

<b><i>NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE POLICY 04-109</i></b> Effective on: August 6, 2007	
To be reviewed on: May 1, 2025	
Science and Technology	
National Minimum Eligibility Standards for Marine Fisheries Observers	
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## I. Introduction

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) regional observer programs have been established independently since 1973 to respond to regional fishery management and conservation requirements. NOAA Fisheries currently deploys fishery observers on commercial fishing and processing vessels in 42 fisheries throughout the US. The role of fishery observers is to record and supply catch and bycatch data on commercial fishing activity. Observers also monitor compliance with Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act regulations, Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act requirements, and catch quotas. Currently, NOAA Fisheries coordinates observer program management through its Office of Science and Technology/National Observer Program (NOP). The NOP seeks to support observer programs and increase their usefulness to the overall goals of resource conservation and management. Improvements in data collection, observer recruitment and training, and the quality of observer data are among the important issues that the NOP addresses on a national level. National minimum eligibility standards for new observers are being adopted to aid in the selection of academically and physically qualified candidates who can perform their duties professionally and objectively, and to set a foundation for developing standards for quality observers for all NOAA Fisheries regional observer programs.

## II. Objective

Each regional program has set standards for observer eligibility that may be similar to, but not exactly the same as, other regions' eligibility standards. After the NOAA Fisheries National Observer Program Advisory Team (NOPAT) reviewed the eligibility standards in place in each NOAA Fisheries regional observer program, NOAA Fisheries has identified common areas that will benefit from being standardized nationally. The establishment of national minimum eligibility standards

will enable observers that meet these basic qualifications to be recognized as minimally qualified for all NOAA Fisheries observer programs. The publication of national minimum eligibility standards will alert all potential applicants and program planners of the basic qualifications for all NOAA Fisheries observer program recruitment actions. These minimum standards will be used to help determine observer programs effectiveness to train observers to collect quality data.

### III. Authorities and Responsibilities

This policy directive establishes the following authorities and responsibilities:

#### **The National Observer Program**

The National Observer Program will coordinate with all regional observer programs to ensure the minimum eligibility standards are met.

#### **Regional Observer Programs**

Regional observer programs will monitor and ensure, through clearly developed and defined regulations and/or performance measures, that all observer providers recruit and hire qualified and experienced individuals to work as observers.

### IV. Measuring Effectiveness

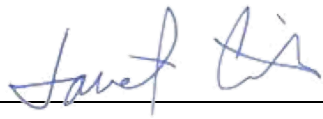
Each program has different training requirements, data collection requirements, deployment and data collection needs, and trip and sea day definitions. In some programs, a trip is defined in terms of gear retrieval; in others, it is based on sea days. It is essential that each program have the ability to assess observer performance independently of other programs.

Each program will determine what performance standards an observer must meet to successfully demonstrate the ability to adequately perform their job. Each regional program will measure the effectiveness of these requirements through a formal documented debriefing process for observers, designed to evaluate observer performance in relation to data quality. NOPAT will provide an annual report identifying deficiencies as well as where performance standards are being met or exceeded to the NOP. Where deficiencies are identified suggested improvements must also be provided.

### V. References

National Marine Fisheries Service Procedure 04-109-01, National Minimum Eligibility Standards for Marine Fisheries Observers Procedure

Physical/Medical Condition and Examination Form 04-109-01, National Minimum  
Eligibility Standards for Marine Fisheries Observers Procedure

Signed  05/06/2022  
Date  
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries