

# At-Sea Monitors and Observers: Our Eyes and Ears on the Water

## A Message from Eileen Sobeck, Head of NOAA Fisheries

October 14, 2015

I frequently share my admiration for the many talented and passionate people who make up the NOAA Fisheries workforce. I want to take this opportunity to recognize a cadre of highly trained, dedicated individuals who are part of the NOAA team and play a critical role in supporting our fisheries science and management.

At-sea fisheries monitors and observers are our eyes and ears on the water. They may spend days or weeks aboard commercial fishing vessels gathering first-hand information on what's caught and thrown back.

The work is intense. Observers undergo a rigorous training program to be able to identify and take samples of the myriad ocean life that might come aboard. Getting it right is important because the stakes are high. The high-quality data they collect are used to monitor fisheries, assess fish populations, and inform management.

The working conditions are tough. Observers work alongside fishermen in stressful, strenuous and at times hazardous conditions. Fishing is one of the most dangerous professions in the world. NOAA's observers and monitors are right there with those doing the dangerous work. This was tragically underscored recently when a member of our observer community, Keith Davis, went missing while at sea on a foreign vessel. There is an ongoing investigation into his disappearance led by the Government of Panama that is supported by the U.S. Embassy in Panama, the US Coast Guard investigative unit and the FBI.

Cooperation is critical. Deploying observers safely and collecting data at sea requires an active partnership between NOAA Fisheries, observers, observer providers, and the fishing industry.

We understand that at times, there can be tension among these parties. Observer safety is of utmost importance for me and NOAA as a whole. I understand tensions have been on the rise recently, but we must maintain respectful relationships. I have asked our law enforcement officers to remain vigilant and ensure the safety of our at-sea monitors and observers. Threats to these individuals will not be tolerated.

At-sea observers and monitors are dedicated professional scientists. They make a valuable contribution to our knowledge of fisheries and deserve our respect.



**Eileen Sobeck**  
Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eileen Sobeck', written in a cursive style.

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