general, my staff and I continue to have to place calls to most of the vessel owners to determine fishing activities and port location of the vessels. My recommendation is for the SEFSC to suggest to the HMS-HQ office to send periodic notices via fax distribution as reminders to vessel permit holders of their responsible for contacting the POP office of their fishing activity when selected. Until this action is supported, much of the staff time will always be committed to calling marinas, fish dealers, and/or leaving messages on phone recorders in hopes of locating the vessels.

During the quarter, the POP did not place observers on 16 of the 31 vessels selected (51%; Table 3), thus reducing the target coverage of the POP office by 92 sets. Unfortunate for the POP, there were 12 vessels (75 sets) in which the owners reported their vessels as not fishing (damage or tied to the dock), sold, or involved in another fishery. Although the most we have ever encountered in this situation, this could indicate a growing trend of the fishery. There were three (3) selected vessels listed in Table 3 as not participating primarily due to non-communication with the office, but also would have had issues with lack of bunk space, liferaft issues, and/or not possessing a current CFVSE decal. Finally, one (1) selected vessel owner was without a captain most of the quarter, but, once hired, the safety decal was not issued during the quarter. These vessels only reduced the POP's coverage opportunities by a minimum of 17 sets, which would not have helped in attaining our overall eight percent (8%). Lack of communication with our office and lack of marine safety decals still affects our program the most in any quarterly coverage. In addition, observer accommodations or liferaft can have an impact. With these excuses from owners re-occurring each quarter and with many of the same vessels on a regular basis, my staff continues to emphasize that the Agency should seek other alternatives of collecting data from these vessels if regular participation in observer coverage cannot be enforced for the permit holder. Fortunately this quarter, many of the vessels that were covered provided more sets than were

requested in the selection letters helped, but did not the POP to attain the 8% coverage needed.

In closing, neither the Turtle Take Estimates (TTE) nor the Net Mortality Ratio (NMR) mentioned in the 2004 Biological Opinion (BO) are provided in this report as the POP does not have the staffing expertise to conduct these analyses. In addition, the POP recorded no sawfish catches during the quarter; this species is not likely to occur in the pelagic environment. Although turtle handling workshops are being scheduled at various ports, observers have also been instructed to share their expertise of using the turtle handling gear. Additionally, on August 5, 2004, the NOAA-Fisheries implemented the regulations for vessels to have the turtle handling and release gear on board. Shortly after that date, the POP observers were provided a turtle gear checklist form issued by the Miami PR and given instructions to review the gear on each boat, fill out the checklist forms, and submit the forms with their data at the completion of the trip. In keeping with the BO reporting requirements from the POP office, observers filled out the turtle gear forms on 15 of the 16 first quarter selected vessels. Following two industry organized turtle gear workshops held in February and April of 2005, the presence of this gear required by the BO appears to be routine. Of these 15 vessels selected and observed in quarter 1, 100% (n=15) of the vessels had both the equipment needed for removing gear from turtles in the water (at least 3 of 4 items aboard), as well as most of the equipment for removing gear if the turtle is boated (6 or more items aboard). Interestingly, 80% of the selected vessels (n=12) also had the turtle tether aboard, which is voluntary at this time. A PDF document of the observer turtle gear forms will be posted on a secure site of the POP website. Finally, the cumulative number of unique vessels observed since the effective date of the sea turtle conservation regulations (July, 2004), now stands at 76 vessels covered (Table 4).

Attachments:
Tables 1,2,3, and 4.

cc: The POP office files; Gregg Houghaboom, NOAA-Fisheries SERO/OLE liaison.

Table 1: Regular coverage (8%) of the longline fleet. Number of vessels observed, areas of fishing activity, total sets observed, and total days at-sea conducted by the SEFSC Miami Laboratory **POP** from January 1 to March 31, 2006.

Vessel Number	Vessel Name	Trip No.	Area	Total Sets	Total Sea Days
1022773	EAGLE EYE II ¹	W01055	SAR/FEC	8/3	16
1026596	WHITEWATER ²	M01036	SAR/FEC	8/5	26
908223	SHADY LADY	D04025	SAB	5	10
510728	MISS SUZANNE	C02041	MAB	12	13
610006	CAPT MICHAEL	Q02058	GOM	9	13
1094947	VICTORIA	P01115	GOM	5	9
956008	DAKOTA	T02019	SAB	1	4
929437	ST. BENEDICT ³	Q02059	GOM	2	12
1029384	OURLADYOFLEVANGE	P01116	GOM	5	12
646506	JANICE ANN	D04026	GOM	3	5
956008	DAKOTA ⁴	J02046	SAB	5	4
956008	DAKOTA ⁴	J02047	MAB	3	7
646506	JANICE ANN ⁴	D02027	GOM	6	10
673556	CANDACE	T02020	TUN	10	28
669893	MASTERRAY	J02048	GOM	8	16
656859	KRISTIN LEE	D04028	GOM	1	4
902748	WHITEWATER II	W01056	MAB	3	6
995485	SEA QUEEN III	P01117	GOM	9	16
919844	FORTUNA II	C02042	MAB	3	4
656859	KRISTIN LEE ⁴	D04029	GOM/FEC	6/1	9
TOTAL		20		121	224

16 vessels observed:

- 1) Vessel selected for quarter 1. Departed prior to January 1 and made 2 sets in 2005 and 11 sets in 2006. Sets made in 2005 are not included in this summary.
- 2) Vessel selected for quarter 4, but observed in quarter 1.
- 3) Due to observer illness, coverage of most sets was incomplete.
- 4) Several vessels covered multiple times due to weather fronts or mechanical problems.

Table 2: Percent coverage (by sets), the incidental take of Protected Resource species (turtles, mammals, seabirds), and hook effort summarized by geographical area for January 1 to March 31, 2006 (A=Alive, D=Dead, LB=Leatherback, LH=Loggerhead, U=unknown)

AREA	TOTAL SETS OBSERVED	REQUIRED 8% COVERAGE	TURTLES			MAMMALS		BIRDS	
			A	D	LB/LH/U	A	D	A	D
CAR-1	0 (0%)	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	
GOM-2	54 (4+%)	100	1	0	0	0	0	0	
FEC-3	9 (3+%)	23	1	1	0	0	0	0	
SAB-4	11 (8+%)	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	
MAB-5	21 (15%)	11	0	0	0	7	0	0	
SAR-8	16 (8+%)	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	
NCA-9	0 (0%)	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	
TUN-10	10 (8+%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTAL	121 (6+%)	154	6	3	0	7	0	0	

Hook effort Summary:

<u>Area</u>	<u>Hook effort</u>
GOM	39,320
FEC	8,450
SAB	7,591
MAB	10,278
SAR	14,876
TUN	<u>4,105</u>
TOTAL	86,620

Table 3: Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 1, 2006 (January 1 to March 31). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: **(1)**No bunk available;**(2)**Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity;**(3)** Lack of current CFVSE decal; **(4)**No communication with observer office/staff; **(5)**Not fishing (involved in another fishery);**(6)**Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and **(7)**other safety concerns.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
AUSTIN T	502492	Reason 4. Certified letter received. Owner did not communicate with POP office during quarter. Owner has a history of non-communication with POP. POP requested 5 sets for the quarter. Logbook submission: No logbook or no fishing reports available.
BJORN II	947927	Reason 5. Certified letter received. Owner notified the POP office on 1/18/06 that the vessel was scallop fishing during the quarter. POP requested 6 sets for the quarter. Logbook submissions: Owner submitted a "No fishing report" for JAN and FEB. No log forms available for MAR.
BLUEFIN	597797	Reason 3, 5, and 6. Certified letter received. Owner called the POP office numerous time during the quarter indicating he had problems finding a reliable captain to operate the boat causing fishing activity to be irregular at times. Vessel was also involved in the shark bottom longline fishery. Safety decal inspection occurred with deficiencies, but was finally issued a decal on 3/26/06. Vessel rescheduled coverage in quarter 2. POP requested 3 sets for the quarter. Logbook submissions: Owner submitted Log books for JAN and a "no fishing report" submitted for FEB. No log forms available for MAR.

Table 3 (continued): Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 1, 2006 (January 1 to March 31). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: **(1)**No bunk available;**(2)**Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity;**(3)** Lack of current CFVSE decal; **(4)**No communication with observer office/staff; **(5)**Not fishing (involved in another fishery);**(6)**Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and **(7)**other safety concerns.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
CECILIA II	936041	Reason 6. Certified letter delivered by observer. Sources indicate vessel was having HMS permit renewal problem and was not fishing during the quarter. Vessel was again selected for the next quarter. Pop requested 7 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN, FEB, and MAR.
CLAYTON REED	683286	Reason 5. Certified letter received. Owner sent written notice on 1/17/06 that vessel had been sold. POP requested 5 sets for the quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN, FEB, and MAR.
DAYTONA	507646	Reason 4. Certified letter received. Owner did not communicate with POP office during quarter. Owner has a history of non-communication with POP office. Owner has been submitted for non-compliance in other quarters. POP requested 7 sets during the quarter. Logbook submission: No logbooks or reports available.

Table 3 (continued): Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 1, 2006 (January 1 to March 31). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: **(1)**No bunk available; **(2)**Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity; **(3)**Lack of current CFVSE decal; **(4)**No communication with observer office/staff; **(5)**Not fishing (involved in another fishery); **(6)**Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and **(7)** other safety concerns.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
DEESEI	606059	Reason 6. Certified letter received. POP office was notified by the owner on 12/20/05, 2/3/06, and 2/27/06 indicating the vessel would not be fishing and in port. POP requested 8 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN, FEB, and MAR.
DELPHINUS	671174	Reason 4. Certified letter received. Owner did not communicate with POP office during quarter. Owner has a history of non-communication with POP office. POP requested 2 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN and logbook forms submitted for FEB. No log forms available for MAR.
LILLIAN	685129	Reasons 6. Selection letter delivered by OLE. Owner sent written notification to the POP office he would not be fishing due to hurricane damage to vessel and unable to make repairs. POP requested 7 set for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN, FEB, and MAR.

Table 3 (continued): Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 1, 2006 (January 1 to March 31). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: **(1)**No bunk available; **(2)**Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity; **(3)**Lack of current CFVSE decal; **(4)**No communication with observer office/staff; **(5)**Not fishing (involved in another fishery); **(6)**Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and **(7)**other safety concerns.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
QUEENSLAND	926359	Reason 6. Certified letter received by observer. Vessel owner reported on 2/27/06 that he would not be fishing during the quarter due to hurricane damage to home and boat. Pop requested 9 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN, FEB, and MAR.
SENECA	532569	Reason 6. Certified letter received. Owner sent written notice to the POP office that the vessel was under repair and would not be fishing for the quarter Pop requested 8 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN, FEB, and MAR.
SHEARWATER	613745	Reasons 6. Certified letter received. Owner informed the POP office that he would not be fishing during the quarter. POP requested 6 sets for quarter. Logbook submissions: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN, FEB, and MAR.

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categories are provided: **(1)**No bunk available; **(2)**Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity; **(3)**Lack of current CFVSE decal; **(4)**No communication with observer office/staff; **(5)**Not fishing (involved in another fishery); **(6)**Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and **(7)** other safety concerns.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
ST. JOSEPH	936303	Reasons 6. Certified letter never received. Owner was displaced from New Orleans due to Hurricane Katrina. No forwarding address available. Vessel was never notified of selection. May need to update address with SERO office. Other sources indicate the vessel is damaged and not fishing. POP requested 6 set for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN, FEB, and MAR.
ST. MARIA	1021751	Reason 6. Certified letter delivered by observer. Owner gave written notice on 2/20/06 that his vessel is not fishing due to hurricane damage. His second vessel was covered during the quarter. POP requested 4 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN, FEB, and MAR.
THUAN LOI	985618	Reason 5. Certified letter delivered by OLE. Through the Louisiana observer, owner indicated he was displaced by 2005 hurricanes to California and that the vessel would not be fishing during the quarter. POP requested 5 sets for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN, FEB, and MAR.

Table 3 (continued): Listing of vessels that were not covered by Pelagic Observer Program (POP) during quarter 1, 2006 (January 1 to March 31). Short explanations provided. Vessel non-compliance of observer coverage may be based on more than one category of explanation. The following categories are provided: **(1)**No bunk available; **(2)**Observer presence exceeds the liferaft capacity; **(3)**Lack of current CFVSE decal; **(4)**No communication with observer office/staff; **(5)**Not fishing (involved in another fishery); **(6)**Not fishing (new owner, repair, sunk, no permits); and **(7)** other safety concerns.

<u>Vessel Name</u>	<u>Doc #</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
WATERSPORT	618782	Reason 5. Certified letter received. Owner communicated with the POP office to indicate the vessel is involved in the shark bottom longline fishery. POP requested 1 set for quarter. Logbook submission: Owner submitted "No fishing report" for JAN, FEB, and MAR.

Table 4: The POP coverage completed aboard the pelagic longline fleet by quarter and year since the publication of the 2004 Biological Opinion. The number of trips observed include vessels that are covered multiple times during a quarter. The number of unique vessels observed represents those vessels only covered once by an observer during a quarter and year.

Quarter	Year	No. of Vessels Selected	No. of Trips Observed	No. of Unique Vessels Observed
3	2004	44	29	29
4	2004	30	28	14
1	2005	34	26	12
2	2005	45	22	9
3	2005	41	19	7
4	2005	28	14	1
1	2006	31	20	4
Cumulative Totals			158	76
