

Industry Funded Scallop Program (IFS)

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Fisheries Sampling Branch manages the Industry Funded Scallop Program (IFS). They monitor the IFS observer provider companies, provide training and certification, and perform data quality assessments. IFS observers have played a vital role in the management of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic scallop fishery since the program was permanently re-activated in 2007.

The IFS observer program utilizes an automated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system to record information on a vessel's intent to fish for scallops. Fishermen are required to call in for a fishing trip 72 hours prior to a planned sail date. The system is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Roles and Responsibilities

IFS observers monitor sea scallop dredge and trawl gear catches aboard Limited Access and Limited Access General Category vessels as specified by Amendment 13 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan. Amendment 13 was determined necessary for the conservation and management of the Atlantic sea scallop fishery. It is also consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and applicable laws including the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Data collected by observers are used to identify key characteristics of the commercial scallop fishery in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions. Catch data and biological information informs stock assessments. Protected species samples provide life history information and data for bycatch estimation.

Duties of an IFS Observer

Fishing trips typically range from one to fourteen days. IFS sampling protocols require observers to collect weights for kept and discarded species caught, measure lengths, and take biological samples of priority species. Interactions with marine mammals, sea turtles, and birds are documented and detailed. Information on vessel operating costs, detailed gear configuration, photographs of dredge frame and chain mat used, and fishing locations are also collected.

Minimum Qualifications

Education – 1) bachelor's degree in biological sciences, 2) at least one class in math or statistics, 3) 6 semester hours of marine science/fisheries, 4) experience with computers.

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

Citizenship – 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 – must hold a current certification for CPR and First Aid. They must successfully pass an IFS observer certification course administered by the FSB.

Conflict of Interest – 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.

How will I be notified to carry an observer?

Fishermen and fishing industry representatives will be notified that they have been selected for observer coverage by an e-mail via the vessel selection monitoring system (VMS).

What are my responsibilities when carrying an observer?

- Provide the observer with living quarters, meals, and amenities comparable to a crew member
- Allow the observer access to areas of the vessel and gear necessary to conduct sampling and collect required data
- Allow the observer access to communication equipment and view of navigation equipment as necessary to perform their duties
- Allow the observer to sample, retain, and store marine mammal specimens, and other protected species and/or target and non-target species specimens
- Provide true vessel locations by latitude and longitude upon request by the observer
- Provide the observer with VTR serial numbers and VMS fishing activity codes if requested
- Notify the observer when commercial fishing operations are to begin and end
- Allow for the safe embarking and 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 verify that the equipment, registrations, and certificates meet the requirements.

- All vessels MUST have a current U.S. Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination decal. An observer may not depart on a trip selected for coverage until the decal is up to date.
- Personal flotation devices (PFD)/immersion suits for all crew on board. Observers provide their own suit and 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 on board including the observer