

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE POLICY DIRECTIVE 04-109
August 6, 2007

Science and Technology

***NATIONAL MINIMUM ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS FOR MARINE FISHERIES
OBSERVERS***

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SUMMARY OF ACTION: Creates NOAA Fisheries PD 04-109, “National Minimum Eligibility Standards for Marine Fisheries Observers.” Major features include national minimum requirements for recruiting and retaining fisheries observers for new and existing observer programs set out in NMFS Service Instruction 04-109-01.

Introduction

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regional observer programs have been established independently since 1973 to respond to regional fishery management and conservation requirements. The NMFS currently deploys fishery observers on commercial fishing and processing vessels in 42 fisheries throughout the US. The role of fishery observers is to record and supply catch and bycatch data on commercial fishing activity. Observers also monitor compliance with Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act regulations, Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act requirements, and catch quotas. Currently, NMFS coordinates observer program management through the NMFS Office of Science and Technology/National Observer Program (NOP). The NOP seeks to support observer programs and increase their usefulness to the overall goals of resource conservation and management. Improvements in data collection, observer recruitment and training, and the quality of observer data are among the important issues that the NOP addresses on a national level. National minimum eligibility standards for new observers are being adopted to aid in the selection of academically and physically qualified candidates who can perform their duties professionally and objectively and to set a foundation for developing standards for quality observers for all NMFS regional observer programs.

Objective

Each regional program has set standards for observer eligibility that may be similar to, but not exactly the same as, other regions’ eligibility standards. After a review by the NMFS National Observer Program Advisory Team of the eligibility standards in place in each NMFS regional observer program, NMFS has identified common areas that will benefit from being standardized nationally. The establishment of national minimum eligibility standards will enable observers that meet these basic qualifications to be recognized as minimally qualified for all NMFS observer programs. The publication of national minimum eligibility standards will alert all potential applicants and program planners of the basic qualifications for all NMFS observer program recruitment actions.

Authorities and Responsibilities

This directive establishes the following authorities and responsibilities:

The National Observer Program

The National Observer Program will coordinate with all regional observer programs to ensure the minimum eligibility standards are met.

Regional Observer Programs

Regional observer programs will monitor and ensure, through clearly developed and defined regulations and/or performance measures, that all observer providers recruit and hire qualified and experienced individuals to work as observers.

Measuring Effectiveness

Each program has different training requirements, data collection requirements, deployment and data collection needs, and trip and sea day definitions. In some programs a trip is defined in terms of gear retrieval; in others, it is based on sea days. It is essential that each program have the ability to assess observer performance independently of other programs.

Each program will determine what performance standards an observer must meet to successfully demonstrate the ability to collect quality data. Each regional program will measure the effectiveness of these requirements through a formal documented debriefing process for observers, designed to evaluate observer performance in relation to data quality. NOPAT will provide an annual report identifying deficiencies as well as where performance standards are being met or exceeded to the NOP. Where deficiencies are identified suggested improvements must also be provided.

References

This policy directive is supported by the reference listed in Attachment 1.

Signed _____/s/ _____ 7/23/07____
William T. Hogarth, Ph.D. Date
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

Attachment 1

GLOSSARY OF REFERENCES AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

References

National Marine Fisheries Service Instruction 04-109-01, National Minimum Eligibility Standards for Marine Fisheries Observers

Observer Safety Training Acknowledgement of Risk Form 04-109-01, National Minimum Eligibility Standards for Marine Fisheries Observers