

Northeast Fisheries At-Sea Monitoring Program

The NOAA Fisheries Service, Northeast Fisheries Science Center manages the Northeast Fisheries At-Sea Monitoring Program by overseeing the contract to At-Sea Monitoring Service Provider Companies, providing training and certification, performing data quality assessments, and processing pre-trip notifications and vessel selections.

Roles and Responsibilities

At-sea monitors collect scientific, management, compliance, and other fisheries data onboard commercial fishing vessels through interviews of vessel captains and crew, observations of fishing operations, photographing catch, and measurements of selected portions of the catch and fishing gear. At-sea monitoring requirements are detailed under Amendment 16 to the NE Multispecies Fishery Management Plan with a planned implementation date of May 1st, 2010. At-sea monitoring coverage is an integral part of catch monitoring to ensure that Annual Catch Limits are not exceeded. At-sea monitors collect accurate information on catch composition and the data are used to estimate total discards by sectors (and common pool), gear type, and stock area. Coverage levels are expected around 30%.

Duties of an At-Sea Monitor

At-sea monitors are deployed on vessels participating in the groundfish fishery in the Northeast (generally Maine through New York) for the duration of a trip (approximately one to fourteen days in length). Trip and fisheries data are collected electronically on a hand held computer. A rigorous sampling protocol is followed to collect weights of fish catch (kept and discarded) and to measure the lengths of certain fish. Interactions with protected species (marine mammals, sea turtles, and birds) and documented and detailed. Information on trip costs, gear type, and tow locations are also collected.

Minimum Qualifications

Education – Unless waived, at-sea monitors must have: 1) a bachelor's degree from an

accredited college or university with a major in the biological sciences, 2) at least one class in math or statistics, and 3) experience with computers.

Physical – At-sea monitors must be able to work for extended periods of time at sea, sharing common facilities in close quarters. They must be able to lift and/or drag heavy objects, climb ladders, tolerate stress, work long hours, and live in confined and remote spaces.

Citizenship – At-sea monitors must be a U.S. citizen, or a non-citizen who has a green card, TN authorization, H1 visa, or valid work visa, and a social security card.

Requirements – At-sea monitors must hold a current certification for CPR and First Aid. They must successfully pass an At-Sea Monitoring certification course administered by NMFS.

Conflict of Interest – At-sea monitors must not have any direct or indirect interest in a fishery managed under Federal regulations, including, but not limited to, vessels, dealers, shipping companies, sectors, sector managers, or advocacy groups.

Training

NOAA Fisheries offers a 10-day training course to certify At-Sea Monitors. Candidates must first be committed to an approved At-Sea Monitoring Service Provider Company and meet the qualifications listed above. The course covers vessel safety and survival, species identification of marine animals in the Northwest Atlantic Ocean, sub-sampling and catch estimation, conflict resolution, and computer reporting requirements. A full security background check is performed.

List of Contacts

For more information regarding At-Sea Monitoring, please contact Amy Van Atten at 508-495-2266, or visit the Northeast Regional Office website at: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/sfd/sfdmultisector.html>