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2012 Northeast Vessel Cost Survey is in the Mail

The first of three new or redesigned surveys designed to collect vital information on the operational costs and culture of commercial fishing launches Friday August 10, when an annual vessel cost survey will hit the mail.

Tammy Murphy of NOAA's Social Sciences Branch at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center is the point person on the multi-year effort. "Telling us more about your situation will be voluntary and your responses are confidential," says Murphy, an economist. "Collecting this information is absolutely essential to showing how fisheries, fishermen, and fishing communities are faring as management and fishery stock conditions change."

The annual vessel cost survey, last conducted in 2009, has been significantly redesigned with the help of fishermen. About 1700 vessel owners will receive a 2012 survey. Although that's not every owner, the pool covers all the fisheries, gear types, and vessel sizes in the Northeast, to capture how these costs may vary.

Collected over time, these economic data will be used to evaluate proposed changes to fishery management plans, provide a more complete picture of economic impacts from regulatory actions in the fisheries.

Vessel owners can return the survey by postage paid envelope, or complete it online. The surveys are also available in Portuguese or Spanish. Survey responses are confidential data, just like vessel trip, observer, and dealer reports.

The second survey effort will start this fall using two different approaches: for vessel owners and one for crew members. "We have limited information from vessel owners and really none from crew members on how fishery regulations affect their everyday lives as individuals, as well as the lives of their family and communities," says Murphy, "This effort is intended to start filling in those gaps."

In early fall 2012, about 800 permit holders will get the owner's survey, which will be sent by mail. It will be available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, and may be returned by postage paid envelope or filled out online. The crew survey will be conducted face-to-face on the docks in fifteen ports in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, with about 1300 willing participants. It will continue for a year, to capture seasonality and port diversity.

Much of the data collection is new, so Murphy is aiming for a high return rate. "The more responses we get, the more accurate our results can be. We want to capture differences across regions, fisheries, gear types and vessel sizes, and that means we need to hear from every fisherman that is asked to participate in these survey efforts" she said.

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