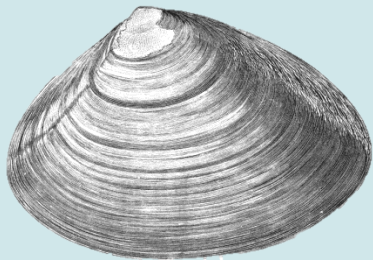


**NOAA  
FISHERIES**



*Spisula solidisma*  
NOAA, NEFSC

For more information or questions regarding observer coverage of clam dredge vessels, contact:

Chad Keith:

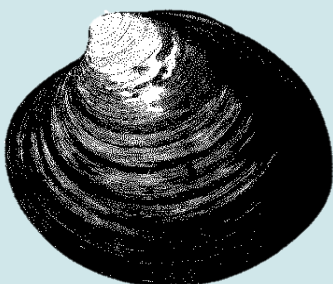
(508) 495-2067

[charles.keith@noaa.gov](mailto:charles.keith@noaa.gov)

or

Sara Weeks: (508) 495-2227

[sara.weeks@noaa.gov](mailto:sara.weeks@noaa.gov)



*Arctica islandica*  
NOAA, NEFSC

## Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) Clam Dredge Fisheries (Atlantic Surf Clam & Ocean Quahog)

### Observer Program Background

- Operating since 1989 with the mission to collect, process, and manage fisheries dependent data collected on commercial fishing vessels for scientific and fisheries management purposes
- NEFOP maintains a corps of certified observers and at-sea monitors federally contracted through private observer providers companies
- Seadays are observed in the trawl, gillnet, longline, dredge, pair trawl, and pot/trap fisheries

### Observer Coverage

- Observer coverage levels for most fisheries are determined by a process known as the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM)
- A total of 140 sea days were tasked for the Atlantic surf clam and ocean quahog fisheries during SBRM year 2015-2016, 65 Northeast days and 75 Mid-Atlantic days
- 2015 sampling will begin in late summer and concludes in March 2016; only experienced and proficient observers are selected for advanced NEFOP training such as clam dredge
- Future coverage of the clam dredge fisheries will depend on data needs and funding available to meet those needs
- **Vessels are not responsible for covering the cost of observers in the Atlantic surf clam / ocean quahog dredge fisheries**

### Clam Dredge Sampling

- Primary goal is to collect Atlantic surf clam and ocean quahog catch data (kept & discarded). Equal priority placed on sampling bycatch
- Observers record dredge gear characteristics (i.e. cage length, width & height, etc), haul level data (i.e. location, depth, time) and trip level information (i.e. trip costs, home port)
- Observers will be collecting biological samples including shell width data and length & age structures from finfish
- Interactions with protected species are documented by observers

### Uses of Observer Data from Clam Dredge Fisheries

- Data collected by observers will be incorporated in stock assessment models, particularly shell width frequency data
- Data will be used to track potential changes in commercial selectivity of the dredge gear and will record recruitment events in the fishery
- Data will be used to inform fishery managers about clam dredge bycatch

As a fishery participant, your cooperation is important to help NMFS collect the most complete, unbiased, and relevant data possible. Good data prevent over-regulation and ensure the sustainability of our fisheries and the conservation of protected species populations.



To provide fishermen comments and feedback to the NEFOP program or to request the data collected by the NEFOP program on your vessel please fill out the forms provided by your observer or visit the following website,  
<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/forms/>

## How will I be notified to carry an observer?

Fishermen and fishing industry representatives will be notified in advance, whenever possible, that observer coverage will be required. Alternatively, dock intercepts may also be used. Fishermen may be notified that they have been selected for observer coverage either by selection letter, phone, or in person by NMFS personnel, NEFOP observers, or MRAG Americas, the NEFOP observer provider (<https://www.mragamericas.com/>).

## What are my responsibilities when carrying an observer?

- Allowing the observer to access all areas of the vessel as necessary to conduct sampling and collect required data
- Allowing the observer access to communications equipment and view of navigation equipment
- Allowing the observer to sample, retain & store marine mammal, other protected species and/ or target and non-target species specimens
- Notifying the observer when all commercial fishing operations begin & end
- Providing accommodations & food to the observer equivalent to those provided to the crew
- Allowing for the safe embarking & disembarking of the observer

## What are the vessel safety requirements I must meet to carry an observer?

Observers are required to review emergency instructions with the vessel operator and complete a pre-trip safety check of the vessel's emergency equipment prior to departing on a trip (observers arrive early to conduct the pre-trip safety checklist). Observers will be verifying that the equipment, registrations and certificates meet the requirements listed above.

- All vessels **MUST** have a current US Coast Guard safety decal, an observer may not depart on a trip selected for coverage until the decal is up to date
- Personal flotation devices/immersion suits for all crew onboard (observers provide their own suit & PFD)
- Ring buoys or other approved flotation
- Distress signals / flares
- Fire extinguishing equipment
- EPIRB registered to vessel with current NOAA SARSAT registration, battery and hydrostatic release
- Survival craft with sufficient capacity to accommodate the total number of crew onboard including the observer

## NEFOP is currently authorized to cover the Atlantic Surf Clam and Ocean Quahog vessels with other federal permits listed under:

**CFR 648.11(a)** (including Atlantic sea scallops, NE multispecies, monkfish, skates, Atlantic mackerel, squid, butterfish, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, spiny dogfish, Atlantic herring, tilefish, Atlantic deep-sea red crab or a moratorium permit for summer flounder)

For more information or questions regarding observer coverage requirements, visit [www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/](http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/) or contact: Amy Martins, phone: (508) 495-2266 or e-mail: [Amv.Martins@noaa.gov](mailto:Amv.Martins@noaa.gov)