



Northeast Fisheries Observer Program Fact Sheet



Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, all Category I or II fishery participants (those that have a moderate to high likelihood of seriously injuring or killing marine mammals during the course of fishing) must carry an observer on fishing trips when requested. The NOAA Fisheries Service (NMFS) may also request that Category III fishing participants (those with rare or undocumented takes of marine mammals) carry an observer on a voluntary basis.

Observer programs are a vital component of the fishery management process because they are one of the best ways to gather information on the status of marine resources.



As a fishery participant, your cooperation is important to help NMFS collect the most complete, unbiased, and relevant data possible. Good data prevent over-regulation and ensure the sustainability of our fisheries and the conservation of protected species populations.



Observer Data Are Used to:

- Track the effectiveness of gear modifications.
- Determine whether appropriate conservation measures are in place for commercial fisheries to reduce bycatch of marine mammals.
- Identify fishing patterns.
- Identify ways for fishermen to efficiently reduce unwanted bycatch.

Categorization of Observed Fisheries in the Northeast (2008 LOF):

Category I Fisheries

- Northeast sink gillnet
- Mid-Atlantic gillnet
- Northeast/Mid-Atlantic American Lobster



Category II Fisheries

- North Carolina inshore gillnet
- Northeast anchored float gillnet
- Northeast drift gillnet
- Southeastern U.S. Atlantic shark gillnet
- Chesapeake Bay inshore gillnet
- Atlantic mixed species trap/pot
- Mid-Atlantic bottom trawl
- Northeast mid-water trawl (including pair trawl)
- Northeast bottom trawl
- Mid-Atlantic haul/beach seine
- Virginia pound net
- Mid-Atlantic mid-water trawl (including pair trawl)
- Mid-Atlantic flynet
- North Carolina long haul seine
- North Carolina roe mullet stop net
- Mid-Atlantic menhaden purse seine

Category III Fisheries

- Atlantic shellfish bottom trawl*
- Gulf of Maine Atlantic herring purse seine*
- Gulf of Maine menhaden purse seine
- Northeast/mid-Atlantic bottom longline/hook-and-line*
- Gulf of Maine mussel
- Gulf of Maine, U.S. Mid-Atlantic sea scallop dredge*
- U.S. mid-Atlantic offshore surf clam and quahog dredge*

*Observer coverage in these fisheries is mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation & Management Act.

**For a complete list of ALL Category I, II, and III fisheries, visit:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/interactions/lof/>**



How Will I Be Notified to Carry an Observer?

Fishermen and fishing industry representatives will be notified in advance whenever possible that observer coverage will be required. Fishermen may be notified that they have been selected for observer coverage either by letter, phone, or in person by NMFS personnel or a designated certified observer service provider.

If selected to carry an observer, a vessel may not engage in any Category I or II fishing operation unless an observer is on board.

What are My Responsibilities When Carrying an Observer?

- Allowing the observer access to all areas of the vessel.
- Allowing the observer access to communications equipment & navigation equipment.
- Allowing the observer to sample, retain, & store marine mammal specimens and other protected species specimens, or target and non-target catch specimens.
- Notifying the observer when all commercial fishing operations are to begin & end.
- Providing accommodations & food to the observer equivalent to those provided to the crew.
- Allowing for the safe embarking & disembarking of the observer.

What are the Safety Requirements for Carrying an Observer?

- Complying with all United States Coast Guard (USCG) requirements while at sea.
- Obtaining a Commercial Fishery Vessel Safety Examination Decal by successfully completing a USCG safety examination. Safety examinations are completed dockside at no cost by calling the USCG Marine Safety Office Dockside Examiners.
- Allowing an observer, NMFS personnel, or designated observer service provider to visually inspect any safety or accommodation requirement if requested.

Note: Vessels that do not have a current and valid safety decal are considered unsafe for purposes of carrying an observer. Vessels that are required and selected to carry an observer, but do not have the safety decal, are prohibited from fishing without observer coverage.



For more information or questions regarding observer coverage requirements, contact:
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<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/>