

# Northeast Fisheries Observer Program

## Notification Requirements and Vessel Selection Information

Many of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic fisheries require observer coverage. Several fisheries require a vessel representative to notify the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program prior to each trip. These fisheries include: **Northeast Multispecies Groundfish, Atlantic Sea Scallop, and the Atlantic Herring and Mackerel fisheries.**

For other fisheries subject to observer coverage, vessel representatives will be contacted by a NMFS employee, designated contractor, or observer acting on behalf of the Regional Administrator. Contact may be in person, by telephone, or in writing, notifying the vessel representative that the vessel has been selected to carry an observer. Once you have been notified of your selection you must contact the designated contractor as soon as possible and before deploying on your selected trip. In some situations vessels fishing in a fishery without a notification requirement may be selected dockside shortly before a fishing trip.

Observer coverage is accomplished through three categories of observers: Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP), At-Sea Monitoring (ASM), and Industry Funded Scallop (IFS). For consistency, any reference to “observer” in this document refers to any observer or monitor working for a NEFOP, ASM or IFS contracted provider.

### **Pre-Trip Notification System (PTNS) for Northeast Multispecies Groundfish**

Vessels must notify for groundfish trips a minimum of 48 hours in advance of trip sail time. A vessel may submit notifications at <https://fish.nefsc.noaa.gov/cgi-bin/PTNS/login.pl>. They may also email them to [nefsc.ptns@noaa.gov](mailto:nefsc.ptns@noaa.gov), or call them in to 1-855-347-4371. This PTNS phone line is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year with on-call NMFS staff available.

When a notification is entered into the system, the PTNS initiates an automated process that randomly selects a trip for possible observer coverage or issues it a waiver based on the coverage rate of trips in the same stratum. A stratum is a unique combination of sector, gear, and fishing area.

PTNS selects trips at an increased rate in a stratum when that stratum’s coverage is low and at a lower rate when that stratum’s coverage is high. Increased selection rates are most evident at the start of the fishing year or when a stratum with zero previous trips begins fishing. This high amount of selection is normal and works to accomplish observer coverage on enough trips to calculate an observed discard rate as quickly as possible.

If a trip is selected for possible coverage, the NEFOP provider or the sector's contracted ASM provider is notified. Based on observer availability, the provider either accepts the trip and assigns it an observer or indicates they are unable to provide groundfish observer coverage for that trip – in which case the vessel will then be issued a waiver.

A vessel will receive automated emails to their vessel monitoring system (VMS) and other email addresses registered in their PTNS account when a notification is entered. Emails are also sent between 24 and 48 hours prior to a vessel's scheduled sail time when the trip's final observer status is determined.

Please see the Pre-Trip Notification System Instructions for more information:

[http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/ptns/PTNS\\_Instructions.pdf](http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/ptns/PTNS_Instructions.pdf).

#### **Notification System for Atlantic Herring**

Atlantic herring vessel representatives notify NEFOP 48 or 72 hours in advance of a fishing trip, depending on their permit category. NEFOP will issue waivers or selection notices for observer coverage weekly via VMS. Selection of vessels is representative of effort, and designed to achieve sea days allocated by fleet per quarter under the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM). More information about SBRM is found at:

<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/SBRM/>.

#### **Notification System for Atlantic Mackerel**

Representatives for Atlantic mackerel vessels that are issued a limited access permit (Tier 1, 2, or 3) must call NEFOP at least 48 hours in advance of a fishing trip. NEFOP will issue waivers or selection notices for observer coverage weekly via the vessel's VMS. Selection of vessels is representative of effort, and designed to achieve sea days allocated by fleet per quarter under SBRM. More information about SBRM is found at: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/SBRM/>.

#### **Notification System for Atlantic Sea Scallop**

The IFS observer program utilizes an automated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system to record information on a vessel's intent to fish for scallops. The system is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Limited Access vessels are required to call the system on a per-trip basis, and Limited Access General Category vessels are required to call once per calendar week (Sunday through Saturday).. Each permit type is required to provide the IVR with 72 hour notice of their intent to fish. Random selection for coverage of scallop trips occurs based on fleet, gear type, and area fished; and takes into account the vessel's previous observer coverage. Selection or waiver emails are sent by NEFOP via the vessel's VMS within 24 hours of notice of their intent to fish. If selected, fishermen are then required to contact all three of the approved provider companies to arrange observer coverage for their selected trip. If no observers are available from any of the three companies the vessel representative may request a waiver from NEFOP.