



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Northeast Fisheries Science Center  
166 Water Street  
Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026

June 22, 2020

Dear Partners and Stakeholders:

Observers and at-sea 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.

On May 29, NOAA Fisheries announced that on July 1, the waiver of fishery monitoring will expire, and we will begin deploying observers and at-sea monitors on vessels fishing in northeast fisheries. In this letter, I am updating you on what we are doing to prepare for a safe and efficient redeployment.

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Fisheries Sampling Branch has been working through internal protocols and processes to ensure shoreside components of the program can operate. They are also coordinating with observer providers to develop deployment plans that support the health and safety of observers, fishermen, and others in the fishing industry, in light of the COVID-19 virus.

I want to share some additional information on progress we have made to date.

## **NOAA Fisheries**

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Fisheries Sampling Branch is developing a comprehensive plan for resuming operations that supports fishery monitoring, with safety at its core. This plan has to do with workplace operations, communications, people, training, and deployment of observers and monitors. This is some of what is included:

- Beginning July 1, we will follow the sea day schedule and coverage targets laid out for the 2020 fishing year. Coverage targets are not expected to increase beyond those levels to make up for unused days during the waiver period.
- Vessels with Electronic Monitoring will temporarily not be assigned observers and monitors after the waiver lifts.
- To limit the number of different vessels an observer covers, we will temporarily lift restrictions on the number of times an observer/at-sea monitor can cover the same vessels.



- Observers and at-sea monitors will be deployed to vessels using the Pre-Trip Notification (PTNS), Scallop Vessel Call-in System (VCIC), and port intercepts (i.e., observers selecting trips for coverage in the ports).

## **Observer Providers**

Each observer service provider has developed a deployment plan that includes safety protocols and requirements. We are closely coordinating our actions with these companies and are encouraging them to use common practices, which include:

- Training observers on COVID-19 awareness and risk mitigation
- Deploying individuals to the same vessel(s) and ports as much as possible
- Minimizing observer travel among vessels, ports, and states
- Pre-trip health screening for observers
- 14-day self-isolation prior to first deployment
- Personal protective equipment requirements
- Temperature monitoring prior to and throughout deployment
- Protocols for detecting, reporting, and acting on COVID-19 symptoms at home and at sea
- Vessel COVID-19 assessment pre-screening questions

## **Fishing Businesses**

Vessels, fishing organizations, sectors, and other fishing businesses each have their own plans. We encourage fishing businesses to reach out to the observer providers or the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Fisheries Sampling Branch staff with any questions about redeployment.

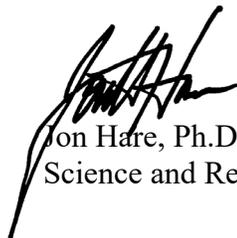
## **Next Steps**

We will continue to monitor local and state public health notifications, as well as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) for updates. Should our observer and at-sea monitor redeployment change, we will announce those changes as quickly and clearly as practicable.

We are committed to the public health and safety of fishermen, observers, and others while fulfilling our mission to maintain our nation's seafood supply and conserving marine life.

We appreciate everyone's help with resuming fishery monitoring.

Sincerely,



Jon Hare, Ph.D.  
Science and Research Director