



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
NORTHEAST REGION  
One Blackburn Drive  
Gloucester, MA 01930-2298

December 18, 2007

Dear Atlantic Hagfish Vessel Owner/Operator:

This letter is to inform you that you have been selected to carry an at-sea fishery observer on your Atlantic hagfish fishing trips. You are hereby required to contact NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (Observer Program) prior to leaving port on any fishing trip on which you intend to fish for, catch, or land Atlantic hagfish (*Myxine glutinosa*). Under the hagfish information collection program, any vessel owner/operator that fishes for, catches, or lands hagfish, or intends to fish for, catch, or land hagfish in or from the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is required to carry an observer if requested by the Regional Administrator. The information collection program was recently implemented as a Federal regulation at the request of the New England Fishery Management Council, and the data collected may be used to determine the necessity of future management measures for hagfish under a fishery management plan.

The vessel owner or operator of a hagfish vessel intending to fish or fishing for hagfish must call the Observer Program at least 72 hours in advance of a trip in order to facilitate observer coverage. The Observer Program contact number is: (508) 990-9057. The vessel owner or operator must call this number and provide the following information:

- Vessel name
- Contact name for coordination of observer deployment
- Telephone number of contact
- Date, time, and port of departure

The Observer Program will notify the vessel owner, operator, or vessel manager whether the vessel must carry an observer on the specified trip, or if a waiver has been granted within 24 hours of the notification of the prospective trip as specified above. Once notified to carry an observer, a vessel may not start a fishing trip unless the observer is on board or a waiver has been granted.

The purpose of the observer coverage is to improve the quantity and quality of information on the fishery for Atlantic hagfish. The hagfish observer coverage objectives will focus on the collection of basic fleet information and observations of fishing behavior, including but not limited to, the distribution of fishing effort, number of hauls per trip, area/depth fished, trip length, soak time, discard rates of hagfish or other species, gear type/configuration, and gear deployment methodology.

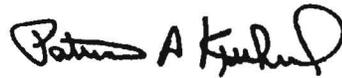
Although vessels must call to arrange deployment of observers, hagfish vessels will not be required to pay for the observers; funding of observer coverage for this fishery will be provided by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service.



**IMPORTANT REMINDER ABOUT SAFETY REQUIREMENTS:** As of May 1, 2006, all vessels required to carry an observer must meet United States Coast Guard safety requirements and display a current Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination Decal (Decal). Vessels that do not have a current safety Decal are deemed unsafe for purposes of carrying an observer. Vessels that are required to carry an observer, but are inadequate or unsafe for purposes of carrying an observer, are prohibited from fishing without observer coverage [50 CFR 600.746(f)]. Enforcement action may result when a vessel that is required to take an observer does not meet the safety requirements and embarks on a fishing trip without the observer.

If you have any questions regarding the hagfish observer requirements, please contact the Sustainable Fisheries Division at (978) 281-9315.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patricia A. Kurkul". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "P".

Patricia A. Kurkul  
Regional Administrator

cc: Sara Wetmore, Northeast Fisheries Observer Program

## NORTHEAST FISHERIES OBSERVER PROGRAM

National Marine Fisheries Service · Northeast Fisheries Science Center · 166 Water Street · Woods Hole · MA · 02543

<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/>

Program Information at 508-495-2266 · Office for Law Enforcement at 508-495-2147

### WHAT TO EXPECT DURING AN OBSERVED TRIP

#### *Observers shall perform the following duties, at a minimum:*

Conduct a pre-trip safety inspection;

Communicate with vessel personnel about observer duties and data collection needs;

Ask the captain and/or owner of the vessel for some economic information, such as trip costs (price of fuel, ice, etc.) and fixed costs (amount spent on annual insurance, repairs, etc.);

Collect information on fishing gear, such as size of nets and dredges, mesh sizes, and gear configurations;

Collect tow-by-tow information, such as depth, water temperature, wave height, and location and time when fishing begins and ends;

Record all kept and discarded catch (fish, sharks, crustaceans, invertebrates, and debris) on observed hauls and record kept catch on unobserved hauls, which includes species, weight, and disposition reason;

Collect actual weights of catch whenever possible, or estimate or extrapolate weights by sub-sampling;

Collect whole specimens, photos, and biological samples, such as scales, ear bones, and/or spines from fish, invertebrates, and incidental takes; and

Collect detailed information on interactions with protected species, such as sea turtles, porpoise, dolphins, whales, and birds (also called incidental takes).

#### *Observers should not:*

Provide advice about fishing regulations;

Accept any gifts or direct payment in any form from the vessel operator, owner, or crew;

Participate in commercial fishing activities during the trip, such as dressing fish, shucking scallops, or standing wheel watch;

Hinder or slow fishing operations unless necessary to obtain critical discard or incidental take information;

Use personal recording devices, such as camcorders, cameras, cell phones, and diaries;

Use the vessel's communication equipment for personal purposes; nor

Discuss the observed trip with anyone other than program staff.

***The Captain's legal responsibilities include, but are not limited to:***

Ensure the vessel has a current U.S. Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination decal and other essential non-expired safety devices, provide the observer with a safety orientation, and maintain a wheel watch throughout the trip;

Cooperate with the observer in the performance of the observer's duties;

Provide the observer with living quarters, meals, and amenities comparable to a crew member;

Allow the observer access to areas of the vessel and gear necessary to conduct observer duties,

Allow the observer access to communication and navigation equipment as necessary to perform observer duties;

Provide true vessel locations by latitude and longitude upon request by the observer;

Provide the observer with VTR Serial Numbers and VMS Fishing Activity Codes if requested;

Notify the observer when commercial fishing operations are to begin and end;

Bring aboard marine mammals, sea turtles and sea birds that were killed during fishing operations if requested by the observer; and

Provide refrigerated storage space for observer-collected specimens within reason.

***It is illegal for Captains and Crew to:***

Assault, harass or sexually harass, intimidate or attempt to influence observers;

Interfere with or impede observer duties;

Ask observers to stand watch or help with fishing operations; and

Fish without an observer on board the vessel after the owner or agent of the owner has been selected by NMFS or the observer provider to carry an observer.

***Observers should bring the following, along with other scientific gear:***

C.P.R. Card, personal identification, and proof of insurance; immersion suit and Personal Floatation Device; appropriate clothing, such as boots, raingear, gloves; length frequency board for finfish and scallops; volumetric measuring cup for scallop meats; spring scales; thermometer for water temperature; scientific calipers and tape measure; buckets and/or baskets to sample; and work-issued cameras, logs, manuals, and field guides.

***At the completion of a trip, Observers should provide the Captain with this sheet and a:***

Data Release Form to request a photocopy of the observer's trip logs;

Meal Reimbursement Form for multi-day trips (not provided for industry-funded trips);

Fishermen's Comment Card with pre-paid postage; and program brochure, upon request.