



NOAA FISHERIES

National Observer Program

Supporting the NOAA Fisheries Mission

For more than five decades, NOAA Fisheries has used fishery observers and at-sea monitors* to collect data from U.S. commercial fishing and processing vessels, as well as from shoreside processing plants and “motherships” (also known as receiving vessels). Our eyes and ears on the water, observers and at-sea monitors are professionally trained biological technicians gathering firsthand data to support a wide range of science, conservation, and management activities.

There are few, if any, parts of the NOAA Fisheries mission in which observers do not play a vital role. In addition to collecting data that feeds directly into fisheries science, management, and stock assessment decisions, observers also support compliance with fishing regulations and monitor interactions with sea turtles, marine mammals, and other protected resources.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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*At-sea monitors collect data to estimate discards for vessels in the Northeast groundfish fishery.

A Collaborative Approach to Priority-Setting and Implementation

The National Observer Program Advisory Team

Regional-National Collaboration

Because of the broad and diverse role that observers and monitors play across NOAA Fisheries, the work of the National Observer Program is supported by the **National Observer Program Advisory Team**. NOPAT works with the NOP staff to:

- Identify issues of national concern relevant to commercial fisheries monitoring.
- Recommend or establish priorities for fisheries-dependent monitoring.
- Support information collection and program implementation.

The NOPAT, which meets twice annually, is composed of representatives from the following:

NOAA Fisheries Headquarters	Office of Science and Technology	Office of Sustainable Fisheries	Office of Protected Resources	Office of Law Enforcement		
Regional Offices	Alaska	Greater Atlantic	Pacific Islands	Southeast	West Coast	
Science Centers	Alaska	Northeast	Northwest	Pacific Islands	Southeast	Southwest
General Counsel for Fisheries	General Counsel for Enforcement and Litigation		Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Program		U.S. Coast Guard (liaison)	

Ensuring Safety and Professionalism

For observers to be effective, the working conditions must be safe and professional. Since the inception of the observer program in the 1970s, NOAA Fisheries has continually worked to develop and institute world-class training and safety protocols. As part of this process, the Safety Advisory Committee, or SAC, advises the NOPAT on matters of observer safety, health, and welfare. It works to promote a safer and healthier environment for observers to work in and is responsible for developing and recommending the requirements necessary to fulfill the NOPAT’s national safety standards, including:

- Spearheading and reviewing proposals on observer safety initiatives, along with monitoring and advising on any safety policies and programs that may affect NOAA Fisheries Observers
- Addressing specific safety issues through seminars, workshops, forums, and panel discussions
- Developing training classes and standards for observer programs’ safety trainers
- Creating and maintaining mechanisms to enforce safety-related policies for observer programs

The SAC consists of safety representatives from each regional observer program, the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, NOAA’s General Counsel, and the U.S. Coast Guard. The SAC meets at least twice per year.



BY THE NUMBERS**

Total number of observers:
779

Total annual days at sea:
60,350

Source: NOAA Fisheries, 2021

**Numbers were impacted by COVID-19 interruptions.

Photo: NOAA Fisheries’ Northeast Fisheries Observer Program

