



NOAA FISHERIES

Office of Science and Technology
National Observer Program

Why Survey Observers?

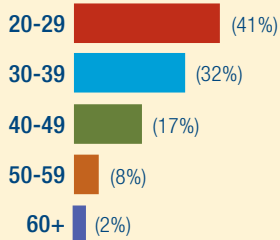
Observers are the only independent data collection source for some types of at-sea information. The information they collect is essential for stock assessments and sustainable fisheries management, the ability of fleets to operate, and testing innovation in fishing gear, such as bycatch reduction devices.

Who Responded?

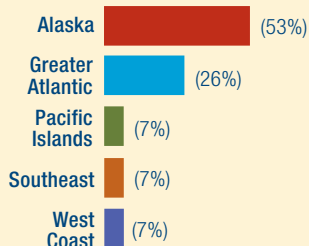
553 current or former observers*:

Female: 40%; Male: 60%

Age range at time of survey:



Regional distribution**:



*Respondents included at-sea monitors, who collect data to estimate discards for vessels in the Northeast groundfish fishery.

**Response distribution was commensurate to regional distribution among active observers in 2016.

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Observer Attitudes and Experiences: 2016 Survey Snapshot



What we heard ...



Field work was the **#1 motivation for becoming an observer**. **69%** of respondents' **expectations for days spent at sea matched their experiences**.



75% thought being an observer was **helpful in advancing their careers**. **45%** said the experience **increased their interest in working in marine science careers**.



69% of respondents **supported electronic reporting**. **40%** supported **electronic monitoring**.



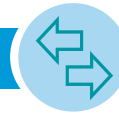
About **half** of survey respondents (46%) reported that they were **harassed at least once** in their observer career, and only **one-third** of those **reported harassment** every time it occurred.



Only **20%** of respondents **felt valued by the fishing community**.



Respondents expressed **low satisfaction** with opportunities to **learn more about science and management**.



How we'll respond ...

Ensure recruitment and training materials set appropriate expectations.

Continue to communicate career path opportunities, and collaborate with observer employers in support of career transition.

Effectively communicate intent of technologies and potential impacts on observer deployments.

Support NOAA-wide efforts to combat harassment, which includes educating the fishing community about **zero tolerance of observer harassment** and resulting penalties.

Better educate the fleet, Councils, and other stakeholders about **observer contributions to sustainable fisheries**.

Create opportunities for observers to attend fisheries conferences, track regional management council actions, and **engage with NOAA Fisheries staff**.

This anonymous, voluntary online survey was intended to help NOAA Fisheries better understand observer attitudes and experiences. Results reflect responses received between August and December 2016. Inferences from the data collected are limited by several factors, including the self-selected nature of the survey, the lack of national or regional databases with information to contact past observers, and because outreach efforts for the survey were more likely to reach former observers who had stayed in marine-related careers rather than those who had left the field. Additionally, observers did not specify the type of harassment they experienced. The report on this survey is available at <https://spo.nmfs.noaa.gov/tech-memos>.