

Code of Federal Regulations

Title 50

Part 648 — Fisheries of the Northeastern United States

648.1 Purpose and scope

(a) This part implements the fishery management plans (FMPs) for the Atlantic mackerel, squid, and butterfish fisheries (Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish FMP); Atlantic salmon (Atlantic Salmon FMP); the Atlantic sea scallop fishery (Scallop FMP); the Atlantic surf clam and ocean quahog fisheries (Atlantic Surf Clam and Ocean Quahog FMP); the NE multispecies and monkfish fisheries ((NE Multispecies FMP) and (Monkfish FMP)); the summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass fisheries (Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass FMP); the Atlantic bluefish fishery (Atlantic Bluefish FMP); the Atlantic herring fishery (Atlantic Herring FMP); the spiny dogfish fishery (Spiny Dogfish FMP); the Atlantic deep-sea red crab fishery (Deep-Sea Red Crab FMP); the tilefish fishery (Tilefish FMP); and the NE skate complex fisheries (Skate FMP). These FMPs and the regulations in this part govern the conservation and management of the above named fisheries of the Northeastern United States.

(b) This part governs domestic fishing only. Foreign fishing is governed under subpart F of part 600 of this chapter.

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Title 50

Part 648 — Fisheries of the Northeastern United States

648.11 At-sea sea sampler/observer coverage

(a) The Regional Administrator may request any vessel holding a permit for Atlantic sea scallops, NE multispecies, monkfish, skates, Atlantic mackerel, squid, butterfish, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, spiny dogfish, Atlantic herring, tilefish, or Atlantic deep-sea red crab; or a moratorium permit for summer flounder; to carry a NMFS-certified fisheries observer. A vessel holding a permit for Atlantic sea scallops is subject to the additional requirements specific in paragraph (g) of this section. Also, any vessel or vessel owner/operator that fishes for, catches or lands hagfish, or intends to fish for, catch, or land hagfish in or from the exclusive economic zone must carry a NMFS-certified fisheries observer when requested by the Regional Administrator in accordance with the requirements of this section.

(b) If requested by the Regional Administrator to carry an observer or sea sampler, it is the responsibility of the vessel owner to arrange for and facilitate observer or sea sampler placement. Owners of vessels selected for sea sampler/observer coverage must notify the appropriate Regional or Science and Research Director, as specified by the Regional Administrator, before commencing any fishing trip that may result in the harvest of resources of the respective fishery. Notification procedures will be specified in selection letters to vessel owners.

(c) The Regional Administrator may waive the requirement to carry a sea sampler or observer if the facilities on a vessel for housing the observer or sea sampler, or for carrying out observer or sea sampler functions, are so inadequate or unsafe that the health or safety of the observer or sea sampler, or the safe operation of the vessel, would be jeopardized.

(d) An owner or operator of a vessel on which a NMFS-approved sea sampler/observer is embarked must:

- (1) Provide accommodations and food that are equivalent to those provided to the crew.
- (2) Allow the sea sampler/observer access to and use of the vessel's communications equipment and personnel upon request for the transmission and receipt of messages related to the sea sampler's/observer's duties.
- (3) Provide true vessel locations, by latitude and longitude or loran coordinates, as requested by the observer/sea sampler, and allow the sea sampler/observer access to and use of the vessel's navigation equipment and personnel upon request to determine the vessel's position.
- (4) Notify the sea sampler/observer in a timely fashion of when fishing operations are to begin and end.
- (5) Allow for the embarking and debarking of the sea sampler/observer, as specified by the Regional Administrator, ensuring that transfers of observers/sea samplers at sea are accomplished in a safe manner, via

small boat or raft, during daylight hours as weather and sea conditions allow, and with the agreement of the sea samplers/ observers involved.

(6) Allow the sea sampler/observer free and unobstructed access to the vessel's bridge, working decks, holding bins, weight scales, holds, and any other space used to hold, process, weigh, or store fish.

(7) Allow the sea sampler/observer to inspect and copy any the vessel's log, communications log, and records associated with the catch and distribution of fish for that trip.

(e) The owner or operator of a vessel issued a summer flounder moratorium permit, a scup moratorium permit, a black sea bass moratorium permit, a bluefish permit, a spiny dogfish permit, an Atlantic herring permit, an Atlantic deep-sea red crab permit, a skate permit, or a tilefish permit, if requested by the sea sampler/observer, also must:

(1) Notify the sea sampler/observer of any sea turtles, marine mammals, summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, spiny dogfish, Atlantic herring, Atlantic deep-sea red crab, tilefish, skates (including discards) or other specimens taken by the vessel.

(2) Provide the sea sampler/observer with sea turtles, marine mammals, summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, spiny dogfish, Atlantic herring, Atlantic deep-sea red crab, skates, tilefish, or other specimens taken by the vessel.

(f) NMFS may accept observer coverage funded by outside sources if:

(1) All coverage conducted by such observers is determined by NMFS to be in compliance with NMFS' observer guidelines and procedures.

(2) The owner or operator of the vessel complies with all other provisions of this part.

(3) The observer is approved by the Regional Administrator.

(g) *Atlantic sea scallop observer program.*

(1) *General.* Unless otherwise specified, owners, operators, and/or managers of vessels issued a Federal scallop permit under §648.4(a)(2), and specified in paragraph (b) of this section, must comply with this section and are jointly and severally responsible for their vessel's compliance with this section. To facilitate the deployment of at-sea observers, all sea scallop vessels issued limited access permits fishing in open areas or Sea Scallop Access Areas, and general category vessels fishing under the Sea Scallop Access Area program specified in §648.60, are required to comply with the additional notification requirements specified in paragraph (g)(2) of this section. All sea scallop vessels issued a VMS general category or Non-VMS general scallop permit that are participating in the Area Access Program specified in §648.60 are required to comply with the additional VMS notification requirements specified in paragraph (g)(2) of this section. When NMFS notifies the vessel owner, operator, and/or manager of any requirement to carry an observer on a specified trip in either an Access Area or Open Area as specified in paragraph (g)(3) of this section, the vessel may not fish for, take, retain, possess, or land any scallops without carrying an observer. Vessels may only embark on a scallop trip in open areas or Access Areas without an observer if the vessel owner, operator, and/or manager has been notified that the vessel has received a waiver of the observer requirement for that trip pursuant to paragraphs (g)(3) and (g)(4)(ii) of this section.

(2) *Vessel notification procedures.*

(i) *Limited access vessels.* Limited access vessel owners, operators, or managers shall notify NMFS/NEFOP by telephone not more than 10 days prior to the beginning of any scallop trip of the time, port of departure, open area or specific Sea Scallop Access Area to be fished, and whether fishing as a scallop dredge, scallop trawl, or general category vessel.

(ii) *General category vessels.* General category vessel owners, operators, or managers must notify the NMFS/NEFOP by telephone by 0001 hr of the Thursday preceding the week (Sunday through Saturday) that they intend to start a scallop trip in an access area. If selected, up to two Sea Scallop Access Area trips that start during the specified week (Sunday through Saturday) can be selected to be covered by an observer. NMFS/NEFOP must be notified by the owner, operator, or vessel manager of any trip plan changes at least 48 hr prior to vessel departure.

(3) *Selection of scallop trips for observer coverage.* Based on predetermined coverage levels for various permit categories and areas of the scallop fishery that are provided by NMFS in writing to all observer service providers approved pursuant to paragraph (h) of this section, NMFS shall notify the vessel owner, operator, or vessel manager whether the vessel must carry an observer, or if a waiver has been granted, for the specified scallop trip, within 24 hr of the vessel owner's, operator's, or vessel manager's notification of the prospective scallop trip, as specified in paragraph (g)(2) of this section. Any request to carry an observer may be waived by NMFS. All waivers for observer coverage shall be issued to the vessel by VMS so as to have on-board verification of the waiver. A vessel may not fish in an area with an observer waiver confirmation number that does not match the scallop trip plan that was called in to NMFS. Confirmation numbers for trip notification calls are only valid for 48 hr from the intended sail date; and

(4) *Procurement of observer services by scallop vessels.*

(i) An owner of a scallop vessel required to carry an observer under paragraph (g)(3) of this section must arrange for carrying an observer certified through the observer training class operated by the NMFS/NEFOP from an observer service provider approved by NMFS under paragraph (h) of this section. The owner, operator, or vessel manager of a vessel selected to carry an observer must contact the observer service provider and must provide at least 48-hr notice in advance of the fishing trip for the provider to arrange for observer deployment for the specified trip. The observer service provider will notify the vessel owner, operator, or manager within 18 hr whether they have an available observer. A list of approved observer service providers shall be posted on the NMFS/NEFOP Web site at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/>. The observer service provider may take up to 48 hr to arrange for observer deployment for the specified scallop trip.

(ii) An owner, operator, or vessel manager of a vessel that cannot procure a certified observer within 48 hr of the advance notification to the provider due to the unavailability of an observer may request a waiver from NMFS/NEFOP from the requirement for observer coverage for that trip, but only if the owner, operator, or vessel manager has contacted all of the available observer service providers to secure observer coverage and no observer is available. NMFS/NEFOP shall issue such a waiver within 24 hr, if the conditions of this paragraph (g)(4)(ii) are met. A vessel may not begin the trip without being issued a waiver.

(5) Owners of scallop vessels shall be responsible for paying the cost of the observer for all scallop trips on which an observer is carried onboard the vessel, regardless of whether the vessel lands or sells sea scallops on that trip, and regardless of the availability of set-aside for an increased possession limit or reduced DAS accrual rate. The owners of vessels that carry an observer may be compensated with a reduced DAS accrual rate for open area scallop trips or additional scallop catch per day in Sea Scallop Access Areas in order to help defray the cost of the observer, under the program specified in §§648.53 and 648.60.

(i) Observer service providers shall establish the daily rate for observer coverage on a scallop vessel on an Access Area trip or open area DAS scallop trip consistent with paragraphs (g)(5)(i)(A) and (B), respectively, of this section.

(A) *Access Area trips.* For purposes of determining the daily rate for an observed scallop trip in a Sea Scallop Access Area, a service provider shall charge a vessel owner from when an observer boards a vessel until they disembark (dock to dock), where “day” is defined as a 24-hr period, or any portion of a 24-hr period, regardless of the calendar day. For example, if a vessel with an observer departs on the July 1st at 10 pm and lands on July 3rd at 1 am, the time at sea equals 27 hours, which would equate to 2 “days.”

(B) *Open area scallop trips.* For purposes of determining the daily rate for an observed scallop trip for open area DAS trips, a service provider shall charge dock to dock where “day” is defined as a 24-hour period, and portions of the other days would be pro-rated at an hourly charge (taking the daily rate divided by 24). For example, if a vessel with an observer departs on the July 1st at 10 pm and lands on July 3rd at 1 am, the time at sea equals 27 hours, so the provider would charge 1 day and 3 hours.

(ii) NMFS shall determine any reduced DAS accrual rate and the amount of additional pounds of scallops per day fished in a Sea Scallop Access Area for the applicable fishing year based on the economic conditions of the scallop fishery, as determined by best available information. Vessel owners and observer service providers shall be notified through the Small Entity Compliance Guide of any DAS accrual rate changes and any changes in additional pounds of scallops determined by the Regional Administrator to be necessary. Vessel owners and observer providers shall be notified by NMFS of any adjustments.

(6) When the available DAS or TAC set-aside for observer coverage is exhausted, vessels shall still be required to carry an observer as specified in this section, and shall be responsible for paying for the cost of the observer, but shall not be authorized to harvest additional pounds or fish at a reduced DAS accrual rate.

(h) *Observer service provider approval and responsibilities.*

(1) *General.* An entity seeking to provide observer services must apply for and obtain approval from NMFS following submission of a complete application to The Observer Program Branch Chief, 25 Bernard St Jean Drive, East Falmouth, MA 02536. A list of approved observer service providers shall be distributed to vessel owners and shall be posted on the NMFS/NEFOP website at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/>.

(2) *Existing observer service providers.* Observer service providers that currently deploy certified observers in the Northeast must submit an application containing the information specified in paragraph (h)(3) of this section, excluding any information specified in paragraph (h)(3) of this section that has already been submitted to NMFS.

(3) *Contents of application.* An application to become an approved observer service provider shall contain the following:

(i) Identification of the management, organizational structure, and ownership structure of the applicant’s business, including identification by name and general function of all controlling management interests in the company, including but not limited to owners, board members, officers, authorized agents, and staff. If the applicant is a corporation, the articles of incorporation must be provided. If the applicant is a partnership, the partnership agreement must be provided.

(ii) The permanent mailing address, phone and fax numbers where the owner(s) can be contacted for official correspondence, and the current physical location, business mailing address, business telephone and fax numbers, and business e-mail address for each office.

(iii) A statement, signed under penalty of perjury, from each owner or owners, board members, and officers, if a corporation, that they are free from a conflict of interest as described under paragraph (h)(6) of this section.

(iv) A statement, signed under penalty of perjury, from each owner or owners, board members, and officers, if a corporation, describing any criminal convictions, Federal contracts they have had, and the performance rating they received on the contract, and previous decertification action while working as an observer or observer service provider.

(v) A description of any prior experience the applicant may have in placing individuals in remote field and/or marine work environments. This includes, but is not limited to, recruiting, hiring, deployment, and personnel administration.

(vi) A description of the applicant's ability to carry out the responsibilities and duties of a fishery observer services provider as set out under paragraph (h)(2) of this section, and the arrangements to be used.

(vii) Evidence of holding adequate insurance to cover injury, liability, and accidental death for observers during their period of employment (including during training). Workers' Compensation and Maritime Employer's Liability insurance must be provided to cover the observer, vessel owner, and observer provider. The minimum coverage required is \$5 million. Observer service providers shall provide copies of the insurance policies to observers to display to the vessel owner, operator, or vessel manager, when requested.

(viii) Proof that its observers, either contracted or employed by the service provider, are compensated with salaries that meet or exceed the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) guidelines for observers. Observers shall be compensated as a Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) non-exempt employees. Observer providers shall provide any other benefits and personnel services in accordance with the terms of each observer's contract or employment status.

(ix) The names of its fully equipped, NMFS/NEFOP certified, observers on staff or a list of its training candidates (with resumes) and a request for an appropriate NMFS/NEFOP Observer Training class. The NEFOP training has a minimum class size of eight individuals, which may be split among multiple vendors requesting training. Requests for training classes with less than eight individuals will be delayed until further requests make up the full training class size. Requests for training classes must be made 30 days in advance of the requested date and must have a complete roster of trainees at that time.

(x) An Emergency Action Plan (EAP) describing its response to an "at sea" emergency with an observer, including, but not limited to, personal injury, death, harassment, or intimidation.

(4) Application evaluation.

(i) NMFS shall review and evaluate each application submitted under paragraphs (h)(2) and (h)(3) of this section. Issuance of approval as an observer provider shall be based on completeness of the application, and a determination of the applicant's ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of a fishery observer service provider, as demonstrated in the application information. A decision to approve or deny an application shall be made by NMFS within 15 business days of receipt of the application by NMFS.

(ii) If NMFS approves the application, the observer service provider's name will be added to the list of approved observer service providers found on the NMFS/NEFOP website specified in paragraph (h)(1) of this section, and in any outreach information to the industry. Approved observer service providers shall be notified in writing and provided with any information pertinent to its participation in the fishery observer program.

(iii) An application shall be denied if NMFS determines that the information provided in the application is not complete or the evaluation criteria are not met. NMFS shall notify the applicant in writing of any deficiencies in the application or information submitted in support of the application. An applicant who receives a denial of his or her application may present additional information to rectify the deficiencies specified in the written denial, provided such information is submitted to NMFS within 30 days of the applicant's receipt of the denial notification from NMFS. In the absence of additional information, and after 30 days from an applicant's receipt of a denial, an observer provider is required to resubmit an application containing all of the information required under the application process specified in paragraph (h)(3) of this section to be re-considered for being added to the list of approved observer service providers.

(5) *Responsibilities of observer service providers.*

(i) An observer service provider must provide observers certified by NMFS/NEFOP pursuant to paragraph (i) of this section for deployment in the scallop fishery when contacted and contracted by the owner, operator, or vessel manager of a vessel fishing in the scallop fishery, unless the observer service provider does not have an available observer within 48 hr of receiving a request for an observer from a vessel owner, operator, and/or manager, or refuses to deploy an observer on a requesting vessel for any of the reasons specified at paragraph (h)(5)(viii) of this section. An observer's first three deployments and the resulting data shall be immediately edited and approved after each trip, by NMFS/NEFOP, prior to any further deployments by that observer. If data quality is considered acceptable, the observer would be certified.

(ii) An observer service provider must provide to each of its observers:

(A) All necessary transportation, including arrangements and logistics, of observers to the initial location of deployment, to all subsequent vessel assignments, and to any debriefing locations, if necessary;

(B) Lodging, per diem, and any other services necessary for observers assigned to a fishing vessel or to attend an appropriate NMFS/NEFOP Observer Training class;

(C) The required observer equipment, in accordance with equipment requirements listed on the NMFS/NEFOP website specified in paragraph (h)(1) of this section, prior to any deployment and/or prior to NMFS observer certification training; and

(D) Individually assigned communication equipment, in working order, such as a cell phone or pager, for all necessary communication. An observer service provider may alternatively compensate observers for the use of the observer's personal cell phone or pager for communications made in support of, or necessary for, the observer's duties.

(iii) *Observer deployment logistics.* Each approved observer service provider must assign an available certified observer to a vessel upon request. Each approved observer service provider must provide for access by industry 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, to enable an owner, operator, or manager of a vessel to secure observer coverage when requested. The telephone system must be monitored a minimum of four times daily to ensure rapid response to industry requests. Observer service providers approved under paragraph (h) of this section are required to report observer deployments to NMFS daily for the purpose of determining whether the predetermined coverage levels are being achieved in the appropriate fishery.

(iv) *Observer deployment limitations.* Unless alternative arrangements are approved by NMFS, an observer provider must not deploy any observer on the same vessel for more than two consecutive multi-day trips, and not more than twice in any given month for multi-day deployments.

(v) *Communications with observers.* An observer service provider must have an employee responsible for observer activities on call 24 hours a day to handle emergencies involving observers or problems concerning observer logistics, whenever observers are at sea, stationed shoreside, in transit, or in port awaiting vessel assignment.

(vi) *Observer training requirements.* The following information must be submitted to NMFS/NEFOP at least 7 days prior to the beginning of the proposed training class: A list of observer candidates; observer candidate resumes; and a statement signed by the candidate, under penalty of perjury, that discloses the candidate's criminal convictions, if any. All observer trainees must complete a basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation/first aid course prior to the end of a NMFS/NEFOP Sea Scallop Observer Training class. NMFS may reject a candidate for training if the candidate does not meet the minimum qualification requirements as outlined by NMFS/NEFOP Minimum Eligibility Standards for observers as described on the NMFS/NEFOP Web site.

(vii) *Reports.*

(A) *Observer deployment reports.* The observer service provider must report to NMFS/NEFOP when, where, to whom, and to what fishery (open or closed area) an observer has been deployed, within 24 hr of the observer's departure. The observer service provider must ensure that the observer reports back to NMFS its Observer Contract (OBSCON) data, as described in the certified observer training, within 24 hr of landing. OBSCON data are to be submitted electronically or by other means as specified by NMFS. The observer service provider shall provide the raw (unedited) data collected by the observer to NMFS within 72 hr, which should be within 4 business days of the trip landing.

(B) *Safety refusals.* The observer service provider must report to NMFS any trip that has been refused due to safety issues, e.g., failure to hold a valid USCG Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination Decal or to meet the safety requirements of the observer's pre-trip vessel safety checklist, within 24 hours of the refusal.

(C) *Biological samples.* The observer service provider must ensure that biological samples, including whole marine mammals, sea turtles, and sea birds, are stored/handled properly and transported to NMFS within 7 days of landing.

(D) *Observer debriefing.* The observer service provider must ensure that the observer remains available to NMFS, including NMFS Office for Law Enforcement, for debriefing for at least 2 weeks following any observed trip. If requested by NMFS, an observer that is at sea during the 2-week period must contact NMFS upon his or her return.

(E) *Observer availability report.* The observer service provider must report to NMFS any occurrence of inability to respond to an industry request for observer coverage due to the lack of available observers by 5 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, of any day on which the provider is unable to respond to an industry request for observer coverage.

(F) *Other reports.* The observer provider must report possible observer harassment, discrimination, concerns about vessel safety or marine casualty, observer illness or injury, and any information, allegations, or reports regarding observer conflict of interest or breach of the standards of behavior must be submitted to NMFS within 24 hours of the event or within 24 hours of learning of the event.

(G) *Observer status report.* Providers must provide NMFS/NEFOP with an updated list of contact information for all observers that includes the observer identification number, observer's name, mailing address, e-mail address, phone numbers, homeports or fisheries/trip types assigned, and must include whether or not the observer

is “in service,” indicating when the observer has requested leave and/or is not currently working for the industry funded program.

(H) Providers must submit to NMFS/NEFOP, if requested, a copy of each type of signed and valid contract (including all attachments, appendices, addendums, and exhibits incorporated into the contract) between the observer provider and those entities requiring observer services.

(I) Providers must submit to NMFS/NEFOP, if requested, a copy of each type of signed and valid contract (including all attachments, appendices, addendums, and exhibits incorporated into the contract) between the observer provider and specific observers.

(J) Providers must submit to NMFS/NEFOP, if requested, copies of any information developed and used by the observer providers distributed to vessels, such as informational pamphlets, payment notification, description of observer duties, etc.

(viii) *Refusal to deploy an observer.*

(A) An observer service provider may refuse to deploy an observer on a requesting fishing vessel if the observer service provider does not have an available observer within 72 hours of receiving a request for an observer from a vessel.

(B) An observer service provider may refuse to deploy an observer on a requesting fishing vessel if the observer service provider has determined that the requesting vessel is inadequate or unsafe pursuant to the reasons described at §600.746.

(C) The observer service provider may refuse to deploy an observer on a fishing vessel that is otherwise eligible to carry an observer for any other reason, including failure to pay for previous observer deployments, provided the observer service provider has received prior written confirmation from NMFS authorizing such refusal.

(6) *Limitations on conflict of interest.* An observer service provider:

(i) Must not have a direct or indirect interest in a fishery managed under Federal regulations, including, but not limited to, a fishing vessel, fish dealer, fishery advocacy group, and/or fishery research;

(ii) Must assign observers without regard to any preference by representatives of vessels other than when an observer will be deployed; and

(iii) Must not solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, any gratuity, gift, favor, entertainment, loan, or anything of monetary value from anyone who conducts fishing or fishing related activities that are regulated by NMFS, or who has interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the official duties of observer providers.

(7) *Removal of observer service provider from the list of approved observer service providers.* An observer provider that fails to meet the requirements, conditions, and responsibilities specified in paragraphs (h)(5) and (h)(6) of this section shall be notified by NMFS, in writing, that it is subject to removal from the list of approved observer service providers. Such notification shall specify the reasons for the pending removal. An observer service provider that has received notification that it is subject to removal from the list of approved observer service providers may submit information to rebut the reasons for removal from the list. Such rebuttal must be submitted within 30 days of notification received by the observer service provider that the observer service provider is subject to removal and must be accompanied by written evidence that clearly disproves the reasons for removal. NMFS shall

review information rebutting the pending removal and shall notify the observer service provider within 15 days of receipt of the rebuttal whether or not the removal is warranted. If no response to a pending removal is received by NMFS, the observer service provider shall be automatically removed from the list of approved observer service providers. The decision to remove the observer service provider from the list, either after reviewing a rebuttal, or if no rebuttal is submitted, shall be the final decision of NMFS and the Department of Commerce. Removal from the list of approved observer service providers does not necessarily prevent such observer service provider from obtaining an approval in the future if a new application is submitted that demonstrates that the reasons for removal are remedied. Certified observers under contract with an observer service provider that has been removed from the list of approved service providers must complete their assigned duties for any fishing trips on which the observers are deployed at the time the observer service provider is removed from the list of approved observer service providers. An observer service provider removed from the list of approved observer service providers is responsible for providing NMFS with the information required in paragraph (h)(5)(vii) of this section following completion of the trip. NMFS may consider, but is not limited to, the following in determining if an observer service provider may remain on the list of approved observer service providers:

(i) Failure to meet the requirements, conditions, and responsibilities of observer service providers specified in paragraphs (h)(5) and (h)(6) of this section;

(ii) Evidence of conflict of interest as defined under paragraph (h)(3) of this section;

(iii) Evidence of criminal convictions related to:

(A) Embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements, or receiving stolen property; or

(B) The commission of any other crimes of dishonesty, as defined by state law or Federal law that would seriously and directly affect the fitness of an applicant in providing observer services under this section;

(iv) Unsatisfactory performance ratings on any Federal contracts held by the applicant; and

(v) Evidence of any history of decertification as either an observer or observer provider.

(i) *Observer certification.*

(1) To be certified, employees or sub-contractors operating as observers for observer service providers approved under paragraph (h) of this section must meet NMFS National Minimum Eligibility Standards for observers. NMFS National Minimum Eligibility Standards are available at the National Observer Program website: <http://www.st.nmfs.gov/st4/nop/>.

(2) *Observer training.* In order to be deployed on any fishing vessel, a candidate observer must have passed an appropriate NMFS/NEFOP Observer Training course. If a candidate fails training, the candidate shall be notified in writing on or before the last day of training. The notification will indicate the reasons the candidate failed the training. Observer training shall include an observer training trip, as part of the observer's training, aboard a fishing vessel with a trainer. A certified observer's first deployment and the resulting data shall be immediately edited, and approved, by NMFS prior to any further deployments of that observer.

(3) *Observer requirements.* All observers must:

(i) Have a valid NMFS/NEFOP fisheries observer certification pursuant to paragraph (i)(1) of this section;

(ii) Be physically and mentally capable of carrying out the responsibilities of an observer on board fishing vessels, pursuant to standards established by NMFS. Such standards are available from NMFS/NEFOP website specified in paragraph (h)(1) of this section and shall be provided to each approved observer service provider;

(iii) Have successfully completed all NMFS-required training and briefings for observers before deployment, pursuant to paragraph (i)(2) of this section; and

(iv) Hold a current Red Cross (or equivalence) CPR/first aid certification.

(v) Observers must accurately record their sampling data, write complete reports, and report accurately any observations relevant to conservation of marine resources or their environment.

(4) *Probation and decertification.* NMFS has the authority to review observer certifications and issue observer certification probation and/or decertification as described in NMFS policy found on the NMFS/NEFOP website specified in paragraph (h)(1) of this section.

(5) *Issuance of decertification.* Upon determination that decertification is warranted under paragraph (i)(3) of this section, NMFS shall issue a written decision to decertify the observer to the observer and approved observer service providers via certified mail at the observer's most current address provided to NMFS. The decision shall identify whether a certification is revoked and shall identify the specific reasons for the action taken. Decertification is effective immediately as of the date of issuance, unless the decertification official notes a compelling reason for maintaining certification for a specified period and under specified conditions. Decertification is the final decision of NMFS and the Department of Commerce and may not be appealed.

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