



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL FISHERIES OFFICE
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930

March 20, 2020

Dear Partners and Stakeholders:

As part of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, NOAA Fisheries is temporarily waiving the requirement for vessels with Northeast fishing permits to carry a fishery observer or at-sea monitor. The waiver will be in effect through April 4, and future extensions of this waiver will be evaluated weekly.

This action is consistent with agency authority to grant waivers for observer and at-sea monitoring requirements under certain circumstances. The availability and deployment of observers is becoming increasingly challenging. The action is also consistent with current federal and state health guidance. The health and well-being of fishermen, observers, and supporting staff is not only a human health concern, but also essential to securing our nation's seafood production.

Through April 4, 2020, NOAA Fisheries will issue waivers for declared and incoming Northeast fishing trips. During this period:

- All reporting and pre-trip notification call-in requirements remain in place.
- Waivers will be issued for all current and newly selected fishing trips.
- Port intercepts (i.e., observers selecting trips for coverage in the ports) will be temporarily suspended.
- Trips that are currently at sea with an observer onboard are unaffected.
- Vessels using Electronic Monitoring are unaffected, as this waiver applies to human observers only.

The Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center will evaluate the impacts of waivers on our fisheries and observer programs throughout this period:

- We will monitor fishing activity in comparison to when observers have been deployed, to track continued compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.
- We will evaluate weekly observer availability, ability to travel, and level of fishing effort and landings.
- We will monitor for changes in current health and safety guidelines that we expect would increase observer availability.
- We will also monitor fishing effort and landings, which could be indicators that the temporary waiver of observer requirements could be ended.

Sincerely,

Michael Pentony

