



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

November 24, 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR: MRAG Americas and Northeast Fisheries Observer Program Observers

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

SUBJECT: Increased coverage for trawl, gillnet and pot/trap vessels landing in New York state or fishing within the New York Bight or Long Island Sound

To all NEFOP observers,

The Fisheries Sampling Branch will provide increased observer coverage on federally and state permitted commercial fishing vessels landing in New York or fishing within the New York Bight or Long Island Sound. This coverage is to begin December 2015 and will continue for a minimum of two years. Please use **program code 044** when documenting these 'New York State Days' trips as determined by your provider.

Background & Purpose

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Bureau of Marine Resources has entered into an agreement with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Northeast Fishery Observer Program (NEFOP) to increase the states current coverage of commercial trawl, gillnet and pot/trap fisheries landing in New York state. Target coverage rates will increase by gear type from 2% to 5% for trawl, 2% to 7% for gillnet and 0% to 2% for pot/trap. The purpose of this increased coverage is to provide data for improved bycatch estimates for threatened and endangered species and will also provide data needed to estimate discards for improved management of non target, special interest fish species. This is an important component of New York State's conservation efforts for these species, which are required by NOAA Fisheries, under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), in order for these fisheries to continue operating.

Implementation

Public outreach meetings lead by NMFS and DEC staff will take place prior to implementation of this increased coverage. The focus of these meetings will be to provide additional information about the NEFOP and answer questions for permit holders. DEC also sent out a permit holder

letter in June 2015 informing the industry of the change in coverage rates. NMFS and approved observer service provider, MRAG Americas, will be conducting outreach in local ports and administering vessel selection letters beginning in the spring of 2016. These selection letters will inform the vessel owner or operator of the need to carry an observer on the next trip made by the selected vessel and instructions on how to set up the trip with the observer provider.

Sampling

Priority sampling for these trips should be the collection of data and biological samples from protected species (e.g., sturgeon and sea turtles), seabirds and marine mammals. Please review your biological sampling manual and the NEFOP memo sent to you April of this year (#15-007, April 28, 2015) that reminded observers of some key points when sampling sea turtles and sturgeon.

All gillnet trips covered under this agreement will be limited fish sampling trips. Discarded catch is NOT recorded or sampled and the observer conducts a protected species watch during **every** haul. Data and samples from Individual Animal Log species (with Atlantic sturgeon as a priority) should still be recorded and collected on these trips.

These trips are being accomplished in addition to New York trips for the SBRM seaday schedule and will use program code 044. Consult with your provider before your trip to determine what program code to use when covering trips from New York, Connecticut or New Jersey:

000 - Standard sea-sampling

042 - ASMFC

044 - NY State Days

Authority for Observer Coverage

Vessel owners and operators selected for observer coverage are responsible for complying with regulations set forth by the MMPA, Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) and ESA. Should industry members request any information on coverage authorizations you will find copies of these regulations along with the List of Fisheries Info Sheet, Marine Mammal Protection Act Info Sheet, Selection Letter, and Safety Decal Info Sheet with inspector phone numbers in your blue regulatory compliance binder.

For information on tasked sea day allocation by month, location and gear type visit the NEFOP Sea Day Schedule found on the Fisheries Sampling Branch website:

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

If you have questions regarding this new coverage please contact **Sara Weeks** at **(508) 495-2227** or Sara.Weeks@noaa.gov.