

XVIII. OBSERVER COVERAGE⁴⁰¹

NOAA Fisheries observers collect biological information on all HMS and other fishes 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 NOAA Fisheries verify logbook information. **NOTE:** Observers only observe fishing activities and are *not* to be 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 must be given free and unobstructed access to the vessel's bridge, working decks, scales, holds, and any other space used to hold, process, weigh, or store fish. The observer must be provided accommodations and food that are equivalent to those provided to the crew. The observer is *not* an enforcement officer; however, data gathered by the observer may be used in support of enforcement. 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 NOAA Fisheries Observer⁴⁰²

Fishermen who are notified by NOAA Fisheries that their vessel is selected must inform NOAA Fisheries prior to each fishing trip taken during the selection period. NOAA Fisheries will either assign an observer to the trip or issue a waiver of observer coverage for that trip. When NOAA Fisheries assigns an observer, that observer *must* be onboard in order for that vessel to go fishing. Fishermen that are selected and continue to fish without an observer, or without contacting the observer program office prior to each fishing trip taken during the selection period, may be subject to enforcement action, including the assessment of penalties and sanctions.

In order to carry a NOAA Fisheries observer, the vessel must comply with certain regulatory requirements regarding observer accommodations and health and safety. These regulations include having a valid U.S. Coast Guard safety decal, having a useable life raft that will fit everyone on the vessel, including the observer, and providing the observer with the same accommodations as an officer on the crew. Inability or failure to comply with those requirements does not relieve a vessel of the requirement to carry an observer if selected. Additional information on how to comply with the observer requirements is included in the selection notification package.

Harassing an observer or preventing an observer from carrying out his/her duties is illegal.

Pelagic Observer Program

<http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/fisheries/observers/pelagic.htm>

popobserver@noaa.gov

(800) 858-0624

Shark Bottom Longline Observer Program

<http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/labs/panama/ob/bottomlineobserver.htm>

Southeast Gillnet Observer Program

<http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/labs/panama/ob/gillnet.htm>

Northeast Fisheries Observer Program

<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/>