



April 28, 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR: A.I.S., Inc.,  
East West Technical Services,  
Fathom Research LLC, and  
MRAG Americas  
Industry Funded Scallop Observers and  
Northeast Fisheries Observer Program Observers

FROM: Amy S. Martins  
Branch Chief, Fisheries Sampling Branch (FSB)

SUBJECT: Protected Species Sampling Reminders

To all observers,

In reviewing our sampling from 2014 there were some obvious areas where some improvement is needed in 2015 and beyond. The two areas where this was especially true are in regards to sea turtle sampling and Atlantic sturgeon sampling. The purpose of this memo is to remind observers of some key points in dealing with the sampling of both groups of marine animals.

### Sea Turtles:

*\*Always refer to your Biological Sampling and Catch Estimation Manual\**

In 2014 NEFOP had 27 total sea turtle incidental takes. Of those, three did not come onboard or had interference issues, leaving 24 that could have been properly sampled by NEFOP or IFS observers. Of these 24 only three, or 12.5%, were properly sampled, tagged, documented and released. To be properly sampled, tagged, documented and released an observer needs to:

- 1) Take all photos that are listed on page 48 of the *Biological Sampling and Catch Estimation Manual*.
- 2) Take video of behavior. Please remember to take video of initial behavior on deck, any changes in behavior (e.g., a turtle is placed in the resuscitation position and becomes more active) and video of release. If the turtle is dead, please take a quick video to confirm this.
- 3) Tag properly: 1 tag for dead turtles and 2 tags for alive or comatose turtles that are >26 cm notch to tip length.
- 4) Biopsy properly: 2 biopsies (1 from each rear flipper) for **ALL** turtles regardless of condition or if the turtle is being brought to shore for any reason. Live/comatose turtles must be >25 cm to biopsy.
- 5) Correctly count scutes, measure body and scan for pit tags.

6) Release properly with gear out of water, boat in neutral and no other boats in vicinity.

It is very important that all of this is completed correctly as all of the sea turtle species we can encounter are endangered or threatened. The tagging and biopsying seems to be an area where we can greatly improve by being sure to place a tag in each rear flipper of live or comatose turtles as well as always collecting a biopsy from each rear flipper. We ask for two biopsy samples because one sample is used for genetic study and one is used for stable isotope studies. The biopsy punches we use are just large enough for each sample to be used for each purpose. In other words, if an observer only collects one biopsy sample the samples are not large enough to cut in half to use for each study.

The videos of behavior on deck and at release are a key component for NOAA staff and veterinarians that review our sea turtle data. Each year the Sea Turtle Working Group reviews each sea turtle incidental take on a case-by-case basis to determine likelihood of survival. In addition to the information observers collect on the incidental take log and sea turtle sample log, the photos and videos help greatly with this process.

There also were many cases where a sea turtle was released with gear still in the water or the vessel was in gear. It is extremely important that all observers understand that all of the sampling procedures are covered by the Endangered Species Act and if we are not properly completing the sampling to those specifications, we could lose our permits to complete this sampling. Please communicate with captain and crew about the importance of releasing the animals properly. If the captain or crew refuses to allow for a proper release an Incident Report should be completed noting obstruction of observer duties.

Please always refer to your *Biological Sampling and Catch Estimation Manual* to confirm you are taking the correct measurements, sampling correctly and completing the sampling in the correct order. Also, remember you have step by step directions in your turtle sampling kit for anything that is covered by our permit and sampling protocols.

**Atlantic Sturgeon (NEFOP observers only):**

\*Always refer to your on-deck reference guides and Memo 13-015 Atlantic Sturgeon Biological Sampling Update. Please do not refer to the *Biological Sampling and Catch Estimation Manual* as it is not up to date for Atlantic sturgeon. \*

The memo can be found at this link:

[http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/memos/2013/NEFOP\\_Memo\\_13-015\\_Sturgeon\\_Sampling.pdf](http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/memos/2013/NEFOP_Memo_13-015_Sturgeon_Sampling.pdf)

Observers should be 1.) only sampling sturgeon if they are 100% certain they are sampling an Atlantic sturgeon and 2.) providing the photos outlined on the on-deck reference guide for species verification. As a reminder we are completing a comparative study for the GARFO in which we are taking a pelvic fin clip and mucus swab samples from the interior gill cavity. Since implementing the new sampling protocols of Atlantic sturgeon the biggest issues we are seeing are observers only taking one of the samples and/or not properly shipping samples.

To properly sample Atlantic sturgeon, observers should be taking a mucus gill swab of the interior gill cavity and fixing it on a Whatman FTA card as well as taking a pelvic fin clip and storing it in a vial of 95% non-denatured ethanol. Once these samples are taken from the Atlantic sturgeon both can be stored at room temperature. The gill swab on a Whatman FTA card should be labeled, bagged and sent in with the paper trip. The observer should hold onto the pelvic fin clip stored in an ethanol vial, labeled and wrapped in parafilm. Once the paper trip and Whatman card sample have been received by FSB staff, the proper shipping materials and instructions for shipping the ethanol vial will be sent to the observer by FSB staff. All of this is explained in more detail in the original NEFOP memo 13-015 Sturgeon Sampling which is included as an attachment here.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to improve on sampling in regards to these species. If you have any questions on any of this please feel free to contact Bill Greer at [william.greer@noaa.gov](mailto:william.greer@noaa.gov) or (508) 495-2126. You may also contact Chad Keith at [Charles.keith@noaa.gov](mailto:Charles.keith@noaa.gov) or (508) 495-2067 for questions regarding Atlantic sturgeon sampling.

Attachment: Memo 13-015 Atlantic Sturgeon Biological Sampling Update

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Once you have read this memo please print your name and observer ID then sign and date below to confirm that you understand the sampling protocols that were mentioned within this memo and attachment. Once you have completed this, please cut or tear at the line above and send this bottom portion of the page in with your next trip. Again, if you have any questions please feel free to contact Bill Greer at [william.greer@noaa.gov](mailto:william.greer@noaa.gov) or (508) 495-2126.

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Name (Printed)

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Observer ID

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Signature

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Date