



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
166 Water Street
Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026

December 27, 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR: NEFOP Observers, NEFOP Observer Service Provider

FROM: Amy Van Atten 
Branch Chief, Fisheries Sampling Branch

SUBJECT: 2013 Atlantic Herring Opening Notice
River herring reporting procedures mid-water trawl trips
Updated High Volume Fisheries Pre brief Requirement
New Closed Area 1 Program Code (043) for Mid water
Trawl Vessels

ATTACHMENTS: Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and UMass-
Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology
Midwater Trip Log & Catch Worksheet and Instructions

The purpose of this memo is to provide Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) fisheries observers and the NEFOP service provider an update concerning the re-opening of the Atlantic herring fishery and the new role observers play in a collaborative effort to reduce river herring bycatch by mid water trawl vessels. This memo also details the updated FSB prebriefing protocols required of observers prior to deployment on high volume fishery vessels and new program code for mid water trawl vessels fishing in the groundfish Closed Area 1.

Atlantic Herring Fishery Opening January 1, 2013

On January 1, 2013, the Atlantic herring quota for the 2013 Atlantic herring fishing year will become available, and the directed fishery will re-open. With that, the Fisheries Sampling Branch (FSB) expects vessel call-ins and observer coverage to begin once again.

On August 5, 2011 the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) received a petition from the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), requesting alewife (*Alosa pseudoharengus*) and blueback herring (*Alosa aestivalis*) each be listed as threatened throughout all or a significant portion of their range under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). NMFS is conducting a review



of the status of alewife and blueback herring, collectively referred to as river herring, to determine if the petitioned action is warranted.

River Herring Bycatch Reporting

In response to this petition, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) and UMass-Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) are currently working in cooperation with the Atlantic herring and mackerel mid-water trawl vessels to reduce river herring bycatch. Mid-water trawl captains are sending haul level river herring bycatch information to MA DMF/SMAST coordinators in order to increase the amount of data available. When MA DMF/SMAST receives haul information, the data is plotted, combined with portside sampling data, and any necessary advisories are returned to the fleet in a reasonable time frame.

The Fisheries Sampling Branch (FSB) is collaborating with the MA DMF to assist vessel captains in reporting real time catches of river herring. NEFOP observers deployed on mid water trawl vessels are now required to provide the vessel captain haul by haul catch information for preliminary reporting purposes. Captains are required to report river herring catches daily by 0900 via Boatracs. The observer will make every attempt to provide catch data to the captain in a timely fashion. Observers are expected to complete catch estimation calculations and species information on a haul-by-haul basis while at sea. Once these data are thoroughly reviewed by the observer, they are submitted to the captain for the daily report. In the event the observer is not confident in the catch numbers or catch estimation methods employed, the observer will not submit the catch data and provide a reasonable explanation to the captain as to why the data are unavailable at the given time.

Observer reporting responsibilities:

Report to the vessel captain:

Trip:

1. **Observer Trip ID** header information
2. **Haul Specific Information**
 - Haul number
 - River herring species proportions

Haul:

Upon completion and thorough review of the NEFOP Catch Composition Log, Catch Estimation Worksheet, and Haul Log, provide the captain the following information:

1. Alewife proportion (0. ____)
2. Blueback herring proportion (0. ____)
3. American shad proportion (0. ____)
4. Total (summed) proportion of all 3 river herring species (0. ____)



* Data should only be provided by NEFOP observers with a high degree of confidence. All data submitted by the observer to the captain is considered preliminary and may change during the formal FSB editing/auditing process. **Contact Sara Weeks (508) 495-2227** or Sara.Weeks@noaa.gov for questions concerning NEFOP herring data.

High Volume Fisheries Prebriefing Requirements

During 2011 and 2012 the prebriefing requirement for all high volume fisheries proved a valuable tool, resulting in increased data quality and a better understanding of the fisheries involved. For 2013, prebriefs are required prior to deployment on an observer's **first** HVF trip. After the first trip is reviewed by FSB, typically the Assistant Northeast Area Lead, the observer is informed whether or not they are required to call in for future HVF trips. Observers are welcome to call FSB staff for any questions they may have prior to deployment or submission of data.

Prebriefings are now conducted weekdays 8am-4:30pm. Please contact **Jenna Rockwell at (508) 495-2189** for all prebriefings. She may also be contacted at Jenna.Rockwell@noaa.gov. The herring cell, (774)-392-2735, may be used for after hours questions or guidance.

The first time on gear (e.g. training trip) policy remains the same and requires full editing, debriefing, and approval prior to subsequent deployments on that gear. For questions regarding the first time on gear policy, please contact **Kris Tholke (508) 495-2351** or Kris.Tholke@noaa.gov.

New Program Code (043) for Mid water Trawl Vessels Accessing Closed Area 1

In November 2009 the New England Fisheries Management Council requested NMFS to modify regulations concerning access to groundfish Closed Area 1 by mid water trawl vessels targeting herring. In order to fish within the Closed Area 1, these herring vessels are required to carry an observer (100% coverage) and are required to bring all catch onboard for the observer to sample. This allows for more accurate bycatch reporting, especially for haddock and other groundfish species.

In response to this regulation, NEFOP developed a new program code to specifically capture these trips. Observers will now record program code '**043**' for all Closed Area 1 trips using mid water trawl gear (single and paired). The NEFOP service provider will inform you of the type of trip you to which you are deployed. A Closed Area 1 trip is determined if **Begin Haul or End Haul coordinates are located within the Closed Area 1 boundaries**. Observers can access this information in Appendix E.3 and E.4 in the NEFOP program manual or the chart section in their NEFOP cheatsheets. There are times where vessels may call in for a Closed Area 1 trip, but not fish within the area. In these cases the observer will use the standard program code '000' as appropriate.



Attached: Midwater Trip Log & Catch Worksheet (MA DMF/SMASST)

