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# **FISHERIES SAMPLING BRANCH WEBINAR: PREPARATION FOR OBSERVER/MONITOR REDEPLOYMENT**

August 12, 2020  
2:30-4 PM

# Overview

*Overview of Agenda and Meeting Purpose: to share the observer redeployment plan developments & status*

- Jon Hare, Science and Research Director, NEFSC
- Amy Martins, Deputy Division Chief, Fisheries Monitoring and Research Division (FMRD)
- KB McArdle, Branch Chief, Fisheries Sampling Branch
- Ken Keene, Mid-Atlantic Area Lead
- Sara Weeks, Northeast Area Lead
- Bridget Harner, Assistant Mid-Atlantic Area Lead
- Glenn Chamberlain, Assistant Northeast Area Lead
- Tom Gaffney, Special Agent, OLE

*Some meeting rules and reminders are;*

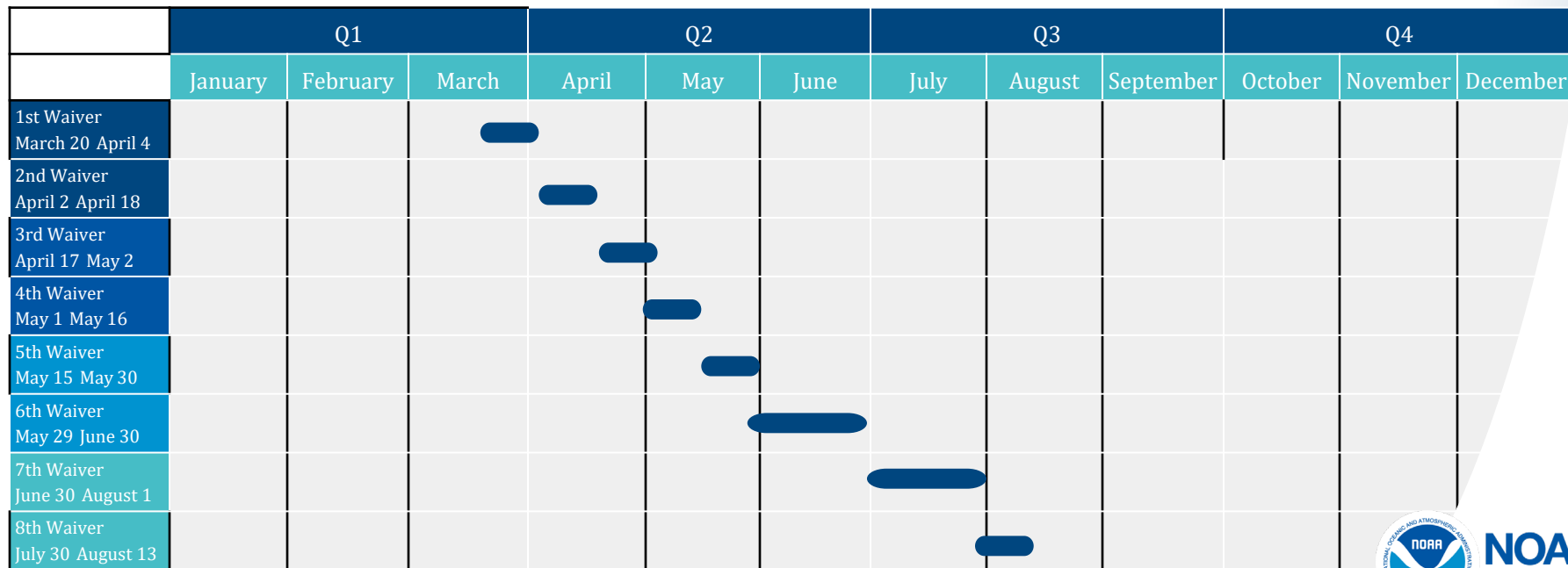
- Please mute your phones while the speakers are presenting
- Honest and constructive discussions are necessary to get the best results





# NMFS Response to the National Health Crisis

- NOAA Fisheries extended the waiver granted to vessels with Greater Atlantic Region fishing permits to carry human observers or at-sea monitors through August 13, 2020.
- Intended date of redeployment August 14, 2020.
- Waivers are reviewed by Chris Oliver, the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries



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# Provider and Agency Responsibilities Related to Plans

Providers have developed redeployment plans that include company-specific safety protocols, personal protective equipment, COVID-19 testing capabilities, and temperature monitoring procedures.

To the extent possible, they established protocols to minimize the mixing of vessel, port, and interstate travel. We have developed a reconstitution plan that includes protocols and operating procedures.

Provider redeployment plan links:

AIS: <https://aisobservers.com/nefsc-observer-deployment-operations-plan/>

EWTS: <http://ewts.com/COVID.19.pdf>

Fathom: [http://fathomresources.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Fathom-Resources\\_COVID\\_19\\_Deployment-Plan.-7-15-20.pdf](http://fathomresources.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Fathom-Resources_COVID_19_Deployment-Plan.-7-15-20.pdf)



	<b>Service Provider Plan</b>	<b>Agency Plan</b>
1	Prevent exposure to virus	Develop training of standard best practices and informational resources
2	Monitor for and contain the virus	Obtain Paperwork Reduction Act clearance for vessel health screening questions prior to boarding
3	Testing for COVID-19	Promote cross-collaboration across all providers and fishing sectors
4	Temperature checks	Prioritize coverage types across fisheries/programs
5	Health screening	Assign observer to the same vessel(s) as much as possible (ex. modifications to the PTNS to include the vessel name)
6	Travel practices	Minimize non-essential travel
7	Communication plan	Develop virtual or remote communication/training to the extent possible
8	Action plan if symptomatic observers or vessel crew	Set standards for timely reporting of incidents and illnesses
9	Deployment kit	Promote mindfulness in setting up trips; share appropriate information and respect privacy
10	Adequate health insurance, unemployment insurance	Evaluate sampling protocols to minimize unnecessary contact and exchange of materials





# Reconstitution Plan

Developed by the science center, regional office, OLE, and NOAA general counsel

Includes:

- References
- Training
- Trip preparation
- Electronic Monitoring (EM) program
- Outreach material
- Prioritization of fisheries and program types



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# Importance of Observer and Monitor Data

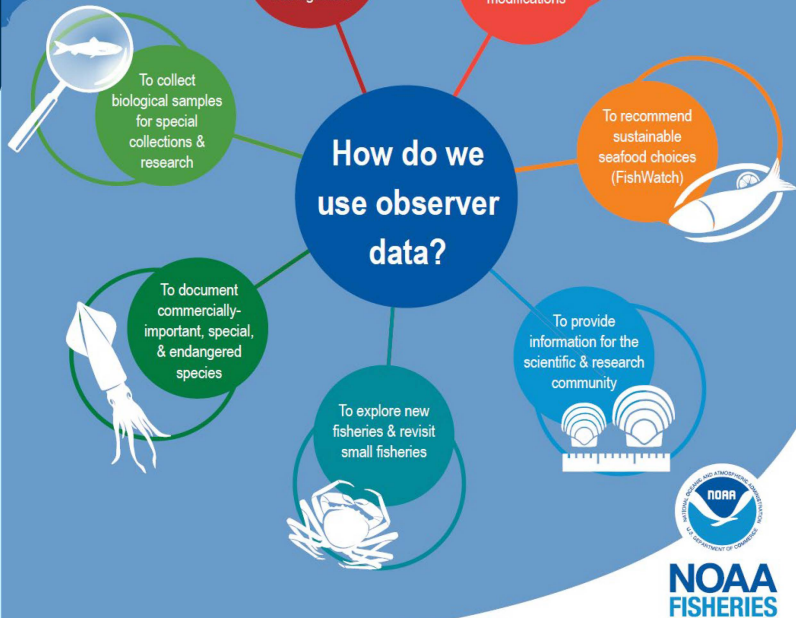
Dr. Jon Hare

Science Center Director of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center





The Northeast Fisheries Science Center manages multiple observer programs covering federal and state waters from Maine to North Carolina. Our team processes and manages data and biological samples collected by observers during commercial fishing trips.



## How do we use observer data?

Observer data provide unique and independent information, collected at sea, critical to the effective management of our marine resources. These data support sustainable fisheries and protected species recovery.



### Inform Stock Assessments & Fishery Management

Observer data directly inform stock assessments to monitor the health of fisheries. Fisheries managers utilize observer data to set catch levels, maintain healthy fish populations, and rebuild overfished stocks.



### Explore New or Smaller Fisheries

The fishing industry constantly evolves as new technology is developed and new markets open. Observers are there to collect baseline data for managers to determine if the resource could be—or still is—fished sustainably.



### Reduce Bycatch

Commercial fishery catch includes two components: kept catch and discarded catch. Kept catch is landed and sold, while discarded catch is thrown back into the ocean. Because some of the discards do not survive, NOAA Fisheries is working with fishermen and others to modify commercial fishing gear to reduce unwanted bycatch. When a gear modification is made, data collection is essential to make sure the modified gear is working as intended.



### Document Species

In 2018, our fisheries observers spent about 10,782 days (~172,200 hours) at sea, where they encountered many types of fish, mammals, seabirds, and invertebrates. The Species Verification Program (SVP) validates the accuracy of identification by requiring observers to photograph or submit a wide variety of commercially-important species, endangered species, or species of particular concern. SVP data provides feedback to observers and are used to improve observer training methods, support improved data accuracy, and evaluate species-specific data reliability. SVP records provide high-confidence data on species distributions used to identify important and shifting species-specific habitats and ranges.



### Recommend Sustainable Seafood

FishWatch is a NOAA Fisheries tool that provides up-to-date information and facts about U.S. seafood, so consumers and businesses can make informed decisions and be pointed toward sustainable choices. Observer data help assess the state of the fishery, determine impacts to habitats, and evaluate bycatch for FishWatch.



### Enhance Special Collections

Due to their specialized training and equipment, observers offer a unique opportunity to support new research or fill data gaps by collecting biological samples. Observers help promote long-term sustainability of fishing ecosystems by working collaboratively with fishermen, scientists, and resource managers.



### Support Science & Research

Every year, we receive requests for non-confidential fisheries data for use in research from government agencies, the commercial fishing industry, and academic institutions across the country. From 2015–2019, the program processed over 300 of these data requests.



# Fishery Observers/At-sea Monitors

Observers and monitors are an essential component of commercial fishing operations and provide critical information that is necessary to keep fisheries open and to provide sustainable seafood to our nation during this time. We recognize the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve and as such, it has required us to adapt to changing circumstances.

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/noaa-fisheries-coronavirus-covid-19-update>



# Industry Outreach

1. Fisheries Sampling Branch (FSB) Plan: Summary version of the Reconstituting Observer and Monitoring Programs (ROMP) document available upon request.
2. COVID-19 Observer Provider Duty Sheet Supplement: Steps observer provider companies and observers are taking to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. Electronic copies will be provided to observers and port agents.
3. VMS Announcement: A message was sent the week of 8/3 as a reminder that the observer blanket waiver will end on August 13 and trip selection for observer/monitor deployments will begin on August 14 through the PTNS, IVR, or dock intercept.
4. Permit Holder Letter: Intention is to remind the industry of the expected redeployment of observers. It touches upon observer redeployment plans, observer safety, contact information and next steps. A copy of the letter was mailed to all federal permit holders on 8/11/20.
5. Waiver Process Document: Outlines the criteria used to issue waivers for observer coverage.

Copies of the FSB plan, permit holder letter, and waiver process document can be found here:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/event/webinar-observer-redeployment-northeast-fishermen>



# Safety and Health

- We will continue to fulfill our mission, maintaining our nation's seafood supply and protecting marine life, **while ensuring the health and safety of our employees, partners, and broader fishing community during this crisis.**
- **Observer providers** have developed redeployment plans to mitigate risk for their employees and the industry.
- Please request a copy of the provider's re-deployment plans to ensure your safety protocols are met.



[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)



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# Risk mitigation and management

- During a pandemic there is a personal and social responsibility to keep the virus from spreading.
- Practice CDC recommendations as often as practical.
- Precautions include: physical distancing, proper hygiene, personal protective equipment (PPE).
- STAY HOME if you do not feel well or present symptoms.
- Highly vulnerable individuals should take more advanced precautions.



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# COVID Protocols

NOAA Fisheries has worked with service providers as they have developed safety protocols for their employees, the observers. Shared protocols across observer providers include:

- COVID awareness and risk mitigation training for observers
- Deploying observers onto the same vessel as much as possible
- Minimizing observer travel between ports and states
- Conducting pre-trip health screenings
- Providing Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and training on how to use the PPE
- Monitoring temperatures daily, prior to and during deployments
- Training on protocols for detecting and acting on any symptoms when they are at sea
- Following CDC guidelines for hygiene and avoiding close contact
- Testing prior to the initial deployment and frequency thereafter varies
- Conducting post-trip health screenings
- Going through a health questionnaire to assess the risk level of vessels prior to assigning an observer

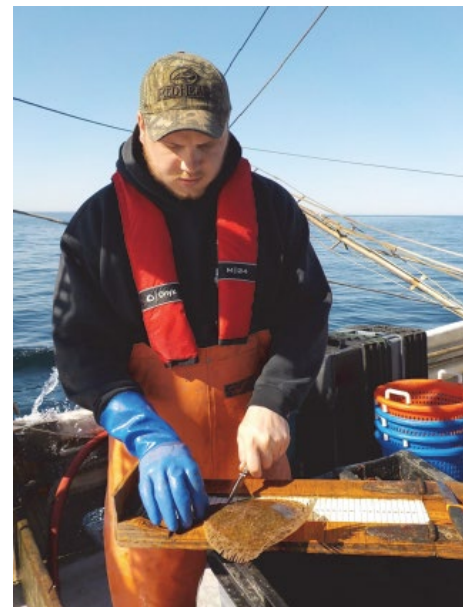


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# Observer Redeployments

Sections 12 & 13 of the Reconstituting FSB's Observer And Monitoring Programs In A Covid-19 World (ROMP)



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# Observer Self Assessment for Redeployment

Observers have been sent a series of self assessments and references to help them and FSB staff gauge observer readiness for redeployment.

The self assessment required each observer to:

- Check their gear status.
- Test and review species identification skills.
- Review data collection techniques.
- Confirm they feel prepared to perform all duties.



FSB staff used the observer's responses to tailor a redeployment pre-brief for each of the observers and their needs.



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# Establishing Safe Quarters Onboard and Maintaining Mindfulness

Starts when arriving at a vessel and lasts throughout the trip

- Getting gear on to the vessel should be done independently if possible
- Performing the PTVSC will take communication and planning
- Conducting outreach with redeployment plan summaries
- General cabin etiquette and mindfulness
- Keeping personal items contained
- Bathroom usage following CDC guidelines
- While in the galley staggering meals and maintaining separate dishware
- Bunkroom use of berthing barriers and alternating nap times





# New Considerations While Working At Sea

Observers may have to change up how sampling is performed or collection methods for haul level data

- Wheelhouse data collection
- What will physical distancing look like on deck?
- Phased approach to gear usage and sampling protocols

Item Description ( <i>Biosampling Section</i> )	NEFOP	ASM	IFS
<input type="checkbox"/> Sampling vials, clear cap = sturgeon	Phase 1	N/A	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> Scallop board & measuring cards	N/A	N/A	Phase 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Measuring cup, for meat volumes	N/A	N/A	Phase 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Plastic bags of various sizes	Phase 1	Phase 1	Phase 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Tyvek tags	Phase 1	Phase 1	Phase 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Permanent markers	Phase 1	Phase 1	Phase 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Fish board & measuring strips	Phase 1	Phase 1	Phase 2
<input type="checkbox"/> Age envelopes, lined	Phase 2	N/A	Phase 2
<input type="checkbox"/> Sampling Knife	Phase 2	N/A	Phase 2
<input type="checkbox"/> Sharpening stone	Phase 2	N/A	Phase 2
<input type="checkbox"/> Stainless steel forceps	Phase 2	N/A	Phase 2
<input type="checkbox"/> 3D Image camera	N/A	N/A	Phase 2
<input type="checkbox"/> Styrofoam cooler	Store in Car	Store in Car	Store in Car
<input type="checkbox"/> Cooler ice packs	Store at Home	Store at Home	Store at Home
<input type="checkbox"/> Digital Voice Recorder, headset, waterproof bag, & batteries (Pot/Trap)	As Needed	N/A	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> Crab calipers (Pot/Trap)	As Needed	N/A	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> Lobster calipers (Pot/Trap)	As Needed	N/A	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> Milk crate with tubes, for lobsters (Pot/Trap)	As Needed	N/A	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> Welk measuring board (Pot/Trap)	As Needed	N/A	N/A

Excerpt from the COVID-19 Modified Gear List  
in Section 12 & 13

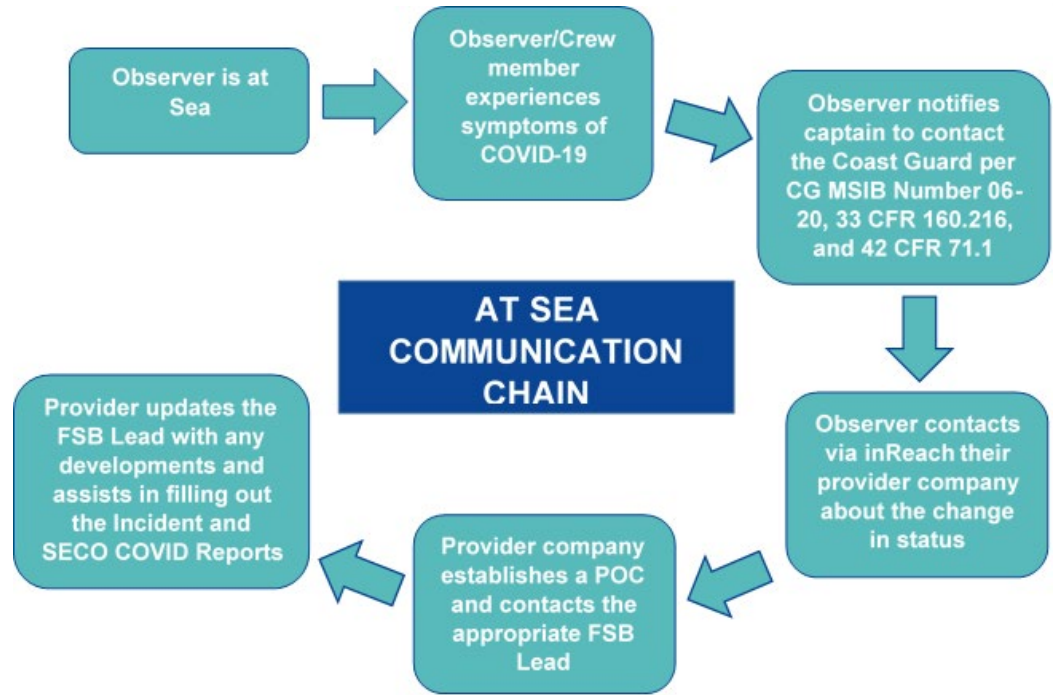


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# Approaches to Communicating While At Sea

- Communication is more important than ever
- There are two main avenues of communication for observers while deployed:
  - Captain and crew
  - Provider Check-Ins
- Illness At Sea Communication Chain
  - Will trigger provider COVID response plans



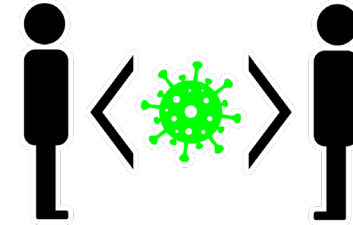
Illness at Sea Flow Chart from Section 13





# Best Practices in Between Deployments While on Land

- Getting prepared for trips is going to take more time
  - Disinfecting gear between every trip on a new vessel
  - Refilling PPE supplies by contacting their provider
  - Communicating with provider company about their health and wellness
- What observers are doing on land could potentially affect who they are with while at sea
  - If living with others, observers should be carefully following CDC guidelines
  - When leaving home to run essential errands, physical distancing, and mask wearing are required of observers by their provider company.
  - Observers will be checking infection rates in the area they live and deploy in



*Protecting yourself is the best way to protect those close to you as well as the members of the fishing industry that you work with*



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# Waivers

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center will issue a waiver on a trip by trip basis to vessels selected for observer or at-sea monitor coverage if one of the two criteria are met:

**Criteria 1:** Observers or at-sea monitors are not available for deployment

**Criteria 2:** The observer providers cannot meet the safety protocols imposed by a state on commercial fishing crew or by the vessel owners or operators on its crew.

Our efforts are intended to ensure observers and monitors are following safety protocols equivalent to or exceeding those fishermen are following.



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# Obtaining a waiver

Applying for case-by-case waivers :

- In situations not involving state imposed protocols, a vessel owner or operator may qualify for a waiver under the second criterion.
- Communicate directly with the assigned provider during the trip set up process and clearly explain what safety protocols you have in place.
- Talk about your vessels operating and safety plan to your provider. They will work to meet or exceed your safety guidelines.
- The providers are working hard to ensure they meet all of your safety protocols - communication is key!



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# How do we know the vessel conditions?

No new State or Federal Health Regulations regarding COVID-19 are specific to the commercial fishing industry in our region. There are new Pre-Screening questions:

1. In the past 2 weeks, have the captain and crew been following state mandates for travel, physical distancing, or any other restrictions and guidance on shore or at sea in response to the current health crisis?
2. Do any crew members currently have two or more symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell)?
3. In the past 2 weeks, have any of the crew tested positive for, or been exposed to, someone who has tested positive for COVID-19?
4. Does the vessel have procedures in place to reduce their exposures to COVID-19?
5. Is there a response plan in place should someone show symptoms of COVID-19 during a trip?
6. Is there a supply of personal protection and sanitizing equipment, such as face coverings, hand sanitizer, etc., onboard the vessel for the crew?







# NOAA Office of Law Enforcement Outreach

Special Agent Tom Gaffney



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# OLE Outreach

- Observers will provide the operator/owner/crewmember with information regarding policies and protocols in place to safely deploy an observer.
- If a vessel refuses to carry an observer when selected, the observer is required to notify the provider, FSB and OLE.
- The OLE agent or officer who receives the information will attempt to make immediate contact with the person(s) identified who is refusing to carry an observer.
- The OLE agent or officer will attempt to gain voluntary compliance, and will advise of a potential refusal complaint if the vessel departs without an observer.



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# Closing Statements

We will continue to monitor all local public health notifications as well as the CDC for updates. We are committed to protecting the public health and ensuring the safety of fishermen, observers, and others, while fulfilling our mission to maintain our nation's seafood supply and conserving marine life.

We are working closely with observer providers to work through problems and questions to provide the support, direction, and tools necessary. We are not working under the same conditions as we were before and we are sensitive to the fact that there may be a high level of stress and uncertainty and fear. We are proceeding with caution and don't want to create unreasonable expectations or create a system so rigid that it would do you harm. We are asking providers to work with observers within their personal comfort zone given these new challenges.

We intend to continue doing outreach and assessments.

Speakers and Organizers: Amy Martins, KB McArdle, Ken Keene, Bridget Harner, Sara Weeks, Glenn Chamberlain

Guest Speakers – Jon Hare, Tom Gaffney (OLE)

Providers:

- Fathom Resources – Ward McIntyre, Danielle Kane; Contact info: (508) 990-0997, dkane@fathomresources.com
- East West Technical Services – Karl Cygler, Jerry Cygler, Jack Cygler; Contact info: (860) 910-4957, Karl@ewts.com
- AIS – Rick Usher, Lauren Wahl, Ben Finkes and Charlie Pitts; Contact info: (508) 742-5510, laurenw@aisobservers.com



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# Questions?

This will be recorded. Some meeting rules and reminders are;

- Honest and constructive discussions are necessary to get the best results
- We will share meeting reports, outcomes, and follow-ups so all are kept in the loop
- Requests for access to meeting slides and recording can be sent to:  
[ne.observerprogram@noaa.gov](mailto:ne.observerprogram@noaa.gov)



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