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**NOAA
FISHERIES**

National Marine Fisheries Service

Alaska Fisheries Science Center

2024 AFSC Seminar Series

Craig Faunce, NOAA, AFSC, Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division
Tuesday, February 27th @ 10 am Pacific

Eyes on the water: Fishery Observers and their role as enforcement assets



Intensively managed, well-regulated, and well-enforced fisheries are typified by low incidences of illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing and also possess stock levels that are above target levels of exploitation or are rebuilding. Fisheries operating in the Federal waters off Alaska are managed with near real-time quota management and have been monitored with observers for over 50 years. Observers in our region are deployed into fisheries year-round and typically operate independently for up to several months at-sea and in remote ports. Observers in the North Pacific are required to collect unbiased information on the extraction of marine resources while also reporting potential violations of maritime law. They must therefore act as scientists and enforcement assets. The scientific

value of observer data to support quota management and stock assessments is relatively well understood compared to the value of observer data to combat IUU. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the start of digital observer statements, i.e., reports of potential law violations in the North Pacific. The Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis (FMA) Division of the AFSC has been collaborating with the Office of Law Enforcement Alaska Division (AKD) for the past eight years to summarize, analyze and publicly report potential IUU in Federal waters. This presentation highlights the results of three teams that have iteratively improved the way observer statements are recorded, analyzed, and presented. The utility of these statements in documenting unlawful behavior over time, the challenge of increasing regulation, how reporting accuracy is being improved, and newly quantified risks of sexual assault and harassment (SASH) faced by observers will be presented. These efforts are only examples of a continuous effort to better inform policy makers of potential issues and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of maritime law enforcement.

For more
information contact:

Amanda.Warlick@noaa.gov
Alexandra.Dowlin@noaa.gov