

## What are “fisheries observers”?

Fisheries observers are trained biologists who monitor and record catch and bycatch data from U.S. commercial fishing vessels, processing facilities, and experimental fisheries.

### Why are fisheries observers needed?

Observers are the only independent data collection source for some types of at-sea information, such as bycatch, catch composition, and gear configuration.



### What types of data do observers collect?

- ✦ Fishing effort, location, and gear type;
- ✦ Composition, size, sex, and weight for catch and bycatch;
- ✦ Interactions with marine mammals and other protected species;
- ✦ Biological samples (tissue, aging structures, stomach contents).



### What is the data collected by observers used for?

- ✦ Stock assessments for fish, marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds;
- ✦ Evaluating fisheries impacts on protected species;
- ✦ Providing data used to measure compliance with fisheries regulations;
- ✦ Monitoring experimental fisheries and gear types;
- ✦ Testing bycatch reduction devices.



## Where do U.S. observers work?

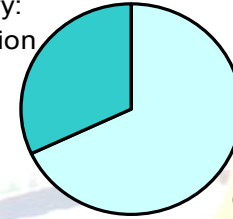
Fishery observers work in U.S. domestic waters up to 200 miles from shore, and on U.S. vessels fishing the high seas. Observers monitor all types and sizes of vessels. The duration of an observer's deployment varies from one day to a month or more, depending on the fishery.

U.S. Observer Programs		
Observer Program	Gear Type	Vessel Size
<b>Alaska Marine Mammal Observer Program</b>	Set & drift gillnet	14-30 ft (4.3-15.2 m)
<b>At-Sea Hake Observer Program</b>	trawl	250-400 ft (76.2-121.9 m)
<b>Northeast Fisheries Observer Program</b>	trawl, gillnet, purse seine, bottom longline, dredge, pot & trap, pound net	20-180 ft (6.1 -54.9 m)
<b>North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program</b>	trawl, longline, pot shore-based processing plants	60-700 ft (18.3-213 m)
<b>Pacific Islands Regional Observer Program</b>	deep-set longline, shallow-set longline, handline, trolling	50-110 ft (15-33.5 m)
<b>Southeast Shark Bottom Longline Observer Program</b>	bottom longline	50 ft (15 m)
<b>Southeast Pelagic Longline Observer Program</b>	pelagic longline	40-100 ft (12-30.5 m)
<b>Southeast Reef fish Observer Program</b>	bottom longline, vertical reel, handline	23-70 ft (7-21.3 m)
<b>Southeast Shark Driftnet Observer Program</b>	driftnet & strike gillnet	25-60 ft (7.6-18.3 m)
<b>Southeast Shrimp Trawl Observer Program</b>	shrimp trawl	36-98 ft (11-28.9m)
<b>Southwest Observer Program</b>	drift gillnet, purse seine, hook & line	30-70 ft (9.1-21.3 m)
<b>West Coast Groundfish Observer Program</b>	trawlers, longliners, pot & trap, shrimp trawl, Scottish seine, line gear (stick , gable), hook & line	10-100 ft (3-30.5 m)



## U.S. Program Funding - 2006

Industry:  
14.5 million



U.S.  
Government:  
30.8 million



## U.S. Program Operations Hiring Observers

The NOAA Fisheries Service contracts with or permits private observer provider companies to recruit and hire observers. Contractors also provide support services, such as insurance, meal allowance, and travel expenses to observers.

### Observer Qualifications

All U.S. observers must be employed by a permitted or contracted observer provider and must meet the following national qualifications:

- ✦ A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with a major in one of the natural sciences.
- ✦ At least one undergraduate course in math or statistics.
- ✦ Required training and pass written and/or oral tests.
- ✦ In good health.
- ✦ No conflict of interest that would interfere with the collection of unbiased data.

*Other regional and national standards may apply.*



## Training Programs

U.S. observer programs train observers. Courses typically last 1-3 weeks and cover the following core training elements:

- Fishery overview,
- What to expect as an observer,
- Species identification,
- Fishery regulations,
- Data collection, and
- Data and reporting forms.



The NOAA Fisheries Service has provided observer training to a number of countries, including Ghana and several South Pacific Islands.

## Observer Health & Safety

The NOAA Fisheries Service takes the safety of observers very seriously. Rigorous safety training is provided to all observers, and national observer health and safety regulations have been developed to protect observers while at sea.

*Regulations specify that:*

- Harassment of observers is illegal and offenses are prosecuted.
- Observers are required to conduct a pre-cruise safety inspection.
- Observers are not required to board unsafe vessels.



## Data Management

All observers are debriefed following a trip, usually in person. Data are quality checked and entered into databases by the regional programs, and are then made available to fisheries managers for use in conservation and management.



For more information on U.S. observer programs, Please contact:

### NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE National Observer Program

Office of Science and Technology  
1315 East-West Highway, 12th Floor  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Phone: (301) 713-2328  
Fax: (301) 713-1875

<http://www.st.nmfs.gov/st4/nop/index.html>



For more information on International observer training opportunities, Please contact:

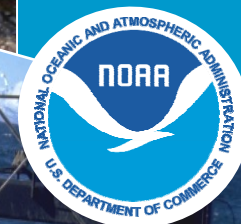
### NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE Office of International Affairs

1315 East-West Highway, Room 12659  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910  
Phone: (301) 713-9090 or 2276  
Fax: (301) 713-9106 or 2313  
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ia/index.htm>



# NOAA

U.S. Fisheries  
Observer  
Programs



U.S. Department of Commerce  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
National Marine Fisheries Service

*Science, Service, Stewardship*