



Northeast Fisheries Mid-Atlantic Observer Coverage

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) Fisheries Sampling Branch manages the federal Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) coverage from Maine to North Carolina. They oversee the observer provider companies, provide training and certification, perform data quality assessments, provide industry outreach, represent the program to groups and councils, and maintain historical data associated with observer coverage. NEFSC observers play a vital role in the management of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic fisheries since the program's inception in 1989.

Roles and Responsibilities

NEFOP observers collect catch, gear, fishing effort, and biological data over a range of commercial fisheries. Examples include: gillnet (all sizes), pot/trap, trawl, longline, hand line, dredge, etc. **MOST, IF NOT ALL, FISHERIES ARE REQUIRED TO CARRY A FEDERAL FISHERIES OBSERVER, particularly if vessels are federally permitted.** Observer coverage requirements were established and are authorized under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) Omnibus Amendment, the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), and the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Data collected by Mid-Atlantic fisheries observers are used to identify key characteristics of commercial fisheries in the region. Catch data and biological information are utilized in stock assessments. Protected species observations and samples provide life history information and data for bycatch estimation.

Duties of a Mid-Atlantic Observer

NEFOP's Mid-Atlantic observers are deployed on vessels participating in Category I, II, and III fisheries. For a complete list of categories visit the [NOAA MMPA List of Fisheries](#). Data are collected electronically on hand held tablets and paper logs. NEFOP sampling protocols require observers to collect weights for all kept and discarded species caught, measure lengths and take biological samples of priority species. Interactions with marine mammals, sea turtles, sea birds, and other protected species are documented and detailed. Information on vessel operating costs, detailed gear configuration, and fishing locations are also collected.

**Observers may be required to observe only protected species (marine mammals, turtles, sea birds, etc.) on certain trips. On these trips, an observers' documentation and sampling of catch will be very limited, and their focus will be on protected species in the area where fishing is occurring.

Minimum Qualifications

Observers have to meet education requirements, including a bachelor's degree. They must also meet certain physical, mental, and citizenship criteria for working on U.S. flagged commercial fishing vessels. Observers must hold a current certification for CPR and First Aid and successfully pass a NEFOP observer training course and receive a medical clearance for sea duty.

How will I be notified to carry an observer?

Fishermen or vessel representatives may be notified that they have been selected for observer coverage either by selection letter, over the phone, or in person by NMFS personnel, NEFOP observers, or NEFOP observer provider staff.

As a fishery participant, your cooperation is important to help NMFS collect the most complete, unbiased, and relevant data possible. Good data prevents over-regulation and ensures the sustainability of our fisheries and the conservation of protected species populations.

What are my responsibilities when carrying an observer?

- Provide the observer with living quarters, meals, and amenities comparable to a crew member
- Allow the observer access to areas of the vessel and gear necessary to conduct sampling and collect required data
- Allow the observer access to communication equipment and view of navigation equipment as necessary to perform their duties
- Allow the observer to sample, retain and store marine mammals, other protected species, and/or target and non-target species specimens
- Provide true vessel locations by latitude and longitude upon request by the observer
- Provide the observer with vessel trip report (VTR) serial numbers and Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) fishing activity codes if requested
- Notify the observer when commercial fishing operations are to begin and end
- Allow for the safe embarking and disembarking of the observer

To provide comments and feedback to the NEFOP program or to request data collected by the NEFOP program on your vessel, please fill out the forms provided by your observer or visit the [NOAA NEFSC Fisheries Sampling Branch Forms](#) website.

What are the vessel safety requirements I must meet to carry an observer?

Observers are required to review emergency instructions with the vessel operator and complete a pre-trip safety check of the vessel's emergency equipment prior to departing on a trip (observers arrive early to conduct the pre-trip safety checklist). Observers will verify that the equipment, registrations and certificates meet the requirements.

- **ALL VESSELS MUST** have a current U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination (CFVSE) decal, regardless of vessel size. An observer may not depart on a trip selected for coverage until the decal is up to date. Visit [FishSafe](#) for more information regarding the USCG decal and maritime safety for commercial fishing vessels.
- If your vessel requires a survival craft, there must be adequate room to accommodate an observer. On some occasions, and when available, an observer may be able to bring a NMFS issued valise packed liferaft in addition to the vessels survival craft to accommodate their presence. *The vessel's survival craft must be up to date with servicing and hydrostatic release dates for a valise liferaft to be used.

To request an observer, contact the following people:

Northern Mid-Atlantic (NY):

Brian Hochstrasser
AIS Area Coordinator
Cell: 774-392-7759
Long Island, NY

Central Mid-Atlantic (NJ):

Tom Fetchko
AIS Area Coordinator
Cell: 774-392-6794
Toms River, NJ

Southern Mid-Atlantic (DE, MD, VA, & NC):

Liz Shores
AIS Area Coordinator
Cell: 774-392-6649
Norfolk, VA

AIS Mid-Atlantic Coordinator of Operations:

Ben Finkes
Cell: 774-328-1777
Toms River, NJ

**For more information or questions regarding NEFOP Mid Atlantic Observer Coverage visit the [NOAA NEFSC Fisheries Sampling Branch](#) website or contact:
**Ken Keene, phone: 732-872-3070 or e-mail: kenneth.keene@noaa.gov
or Kara (Gibbons) Gross, phone: 508-495-2154 or e-mail: kara.gross@noaa.gov****