

XII. OBSERVER COVERAGE

NMFS Observers collect biological information on all HMS species and other fish species caught in the commercial fishery. Observers note information recorded on logbooks such as the gear used, fishing location, and the number of fish caught and discarded, as well as information not reported on logbook forms, including the species, sex, and size of fish. This information is used in stock assessments and to help NMFS verify logbook information. **NOTE:** Observers only observe fishing activities and are **not** considered crew or deckhands. Observers are **not** to be used in place of a certified dealer or proxy for HMS identification purposes.

The observer must have access to navigation equipment, logbook records, communication equipment, and other equipment in order to perform his/her job. The observer is **not** an enforcement officer; however, data gathered by the observer may be used in support of enforcement investigations. The observer may be able to offer help to fishermen in reviewing safe handling and gear removal techniques. However, the observer may not assist in the removal of fishing gear from trapped sea turtles.

Requirements to carry a NMFS Observer

Fishermen who are notified by NMFS in writing that their vessel is selected must carry an observer on every trip unless notified otherwise. Information on how to comply with the observer requirement is included in the notification package. If selected, fishermen must comply with all U.S. Coast Guard and NMFS safety regulations per 50 CFR 635.7. These regulations include having a valid safety decal for the vessel, having a useable life raft that will fit everyone on the vessel, including the observer, and providing the observer with the same accommodations as any crewmember. Additional information regarding these regulations is included on the selection letter.

Fishermen that are selected and continue to fish without an observer, or without contacting the observer program office may be subject to penalties and sanctions. Harassing an observer or preventing an observer from carrying out his/her duties is illegal (50 CFR Part 635.7 (c)).

XIII. HMS WORKSHOPS

PROTECTED SPECIES SAFE HANDLING, RELEASE, AND IDENTIFICATION

The objective of the **Protected Species Safe Handling, Release and Identification Workshops** is to provide fishermen with the skills to reduce the mortality of protected species consistent with the 2004 and 2008 Biological Opinions for the pelagic longline and shark fisheries, respectively. These workshops are designed to educate longline and gillnet fishermen on the proper techniques for safe handling and release of entangled or hooked protected species, such as sea turtles, marine mammals, and smalltooth sawfish. Identification of protected species will also be taught at these workshops in an effort to improve reporting.

All commercial shark and swordfish directed or incidental limited access permit holders that use longline or gillnet gear on their vessel must attend a Protected Species Safe Handling, Release and Identification Workshop. Operators of these vessels, if different from the permit holder, must also attend the workshop. Both the permit holder and operator must attend the workshop and become certified prior to renewing the vessel's shark and swordfish limited access permit. As such, two safe handling, release, and identification workshop certificates must be on

Please see 50 CFR part 635 for the current Atlantic HMS regulations, as regulations are subject to change. October 2008