



photo by Patrick Lea

Healthy Stocks Mean Healthy Fisheries

To help ensure productive harvests now and in the future, scientists study the life history, population size and ecology of fish inhabiting US waters. Fisheries observers aboard commercial fishing vessels and at shore-side processing plants collect information that assist in these studies.

The Observer Program collects and provides fishery data to support management of the marine resources of Alaska. These data are critical for long term stock assessment.

Fishermen contribute valuable experience and insight to fisheries management. A cooperative effort between scientists, the fishing industry, and fisheries managers is needed to provide complete, sound, and unbiased data about our fisheries resources.

cover photos by Sam Zmolek and Charla Archie



photo by Eulaila Ishee

For more information on the North Pacific Groundfish and Halibut Observer Program, please contact:

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The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) is an agency within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The mission of the NOAA Fisheries Service is to provide stewardship of the nation's living marine resources through science-based conservation and management and promotion of healthy ecosystems.



NORTH PACIFIC GROUND FISH AND HALIBUT OBSERVER PROGRAM



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FISHERIES



photo by Samantha Clifton

Observers and Fishermen Working Together

The North Pacific Groundfish Observer and Halibut Program (Observer Program) is the foundation of the Fisheries Monitoring and Analysis Division of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center. From foreign fishing vessels to domestic fishers and processors, observers have worked year round to ensure healthy fish stocks since 1973.

Fishermen Can Benefit From Observer Programs

Accurate data on fisheries and protected species populations are in the best interests of both fisheries managers and fishermen.

Without the information collected by observers, the size of fish populations may be under or over estimated, leading to premature fishery closures or overfishing, potentially harming fishing communities.

With cooperation from industry, good data collection programs can lead to healthier fish populations and sustainable fisheries. Good data can also lead to fewer restrictions and stronger fishing communities.



photo by Renee Wolfe

What Does an Observer Do While Onboard a Vessel?

Fisheries observers are trained biological samplers, not enforcement agents. However, they do report what they see on board and monitor compliance with federal fisheries regulations.

While the types of information an observer collects can vary depending on the fishery being observed, the general list of data observers often collect includes:

- Fishing effort, location, and gear type.
- Composition, size, sex, and weight for catch and bycatch.
- Biological samples (tissue, age structures, stomach contents).
- Incidental takes of crab, Pacific salmon, halibut, herring, marine mammals, and short-tailed albatross.
- Fishery interactions with marine mammals and seabirds.

This information is valuable to understanding fisheries bycatch, and cannot be obtained through any other means.

What are the Responsibilities of a Fishing Vessel Owner/Operator?

When a vessel carries an observer, the vessel owner, captain and crew share some responsibilities:

- Prevent interference with the observer's data collection and harassment of the observer
- Assist the observer in conducting a vessel safety inspection prior to sailing.
- Provide access to all parts of the vessel, provide a safe working area for the observer, and provide space for the observer's equipment.
- Share requested data such as vessel locations and logbooks.
- Notify the observer when fishing gear is being retrieved.
- Provide food and a bunk for the observer.
- Comply with coverage requirements and pay observer costs.

Observers are trained to not obstruct fishing operations. Meeting these responsibilities will ensure everyone's safety and will allow the observer to collect the most accurate data possible.



photo by Jason Wright