



Frequently Asked Questions

General coverage questions

Q: How can I find out what my sector's observer coverage rates are?

A: In general, for fishing year 2014, NOAA Fisheries is targeting observer coverage of groundfish trips at 8% for common pool vessels and 26% for sector vessels, with the exception of declared sector vessel monkfish gillnet trips in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic region, which have a target of 8%. Coverage is accomplished through a combination of observer and at-sea monitor coverage. To obtain your sector's realized (actual) coverage rate, contact your sector manager.

Q: Why is my vessel getting selected for coverage at a rate higher/lower than 8% or 26% for groundfish trips?

A: The target observer coverage was determined based on the activity of the groundfish fleet in past years and the budget allocated to provide at-sea monitoring coverage in fishing year 2014. Depending on several factors, including the number of trips taken in 2014, the average length of each trip, and the ability of providers to cover selected trips, NOAA Fisheries may adjust the trip selection rate throughout the year in order to achieve the target coverage. For this reason, vessels should not assume that the targeted coverage rates will be constant.

Additionally, the at-sea monitor selection process attempts to achieve the target coverage at the stratum level, not the vessel level. For groundfish monitoring, the stratum is primarily defined as the individual sector (or common pool), gear, and area fished. For example, for all vessels of a particular sector, fishing in the Gulf of Maine with gillnet gear 7.9" or less, the selection process will attempt to cover 26% of these trips. Some gillnet vessels within this stratum may be selected for coverage on greater than 26% of their trips, while other vessels may be selected for less than 26% of their trips. As more trips are taken within a stratum (i.e., as the fishing year progresses), the deviation from target will diminish and the coverage across all vessels should begin to approach the target coverage levels.



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PRE-TRIP NOTIFICATION SYSTEM
FOR NEFOP AND ASM

Q: What is the difference between an At-Sea Monitor and Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) observer?

A: Both monitors and observers have undergone extensive training to collect commercial fishing trip data. At-sea monitors collect similar data to that of observers; however they collect a reduced set of data with an emphasis on quantifying catch (determining weights of kept and discarded fish) with less biological sampling. There is no difference in the laws pertaining to observers and at-sea monitors; they are subject to the same standards with regards to data quality, data confidentiality, safety, and harassment.

Using the PTNS

Q: I received a waiver for a day trip, but I did not sail that day. Do I need to cancel day trips in the PTNS, even if the trips were not selected for observer coverage?

A: Yes. You should cancel any trip that you do not take, regardless of whether it was selected for observer coverage or not. NOAA Fisheries is monitoring the PTNS trip declarations and comparing these to VMS activity declarations to identify discrepancies. Failure to cancel trips through the PTNS will result in a greater number of trips being selected for observer coverage. You may cancel a trip using your PTNS account online or by contacting the PTNS coordinator. You should not cancel trips for dates on which you have sailed; you need an active notification in the system for each date on which you have departed on a PTNS-eligible fishing trip.

Q: I did not sail on a multi-day trip on the date entered in the PTNS because of weather, mechanical issues, etc. Do I need to cancel the trip and provide another 48 hours' notice?

If your decision to sail is based on weather, for example, you may not know in advance for how long you will need to delay a trip. If you are departing 48 hours or more past the PTNS sail date, you may keep the same confirmation number and do not need to re-notify. However, you should delay the sail date using the PTNS website or by calling the PTNS coordinator at 1-855-FISHES1. Providing accurate trip information makes for more accurate coverage and compliance rates.

If the trip will be delayed for the long term, due to the need for a haul-out, for example, please use the website or call the PTNS coordinator to cancel the trip, and then re-notify when new trip plans are known.



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Q: Can I notify for more than 48 hours in advance of my next trip?

A: Yes. Trip notifications must be submitted *at least* 48 hours in advance of the anticipated sailing time; however, notifications can be submitted up to 9 days in advance of the sail date.

Q: Why can't I notify for 9 day trips?

A: You are able to notify for trips up to 9 days in advance of the sail date. You are required to give 48 hours' notice. This means that you can notify for up to 7 days at one time, as you would be notifying for the 7th trip 9 days in advance.

Q: Why am I receiving so many emails?

A: When a notification is entered into the system, it either receives a waiver or is selected for coverage. If your vessel receives an initial waiver, it will get only one trip status email, which will contain the confirmation number, the departure date to which it applies, and its waiver status. If your vessel is initially selected for coverage, you will receive an email containing the confirmation number, date to which it applies, and its selection status. Up to 24 hours after your initial selection, you will receive a second email. If an observer provider has accepted the trip, you will receive an email containing the confirmation number, date to which it applies, and its accepted status, with the name of the provider and a contact phone number. If no observers are available to cover the trip, you will receive a secondary waiver; the email will contain the confirmation number, date to which it applies, and its waiver status.

You may also determine your status by checking your PTNS account online.

Q: Can I only call during business hours to deal with an issue or make a notification?

The PTNS line is monitored 24/7. When the PTNS coordinator is not answering the calls and checking voicemails during business hours, an answering service will be answering the calls. The answering service can enter notifications, help troubleshoot issues, and contact a NMFS representative in the event of an urgent situation.



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Q: Why did I just get selected for coverage for a number of trips in a row?

A: It is the nature of random selection that this occurs sometimes. However, the system does react when a trip selected for observer coverage is canceled, as well. After a selected trip is canceled in the system, all trips entered after the cancellation may be selected for observer coverage if the individual vessel coverage rate in the system is below a threshold level. If this is the case, once the vessel carries an observer, any trips entered after that point will go through the random selection process.

Troubleshooting

Q: I can't get onto the website at all – I'm getting a message that says I'm forbidden. What's wrong?

A: The web address is case sensitive. Type fish.nefsc.noaa.gov/PTNS into your browser, ensuring that the "PTNS" at the end is in all capital letters.

Q: I called/emailed in to notify for a trip, and I have not received any notice to my VMS. Why?

A: When you enter your own notifications online, you receive your entry confirmation email within 15 minutes. When you email or call in your notification, there will be a delay due to data entry by FSB staff. If it is 24 hours or less before your trip is set to depart, and you have still not received any notice to your VMS, please contact the PTNS coordinator with plenty of time to spare before your departure time.

Q: It's 24 hours prior to the scheduled sail time for my selected trip and I have not yet heard from an observer. Why?

A: The providers have up to 24 hours prior to trip sail time to accept a trip. Sometimes trips are accepted late at night, and providers feel that it would be inappropriate to contact the captain at that time.

Q: I called in to notify for a trip. Why hasn't anyone called me back to give me my confirmation number and status?

A: When you call to notify for a trip, your information is entered into the system by the PTNS coordinator or other FSB staff. Your trip status will be updated on the PTNS website and a confirmation email will be sent to your VMS, as well as any additional email addresses that you have provided. If you do not have internet access and cannot



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check your email accounts, please specify during your notification that you would like to receive a phone call regarding your status.

Q: I was selected for coverage, but an observer has not yet contacted me. What should I do?

A: Double-check your emails to be sure that you were not issued a secondary waiver for your departure date. Sometimes trips are selected for coverage initially but are not accepted by a service provider. If your trip has been accepted for coverage by a service provider and you have not heard from an observer, contact the service provider listed in your email for that trip.

If you are at the dock at your scheduled departure time and the observer is not at the dock, you have not heard from the observer, and you have called the observer and gotten no answer, call 1-855-FISHES1 to obtain clearance to depart from on-call NMFS staff. Do not leave the dock without an assigned observer if you have not contacted NMFS at 1-855-FISHES1.

Q: I have a problem with my VMS – what do I do?

A: Contact the NOAA Fisheries VMS Office at 978-281-9213 or the VMS Support Center at 888-219-9228. You may also send an e-mail at any time to the NOAA Fisheries VMS Office, NMFS.OLE.NE@NOAA.GOV.