



Contact: Connie Barclay
301-713-2370

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 2, 2008

NOAA Scientists Train African Team to be Fisheries Observers

A team of NOAA scientists traveled to Ghana this week to teach 40 government officials and university students to become trained marine resource observers, able to provide scientific data needed to manage their fish stocks. This information will provide crucial scientific information about fish stocks and bycatch to Ghana and to international organizations, such as the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

The U.S. Navy will provide training space on board the HSV Swift (high speed transportation vessel). The vessel will be used as a teaching platform where the students will learn how to spend time as observers on fishing boats, identifying and counting species of fish, recording marine mammal sightings, and learning how to free sea turtles and sea birds that may get caught in fishing gear.

“We feel privileged we were invited to share our expertise with our colleagues from Ghana,” said Jim Balsiger, acting director of NOAA’s Fisheries Service. “More and more we find that our marine ecosystems are linked together, so the better quality data we can collect and share, the better we can manage our fisheries together.”

This training mission is part of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act commitment to enhance international cooperation in fishery management by improving the monitoring and compliance with international fishing regulations.

Marine observers work on fishing vessels throughout the world collecting information on the amount of fish being caught and about interactions with marine mammals, sea turtles and sea birds. More than 50 different observer programs operate in the world’s oceans. Scientists use the information collected by observers for fishery management programs.

“We hope to expand training programs into other nations in West Africa later this year,” Balsiger said. “We are hoping to use this program as a model around the world.”

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:
NOAA: www.noaa.gov
NOAA’s Fisheries Service: www.nmfs.noaa.gov

PHOTOS AVAILABLE

###