



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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CONFERENCE SEEKS TO STRENGTHEN INTERNATIONAL FISHERY OBSERVER PROGRAMS

The largest international conference for fishery observer programs will begin May 15 in Victoria, British Columbia, to strengthen observer programs, which act to curb illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Observers on fishing vessels track the catch to manage quotas and report any harm to marine mammals and other marine species.

More than 250 fishery observers, fishery scientists, fishermen, nongovernmental organizations' representatives and observer program managers will gather. An estimated 40 countries are expected to send representatives to the Fifth International Fisheries Observer Conference – a larger attendance than all four previous conferences.

“We need strong observer programs to address the significant problem of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing,” said Dr. Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries Service. “It is widely recognized that illegal fishing undermines efforts to conserve and manage fish stocks. Rogue fishing hurts nations’ economies and can lead to the collapse of a stock.”

A major theme of this year’s conference is strengthening the partnerships between the stakeholders. The panel discussions led by fishermen and by nongovernmental organizations are designed to improve communication. Three new working groups have also been established to examine best approaches for training, promoting safety at sea, and improving the profession of being an observer.

The international conference at the Victoria Conference Center will help the observer programs in the United States by fulfilling the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act provision to curb illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing through greater international cooperation.

Observer programs, which have been operated in the United States since the early 1970s, are crucial to collecting biological information on any species captured accidentally by fishermen, including marine mammals, seabirds and sea turtles. Data collected by observers are also used to monitor compliance with fishery regulations, and build confidence among the public that fisheries are being well managed.

“By putting scientists and fisheries observers onboard vessels, directly working alongside fishermen, observer programs provide a great way to build bridges between fishermen, managers and scientists,” said Steve Kennelly, the scientist for Australia’s New South Wales Department of Primary Industries.

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The conference's main sponsors are the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Australia's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries. Other sponsors include the International Pacific Halibut Commission, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, the Province of British Columbia, fishery observer companies, and nongovernmental organizations.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA 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 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries Service, please visit: www.nmfs.noaa.gov.

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