



NOAA FISHERIES

Fisheries Information System Program

About the Quality Management and Continuous Improvement Professional Specialty Group

As part of the Fisheries Information System (FIS) program, the Quality Management and Continuous Improvement Professional Specialty Group (QM/CI PSG) brings experts together from across NOAA Fisheries and our partner institutions to provide trainings; conduct workshops; promote timely, cost-effective management and policy-making; and foster a broad and enduring culture of quality throughout the fisheries data community.

About FIS

The Fisheries Information System program is a state-regional-federal partnership that supports sound, science-based fisheries management. FIS does so by fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration and funding innovative projects to improve the quality of fisheries-dependent data.

FIS Program Contacts

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Quality Management and Continuous Improvement Success Story

Ensuring Timely Delivery of Observer Data: Northwest Observer Data Process Flow Workshop

The Challenge

Fisheries observers are professionally trained data collectors who gather crucial information on what's caught and what's discarded, as well as protected species interactions, on U.S. commercial fishing vessels. Until recently, observers in the Northwest, who often take back-to-back trips, also had to go through a time-consuming, paper-based process to complete their reports on fishing operations, protected resources, catch composition, and other areas. Once on shore, observers would mail a copy of their report to an observer debriefer who would review the data and flag any errors for further input from the observer—a process that could take up to a month of mailing the forms back and forth before finalization. These delays rippled throughout the process of analyzing data, providing the reports, updating catch share accounting, and other actions necessary to support sustainable fisheries management.

The Goal

The need to move to electronic transmission of the observer reports was obvious, but it was not as clear how to best capture all the steps from the observer's assignment to the debriefer's final report approval. A successful electronic system would need to ensure the needs of both the observers and debriefers were being met.

The Approach

The Northwest Fisheries Science Center's Fisheries Resource Analysis and Monitoring Division Observer team and associated IT staff conducted a value stream mapping workshop to pictorially display the current state of data delivery from the observer to debriefers, including data inputs and outputs, key players, when handoff happens, what gear was required, and safety measures.

The Outcome

The map generated in the workshop served as a guidepost for software developers to identify what the software could look like and how data was going to flow through the system. It also helped to explain the issue to upper management. The updated system helps debriefers more quickly and accurately receive trip data from observers. Now, observers catalog information while at sea onto both a paper sheet and a tablet app. Once on shore, they push the information from the app instantly to a debriefer, along with a scanned copy of the paper version for two-step verification. Getting this information to debriefers more quickly has cut the review time down to just a few days. Of particular value to the fishing industry, data appears in the catch share accounting system more quickly, so pounds for specific species are debited in a much faster timeframe, helping fishers to make more informed business decisions and plan trips more effectively.

To learn more about scheduling a workshop, funding opportunities, and the FIS commitment to enhancing the NOAA Fisheries culture of quality, visit www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/commercial-fishing/fisheries-information-system-program.

