



the
Mail Buoy

A publication of the Association for Professional Observers
P.O. Box 30167, Seattle, WA 98103 (206) 547-4228
E-mail: apo_obs@hotmail.com Website: <http://www.apo-observers.org>



OBSERVER NEWS

**SUMMARY OF THE 2002 SURVEY
FINAL RESULTS**

The 2002 observer survey, which began in May of this year, is now complete. Thirty percent of the active observer community is represented. This survey was inspired by war stories heard in the bars, bunkhouses and trainings and, a realization that there were consistencies that needed to be documented. I could not have guessed when I started this process, how well timed this effort was. Regulations that directly affect our jobs will be implemented in January of 2003. On a national level, observer coverage is increasing in response to growing data needs. The results of this survey provide a voice to observer experience for both the upcoming policy changes and the international observer conference in November. I am obliged to the APO, the OTC, and the observers who helped make this happen. Before beginning the survey, I personally knew little about the APO. I was the type of person who would get in and out of trainings and debriefings and quickly as possible, striving to leave my work in Alaska in Alaska. However, after working with the APO and seeing the results of this and other surveys, I believe addressing the issues hashed out over beers is not only possible, but also necessary. The greatest challenge appears to be catching observers long enough to find out what is going on out there. Hence I am most grateful to all who took the time to fill out this survey. *(con't on page 2)*

APO Activities

APO Officer Elections for 2003 Begin!

The officers of APO include a President, a Vice-President(s), Secretary and a Treasurer. Any two (2) or more offices may be held by the same person except the offices of President and Secretary. Starting in 2003, the officers of APO will be elected annually by the Observer Members (yes, you have to pay your dues to vote), and each officer shall serve at the pleasure of the Observer Members. Each officer shall hold office until his successor shall have been duly elected. The "official" duties of the officers as well as the APO's goals/objectives are within our

bylaws (<http://www.apo-observers.org/bylaws.pdf>). A list of duties and short biographies of each of the candidates will be posted on the website soon.

The candidates are as follows:

- President (vote for 1): **Suzanne Romain**
 - Vice-President (vote for 2): **Nicole Caputo, Kelly Van Wormer, Gillian Stoker**
 - Secretary (vote for 1): **Kelly Van Wormer, Jared Bryant**
 - Treasurer (vote for 1): **Kim Dietrich**
- (Con't on page 7)*



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WHO FILLED OUT THIS SURVEY?

Experience/Days at Sea	
1-90	16.7%
91-180	17.9%
181-270	14.1%
271-360	14.1%
361-450	5.1%
451+	32.1%

Age distribution of those surveyed:	
Average	30
Mode	26
Min	23
Max	66

Contractor	
Alaskan Observers (AOI)	53.2%
Saltwater Inc (SWI)	31.2%
NWO Inc.	10.4%
Other (non –Alaskan)	5.2%

80% of those surveyed are **U.S. citizens** (Canada was strongly represented)

34% of those surveyed have worked in other observer programs.

60% of those surveyed are **not members of the APO**

Gender	
Male	55.7 %
Female	44.3 %

Only 22% have switched contractors. A more professional attitude, a friendlier and more supportive environment, and lack of work are the top three reason people switch from one contractor to another. A summary of the most desired changes observers would like to see from contractors is listed below.

DESIRED CONTRACTOR RELATED CHANGES

Topics are listed in order of which issues scored the highest priority of most important to change, with the total percentage of respondents who selected these issues, and their comments.

1. Compensation for waiting periods while on contract 65%

Some observers felt that their contractor had misrepresented the duration of the contract period. Unfortunately, there is no standard limit on contractors for post-briefing/pre-deployment waiting periods. This has resulted in many observers being on contract and unable to pursue other employment-without pay. Once an observer has boarded their first vessel the 90-day NMFS clock starts, but the waiting period for that first vessel has been up to five weeks for some observers, representing a wage loss of up to \$5,000. Additionally, some contractors do not provide food per-diems for these waiting periods. This issue will be brought to the union, and will be addressed at the next round of contract negotiations. Observers who experience a waiting period that results in a significant financial loss should contact the APO and the Union so adequate documentation is available for the 2003 union negotiations.

It is **very important** to **80%** of those surveyed to choose the length of their contract

2. Health benefit options 72%

Some contractors do provide compensation for employees who purchase their own health insurance. However, individual insurance packages are significantly higher than group rates, so many observers do not have health insurance. Short-term plans are available and are quite affordable, but these plans do not cover preventative care. Additionally, the coverage for on the job injuries is convoluted and in some cases inadequate. The National Observer Program (NOP) is currently working to clarify observer insurance issues and information on this project can be found at the NOP website. Information about short-term insurance can be found on the APO website. Observers who are interested in year-round insurance should also contact the APO as we'd liked to investigate group options and would need observer feedback to accomplish this. The issue of health insurance has been addressed in union negotiations with unsuccessful results, and will be brought to the table again in 2003.

3. Company Housing 58%

Observers reported inadequate storage space, overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, sub-standard beds, and inconsiderate behavior of other observers as the major issues of company housing. Some stated they would contribute to a maid service to remedy the unsanitary conditions. While overcrowding should be indirectly addressed by the union standard of a bed for every employee, it seems an upper limit to the number of people within a residence might also need to be addressed. If an observer is asked to sleep on a couch or a floor they should contact both the APO and the union representative.

4. Compensation for expenses 55%

All of the comments on this issue indicated observers felt per-diems for Anchorage and Seattle were inadequate. Other comments included requests for waiting period per-diems and changing the accounting procedure from receipt collection to a prepaid amount.

5. Investment options	54%
Group retirement plans (401k) are desired.	
6. Compensation for experience level	43%
Comments included increased compensation for lead status, and comparable wage increases between grade levels.	
7. At-sea compensation	43%
In general, increase field pay.	
8. Contract lengths/conditions	42%
The majority of comments addressed waiting periods. Other comments included reports of contractor failure to communicate family medical emergencies to observers in the field.	
9. Compensation for briefings/debriefings	38%
In general, increase briefing/debriefing pay.	
10. Compensation for assignment type	38%
All comments referred to increased compensation for lead status or CDQ assignments.	
11. Specific information about assignments	35%
Comments included a desire for information about “problem” vessel (i.e.: safety, harassment or accommodation issues brought up by other observers) and vessel type information prior to training to insure the best preparation for an assignment.	
12. Assignment allocation, interactions with contractor personnel, and support in the field	29%
Comments included a need for increased accessibility of contractors in the field (cell phones as opposed to pagers), misrepresentation of contract lengths, and the need for priors to get assignment offers before a new observer when work is scarce.	
13. Compensation for field debriefings(Dutch Harbor, Kodiak)	28%
All comments felt daily compensation should be increased for field “turn and burns”, and waiting periods for the next assignment should be compensated for at field pay rate.	
14. Documentation of disputes	23%
Observers felt there should be a record of contractor/observer dispute, a service the APO would like to develop. Observers AND contractors should contact the APO and provide as many details as possible for an accurate record of disputes they feel are significant or repetitive.	

DESIRED NMFS RELATED CHANGES

Topics are listed in order of which issues scored the highest priority of most important to change, with the total percentage of respondents who selected these issues, and their comments.

<u>1. Briefings/4-days</u>	55%
All comments stated that the 4-days were too long given the material presented. Observers expressed frustration over “being held until 5 without material to be covered.... insulting.... waste of time.... ridiculously repetitive.... (Trainers) seem to be fishing for stuff to do”, The following suggestions were offered; a fish test on day 1 with an exemption from the last days test upon passing; more safety, special project, species ID training; information on observer activism (APO/or Council representation), current fisheries research; overview of open/openings of fisheries and on how data is used. Shortening the training was the most common suggestion.	
<u>2. Support in field/vessel safety</u>	43%
The following comments were offered; “Dutch personnel should board vessel with first time observers to show safety check and sample station set up, more follow-up from NMFS on vessel issues and how they are resolved, more support in King Cove, higher standards and better enforcement of sample station and vessel safety, the safety questions of one observer must be addressed by NMFS before placing another observer onboard”. Also suggested-increased detail of safety question in computer surveys.	
<u>3. Debriefing/computer survey</u>	32%
A remote network option would be helpful with vessel surveys, more detailed questions are needed for safety issues, and the affidavit program should be overhaul to address bugs that have led to lost data.	
<u>4. Briefings/1-days</u>	25%
Briefings should be waived more often and only assigned by debriefers with just cause; trainings should have specific information on open or opening fisheries.	
<u>5. Debriefings/ interviews</u>	35%
While NMFS has made many good changes to the debriefing system (the 0-1 vs. 0-1-2 assessment) most comments addressed a continued need for a standardized objective interview process, “less of an interrogation, more of a data check”. Increasing debriefings in Anchorage and more debriefers available in Seattle during high volume season ends were also requested.	
<u>6. Support in the field/sampling</u>	36%

Suggestions included more feedback on atlas for 1st time observers, only atlas boats for 1st time observers, and personnel available for dockside assistance (like cadre).

6. Equipment provided 41%

Several comments pointed out the increased difficulty in airports transporting gear-having more gear available at field stations could alleviate some logistic problems. Other suggestions included a new attachment mechanism for strobes on survival suits-they snap off easily upon entering the water with the current system, cleaner gear (specifically referring to Anchorage), higher quality knives, hardhats, and scales.

7. Briefings/level 2 22%

Comments; Are these really necessary?

8. Cruise length/90-day rule 45%

All comments suggested flexibility for long-time priors to negotiate directly with NMFS for extensions. However, 70% of all surveyed feel the rule is necessary, that it protects them from burnout and being forced to stay out to long.

8. Debriefing/exit survey 29%

Detailed safety questions would provide more useful data and more comment space should be provided for vessel specific comments.

8. Training/3-week 38%

Suggestions included both making it shorter, and making it longer. "More applicable information" was also suggested. Include a history of observer activism and a summary of Alaskan fisheries related books, websites and organizations.

9. Support in the field/supplies 38%

Comments included; more supplies in the field, less transported by observers and more platform scales available in Dutch Harbor.

10. Support in the field/enforcement 30%

Observers suggested on-site NMFS staff to board vessels with first time observers, and to respond to safety concerns an observer may have while assigned to a vessel.

DESIRED ASSIGNMENT RELATED CHANGES

Topics are listed in order of which issues scored the highest priority of most important to change, with the total percentage of respondents who selected these issues, and their comments.

1. Sample station /scale options 69%

Many observers expressed a complete lack of confidence in the Salter scales. An increase of platform scales and motion compensated platform scales on all catcher processors would improve data accuracy.

2. Sample station/overall space 69%

Having an established sample space and higher standards for sample stations.

3. Sample station/discard options 50%

Observers reported that some vessels have inadequate discard options for the following reasons; chute too small or too high for large species, sump pump unable to keep up with the volume of discard, and discard chutes located too far away from the sample station-especially for discarding Halibut from samples (having to go from the factory to the deck with large Halibut).

4. Vessel safety requirements 62%

The general sentiment of comments were to "Require vessels to reduce the likelihood of sinking as opposed to requiring preparation for when it does"

5. Sample station/ storage 75%

The following problems were reported; lack of dry/clean/indoor storage space, insufficient space for processing and collection of samples, and inability to lift properly due to lack of space.

6. Sample station/safety 56%

7. Boarding/disembarking procedures 40%

A standardized boarding procedure would be helpful. Some would like to see increased enforcement of accommodation requirements (i.e. officer quarters).

8. Interaction with crew 27%

A standardized information summary sheet for captains detailing sampling requirements such as retain all birds, target sample weights, sea lion samples etc...

If you don't see your opinions here-send me an email to the APO and fill me in.

Changes to certification requirements

The final results of these questions are almost identical to the preliminary-so here they again. 83.3% are comfortable with criminal background checks that look for felonies, yet 69.1% do not feel a clean criminal record is an appropriate prerequisite for the job of observing. Comments regarding this change to requirements specified the need to define what

constitutes a clean criminal record - an issue the observer program has thus far decided to assess on a case-by-case basis.

Standards of Behavior

The observer program is currently developing standards of behavior policy and these should be available by the next mail buoy. A summary of observer responses to behavior questions follows.

Do you feel confident that you understand how the observer program's standards of behavior apply to your experience of cruise situations?

Very confident	47.3%
Fairly confident	27%
A little confident	14.9%
Not at all confident	4.1%

Do you feel confident that you understand how the observer program's standards of behavior are enforced?

Very confident	13.5%
Fairly confident	31.1%
A little confident	29.7%
Not at all confident	25.7%

Are you confident that "...any activities that would reflect negatively on their image as professional scientists, on other observers, or on the observer program as a whole" can be generally understood or defined?

Yes	40.8%
No	59.2%

Does the re-wording of the "sexual relations" code of behavior seem clear to you?

Yes	67.6%
No	32.4%

Does the sexual relations code of behavior seem reasonable to you?

Yes	85.3%
No	14.7%

What do you think is the most acceptable minimum drug policy?

(Respondents could choose multiple answers)

Observers may be drug tested randomly:

Before they are deployed	16.7%
During a cruise	13.9%
After a cruise	20.8%
Before, during or after a cruise	37.5%

Observers may be drug tested if:

It's the fishing companies policy	38.9%
NMFS has reason to believe they have used drugs while on contract	36.1%
Their contractor has reason to believe they have used drugs while on contract	40.3%
The vessel has reason to believe they have used drugs while on contract	25%
NMFS or their contractor has reason to believe they have used drugs off contract	8.3%
NMFS or their contractor has reason to believe they have ever used drugs	4.2%
Observers should not be drug tested	13.9%

What do you think is the most acceptable minimum alcohol policy?

(Respondents could choose multiple answers)

An observer would be considered guilty of excessive drinking if they appeared drunk to:

NMFS staff while in port and assigned to a vessel	35.6%
Contractor staff while in port and assigned to a vessel	28.8%
Industry personnel while in port and assigned to a vessel	28.8%
NMFS staff while in port and <i>not</i> assigned to a vessel	9.6%
Contractor staff while in port <i>not</i> assigned to a vessel	12.3%
Industry personnel while in port <i>not</i> assigned to a vessel	12.3%
NMFS staff on their vessel	47.9%
Contractor staff on their vessel	45.2%
Industry personnel on their vessel	50.7%

An observer would be considered guilty of excessive drinking if they:

Have a blood alcohol level above 0.1 while on their vessel	50.7%
Have a blood alcohol level above 0.1 while in port on contract	19.2%
Are disruptive to the point of complaint by other observers or neighbors at company housing	50.7%

Where and when do you feel you are “on the job site”?

(Respondents could choose multiple answers)

At company housing	25.4%
The start of briefing until I finish debriefing	31%
Anywhere in port while assigned to a vessel	38%
Anywhere in port while not assigned to a vessel	22.5%
Anytime I am interacting with the crew of my assigned vessel	33.8%
Anytime I am interacting with anyone in the fishing industry	18.3%
Anytime I am interacting with my contractor	38%
On the vessel or plant I’m assigned to	83.1%
On any vessel or at any plant	46.5%
While in transit to the filed or to home	11.3%
This should all be common sense	1.4%

Safety

Do you know what is required of vessels to obtain a Coast Guard Safety sticker?

Yes	57.4%
No	42.6%

How confident are you that a boat with a Coast Guard Safety Sticker is actually safe?

Very Confident	4.1 %
Fairly Confident	45.9%
A Little Confident	36.5%
Not At All Confident	13.5%

For the record, the safety sticker requires vessels to carry life rafts, epirbs, survival suits and a radio for distress calls. The Artic Rose had a valid safety sticker when it sunk.

Have you ever been on a vessel that has not felt safe even though it had a valid coast guard safety sticker?

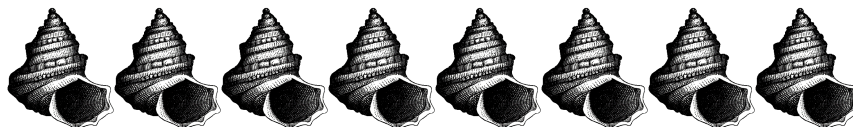
Yes	52.7%
No	47.3%

These are the conditions observers identified as unsafe:

Conditions	Percent of respondents
Vessel appeared poorly maintained	80.5%
Food quality questionable/unsanitary conditions	51.2%
No one on watch/crew sleeping	48.8%
Inexperienced crew	48.8%
Decks cluttered with gear	41.5%
Discard chute not adequate for getting bycatch off the boat quickly	26.8%
Lost power regularly	24.4%
Hatch doors won't seal or are left open	22%
Sump pumps broke regularly	19.5%
Discard chute propped open regularly	17.1%
Communicable disease risk	17.1%
Regular ammonia or other chemical leaks	14.6%
Not enough emergency exits	14.6%
Alarms not working	12.2%
Drug/alcohol use by captain at sea	7.3%
Deck loads and weather	7.3%
Unlicensed captain/engineer	4.9%
Lost or used safety equipment with no replacement onboard	4.9%
Extreme fatigue with visible effects on competency	4.9%
Engineer can't hear alarms everywhere on vessel	2.4%
Fires	2.4%

This summary does not include all of the questions and answers from the survey. More safety related information will be provided in the next mail buoy in context with observer program developments and international issues presented at the observer conference in New Orleans in November.

Cheers-Suzanne



Call For Submissions – Writing of Observers

April Hayward and I are trying to put together a book of observer stories, poems, photos, journal entries, experiences, etc. to be published. We already have a few contributions, but need many more. Please write down a short story of one of your experiences while observing or send us a poem you've written to include in the book. This is to be a compilation of observer experiences for all to enjoy. April has a friend who will edit the book for us, and then we will try talking to the University of Alaska about publishing it. We are serious about this project, so please write something down and send it in. Please pass this along to any former observers you know or any other observers who may not be reading the Mail Buoy. Thanks! The ideas for this project are wide open. I know you are a creative bunch so please have some fun with it.

Please send or email your stories to:
April Hayward, 55 Dayton Cres., Nepean, ON, M6C-7N8, CANADA; email: lirpah@hotmail.com

or
Jeanette Alas, 10302 Piper Dr., New Port Richey, FL 34654; email: jeanettealas@hotmail.com
(you can also send anything to SWI or leave it in my box there)

APO ACTIVITY UPDATE *(continued)*

APO Officer Elections *(con't from page 1)*

If you're a current member of the APO, you should have received a ballot in the mail along with this issue of the Mail Buoy. Ballots are due by January 10, 2003. Votes will be accepted via snail mail, e-mail and telephone. Send your ballots by **January 10, 2003** to: APO, PO Box 30167, Seattle, WA 98103 or via email: APO@apo-observers.org or apo_obs@hotmail.com. For more information, you can also call Kim Dietrich (VP) 206-547-4228 or Kelly Van Wormer (Secretary) 206-723-6850 or email either of the above.

Comments on Federal Observer Compensation Act

In late July, the National Observer Program solicited comments on draft legislative language that establishes an alternative observer compensation plan for work-related injuries. The plan is intended to provide:

- first party compensation coverage to observers in the event of injury or death,
- re-assurance to vessel owners that liability for negligence will be held to a minimum,
- one stop coverage for land and sea based duty stations,
- coverage that would provide protection while en route to and from all assigned duty stations,
- cost benefits to the Federal government through the reduction of redundant insurance coverage.

The draft is modeled after the Longshore & Harbor Worker's Compensation Act (LHWCA) administered by the Department of Labor. The draft [FOCA](#) language and [Whitepaper](#) providing background information can be found on APO's website under "Hot Topics": http://www.apo-observers.org/Observerweb/Sites/Links_navbar_main/hottopicsofder/hot_topics.htm.

APO consulted with Tim McHugh, who participated in the NOP's 2001 Insurance & Liability workshop, assisted us with formal comments and legal advice regarding the draft legislation. Input was also provided by Gabrielle LeDoux and several observers. [Thank you for your advice & input!]

APO's [full comments](#) are integrated into each of the documents above (also viewed at the same URL). Overall, the primary issue is the potential loss of remedies now available under state worker's compensation in Alaska for non-work related disabilities incurred by observers on standby through illness or injury. The APO requested NOAA provide a comparative table of remedies available under FOCA and state comp to demonstrate why "the LHWCA model is much better suited to provide observers superior benefits and procedural rights, . . ." White Paper, at 5. The second major area of concern is that observers would have no right to sue a vessel owner under Section 905(b) of the LHWCA. Comments on this issue are contained in Footnote 16 to the White Paper.

NMFS Requests Input on 2003 Observer Drug & Alcohol Policy

As part of the regulatory process to extend the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program, the NMFS is developing several policy statements. Rob Swanson and Brian Mason, NPGOP staff & prior observers, were tasked with developing and writing the new Drug and Alcohol Policy for the program. They solicited input from the APO as well as a wider group of observers. The APO provided comments and a summary of relevant questions from Suzanne Romain's Observer Survey (comments online: http://www.apo-observers.org/Observerweb/Sites/Links_navbar_main/hottopicsofder/hot_topics.htm).

The final version of the policy should be complete by December 2002. The APO will post online & publish in the next Mail Buoy. Thank you Rob & Brian for the opportunity to comment!

APO Comments on Proposed Rule to extend the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program through 2007 *(Copied from a letter dated 10/11/02)*

The Association for Professional Observers (APO) fully supports the extension of the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program through 2007 as well as the placement of NMFS staff or NMFS authorized personnel on groundfish vessels (67 FR 58452-58477). We agree with NMFS that "high quality observer data are a cornerstone of Alaska groundfish fisheries management."

However, we have the following concerns about the language in the Proposed Rule:

- The permit process for the observer service providers needs to include annual performance evaluations that are available to observers and include observer input as part of the evaluation process. In our opinion, the permit is analogous to a federal contract and services provided under such contracts are evaluated at regular intervals. We do not feel that a permitted provider should be exempt from similar evaluations.
- Previously, the regulations included a caveat to lower hiring standards if an insufficient number of applications were submitted from candidates with bachelor degrees. Is this regulation no longer applicable?
- At 50 CFR 679.5 (i)(2)(vii), the proposed rule states, "Unless alternative arrangements are approved by the Observer Program Office, an observer provider must not: ..(B) deploy an observer for more than 90 days;"

It would be useful to define when deployment time starts and stops. Our current understanding is that the countdown begins the day the observer boards their first vessel and ends the day the observer disembarks their last vessel. With the current wording deployment time could be defined as starting when an observer leaves the site of their briefing for the field and continuing until they leave the field to debrief.

- The Proposed Rule states, "Vessels carrying observers are required under regulations at 679.5(f)(1)(ii) to have on board a valid commercial fishing vessel safety decal issued by the Coast Guard. However, obtaining this decal through a Coast Guard inspection is a voluntary program and vessels are not prevented from operating without one." This language is somewhat confusing since many vessels operating in Alaska waters have 100% mandatory coverage requirements and the General prohibitions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act at 600.725(s) states that vessels may not "fish without an observer when the vessel is required to carry an observer." The current language and the previous rule seem to be in conflict.
- During the EA/RIR process, the APO requested safety training for prior observers be modified to coincide with requirements of sea-going RACE staff, other survey staff such as IPHC, or other observer programs. This request does

not appear to be addressed in this proposed rule. We would like to see this policy modified within the Observer Program regardless of whether it appears in the Final Rule.

- Page 58468, paragraph 1 states, “The proposed regulation would require that observers complete a NMFS electronic vessel and/or processor survey prior to their final debriefing”. Did you mean “prior to being deployed in a non-groundfish fishery”?
- The proposed rule states development and implementation of research projects as a component to justify NMFS to place staff on board vessels. The APO supports this justification but requests the agency publish an annual report or summary of these projects. The Observer Advisory Committee (OAC) has requested specific information on data needs and priorities from NMFS for almost a decade to no avail. A few of the OAC members (myself included) feel the lack of agency articulation regarding data needs is a major stumbling block in redesigning/restructuring the observer program.

We also view this regulatory package as yet another short-term Band-Aid for problems that require a long-term solution. The background statement indicates the Observer Advisory Committee (OAC) and North Pacific Council have **failed** to develop a new plan. The problems and issues with the program have not changed. The agency needs to take the lead to revamp the Observer Program by instituting the Research Plan (or something similar) with or without the Council’s approval. The Council process hasn’t produced a solution in over a decade, why should we expect this to change within the next five years.

The APO appreciates the work that has gone into producing this regulatory package and the outreach to observers and the APO regarding some of the policy language. Thank you for your time and effort.

APO Contracted to prepare Analysis of Recruitment and Retention Procedures for U.S. Fisheries Observers

The U.S. Dept. of Commerce/NOAA/NMFS/Office of Science and Technology/Fisheries Statistics and Economic Division negotiated on a sole source basis with the Association for Professional Observers (APO), located in Seattle, Washington, to prepare an Analysis of Recruitment and Retention Procedures for U.S. Fisheries Observers. There is a need to improve the methods currently used to recruit and retain observers in response to the increasing demand for reliable data on the impacts of fishing operations on living marine resources. This is especially critical to NMFS as it moves towards developing standardized bycatch reporting methodologies for all fishery management plans, with an increased reliance on observer programs to provide more complete information on both catch and bycatch. NMFS' ability to successfully manage the nation's fisheries is predicated on the collection of the highest quality scientific data. The results of the proposed analysis shall ensure that the most qualified and experienced personnel are recruited and retained to work as observers. In Phase I of the project, APO shall assess current hiring practices and identify methods to improve recruitment of qualified observers and identify methods to ensure and increase

retention of experienced observers. APO shall gather information from current and past NMFS Observer Program staff as well as current and past private contractors who provide or have provided observer services to the NMFS. Based upon the results of Phase I, NMFS has the option to renew this purchase order to complete the tasks identified in Phase II, if it is mutually agreed upon by the contractor and the NOAA requesting official. This is a notice of intent with no solicitation package available. Award will be made using simplified acquisition procedures. The Statement of Work can be viewed at: http://www.apo-observers.org/other/NOP_SOW_2002.pdf

Tracey Mayhew is the point of contact for the contract. Ms. Mayhew is based in Anchorage. Over the course of the next few months, she will be asking for input from observers and agency staff. If you have thoughts/suggestions, please contact her by phone: (907) 562-5122 or email: mayhewinak@yahoo.com. The APO will provide updates through the bi-weekly news online.



National Observer Program UPDATE

Third Biennial International Fisheries Observer Conference

The Third Biennial International Fisheries Observer Conference, scheduled for November 18-21, 2002, will be held in New Orleans, Louisiana at the Astor Crowne Plaza Hotel. The objectives of the conference are to bring together a broad representation from the international fisheries observer community to address some of the key issues common to observer programs. The conference will provide a platform for facilitated discussion of the role of observer programs as management, compliance, and scientific programs, and the current applications, limitations, and future uses of observers at sea. Observers are strongly encouraged to attend. The schedule & abstracts are posted on the conference website: <http://www.st.nmfs.gov/observerconference2002>.

Insurance and Liability

Based on recommendations from last summer’s Insurance Liability and Labor Workshop, draft legislative language has been developed that would provide injured observers a scheduled compensation package designed to ensure that their quality of life of is not severely diminished. The NOP distributed the draft language to government agencies, non-governmental organizations, contractors, observers, representatives from unions, insurance and fishing industries for informal feedback. The comments will be reviewed and a final report prepared by the end of October 2002.

The NOP and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program (NPGOP) assisted a former observer seeking compensation under the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA) for injuries sustained while working as an observer. Documentation was provided to the Department of Labor (DOL) that verified his status as an observer and eligibility for FECA compensation, which cleared the way for his claim to be adjudicated.

Observer Support

Observer position descriptions defining contracted fisheries observer duties and responsibilities were drafted and distributed to Regional Administrators (RAs), Science Directors (SDs), and Operations Deputies (ODs) for review and comment. The descriptions were originally drafted by the NOP, in coordination with NOPAT. Final position descriptions were forwarded to DOL in September, for incorporation into their catalog of job categories. It is anticipated that the incorporation of the position descriptions by DOL will ensure that wage rates for contracted fisheries observers are comparable to Federal observers, rendered from a uniform national standard, and at a wage rate that is competitive for attracting and retaining high quality observers.

The NOP awarded a contract to the Association for Professional Observers to review NOAA Fisheries recruitment and retention procedures for contracted observers. Recommendations from the review could lead to improvements in regional programs to more effectively recruit and retain experienced observers.

The NOP contracted for the development of curricula for high school and college level math and science students, to expose them to observer programs and how observer data are used in the management of fisheries. The objective of this project is to recruit the next generation of fisheries observers and scientists.

Observer Health and Safety

A contract was awarded to the Alaska Marine Safety Education Association (AMSEA) to evaluate and document current NMFS Fisheries Observer Safety Training courses, and make recommendations for the establishment of nationwide safety training standards to ensure that high quality and appropriate safety training is provided for all new and returning observers.

In addition, the NOP contracted with AMSEA to conduct a second Marine Safety Instructor Training (MSIT) for fisheries observer trainers. The training will focus on providing trainers with effective methods for training new and returning observers in the areas of marine and vessel safety and survival. AMSEA's methods emphasize hands-on, demonstrations, class involvement, role-playing, and feedback on training.

NOP Update provided by Dennis Hansford.

Fisheries Observer Logo T-Shirts Available



Ray Troll (of "Spawn Til You Die" fame) and Karen Lybrand have teamed up on a new "Fisheries Observer" logo, designed especially for NMFS observers. A limited number of t-shirts are being distributed by NMFS to long-term observers in appreciation

of all the hard work and dedication that observers demonstrate in performing their job. Additional t-shirts with the "Fisheries

Observer" logo are also available for sale at the web site <http://www.promoplace.com/6266/stores/NOAA>.



West Coast Groundfish Observer Program

West Coast Groundfish Observer Data Workshop

By Kelly van Wormer & Janell Majewski

Held on July 25th-26th.

Purpose:

A full year of observer data will be available for analysis at the end of October, 2002. It was prudent to discuss and prioritize the types of analyses to be conducted, and methodology that should be used for these analyses. In addition, a new model in 2001 was used to analyze the observer data collected from a voluntary observer pilot program (the EDCP observer program) and that model should be examined and updated to allow the appropriate use of the new observer data.

Participants:

- WCGOP Observer Program Staff
- Members of Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) stock assessment team
- Member of NWFSC Economics team
- Representatives from North Pacific, Hawaii, and Northeast Observer Programs
- Consultants from MRAG, International
- Representatives from Pacific Marine Conservation Council and Environmental Defense Fund

Contents of the Workshop:

1. WCGOP Observer Program Staff presented an overview of WOC fisheries management, observer sampling goals, observer sampling procedures, and problems encountered in first year of data collection.

West Coast Groundfish Observer Program

- Fisheries Management
 - Two-month cumulative landing periods called "trip limits"
 - Single species and multiple species quotas
- Observer Placement
 - Observers live in one port group during entire contract period
 - Program began with 20 year-round observers from Morro Bay, CA to Bellingham, WA
 - Eight more observers began 8-month contracts in March 2003. From March to July program employed 28 observers
 - Twelve more observers began 4-month contracts in July 2003. From July to present we have had over 30 observers

- Types of Gear Observed
 - Bottom Trawl, Midwater Trawl, Longline, Pot, and a variety of other hook gears (hook and line, pole gear, cable gear, etc), shrimp and prawn trawls
- Types of Fisheries Observed
 - Limited-Entry Trawl – Federally permitted groundfish trawl vessels
 - Limited-Entry Fixed Gear – Federally permitted longline and pot vessels
 - Open Access – State permitted and managed fisheries, i.e. shrimp, prawn, nearshore rockfish
- The goals of observer sampling in the WOC (Washington, Oregon, California fishery) include:
 - Collect Fishing Effort Information
 - Estimates of Total Catch Weight
 - Estimates of Total Discard Weight
 - Species Composition Sampling of Discarded Species
 - Documenting Reason Vessel is Discarding Species
 - Prohibited Species Sampling (Pacific Halibut, Salmon species, and Dungeness crab)
 - Biological Specimens

2. Dr. Jim Hastie and Dr. Rick Methot gave an overview of the models they will be using to estimate bycatch rates.

How the data conference was important to the WCGOP

The data conference allowed the coordinators, sampling designers, and end users of the data to meet and formally discuss their data needs. We are especially grateful to the representatives from other observer programs that supported us and provided guidance to our program. MRAG, who has done extensive work with observer programs, offered advice to ensure sampling protocols deliver the appropriate data for the stock assessment team and other end users.

West Coast Observers – Contract Update
by Dave Edick

On September 1, 2002 fifteen people began their second year as West Coast observers. Their contracts contain a number of changes that were included to address concerns raised by the observers during the program's first year. One of the most important changes, from the point of view of the observers, concerns pay for a minimum amount of sea time each month. West Coast observers are paid a base salary plus an additional amount over and above their base pay for at-sea days, so their incomes can suffer if fishing effort declines in a given month. In the fall of 2001, when it became evident that fishing effort on the coast was going to vary widely from month to month over the winter as well as regionally, Alaskan Observers, Inc. instituted a policy of paying all West Coast observers for a minimum of 12 deployed days each month. Observers welcomed this policy, but it was only a policy (rather than a contractual commitment), and as such it was subject to change at any

time. For the coming year, pay for a minimum of 12 sea days per month is a formal element of all West Coast Observer contracts, no longer subject to change.

Observers who are under contract for the September 2002 through August 2003 period will also receive two weeks paid vacation; they will receive a pay increase of approximately 6% October 1, followed by a pay increase of approximately 4% January 1; and they have also seen the deductible on their health insurance lowered from \$500.00 to \$200.00 annually.

Compensation for West Coast Observers working the September 2002 thru August 2003 period will range from \$42,834.00 per year for positions in Northern California, Oregon, and Washington to \$46,936 per year for positions in central California. (These are minimum figures, based on pay for only 12 deployed days per month. Observers deployed for more than 12 days in one or more months will have higher incomes.)

The West Coast Program – An Observer's Perspective by Jen Eichelberger

A year has passed and 15 of 20 observers who hold year-round positions with the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program have decided to stay on for another year. Despite the fact that we do sometimes have to pee in a bucket, 75% of us have decided that the pros of working for this program do, in fact, out-weigh the cons. Not everything has gone smoothly with the new program, but considering the challenges put before us, we have weathered the bumps very well. We have seen significant improvements in our contracts with AOI and we continue to work with our NMFS field coordinators to use and improve sampling protocols that are used to collect data on an amazingly diverse group of fishing vessels.

As someone who worked as an Alaskan Groundfish Observer for several years before joining the West Coast Program, I have experienced a dramatic change in lifestyle, and I have to say, I like the change. There are several differences between working for the 2 programs, but one of the most obvious differences is that we get to establish a residence and lead fairly normal lives while on shore, and we are on shore much more often. The pros of having my own place are hard to count, but just having my own bed to go home to and having all of my "stuff" available for use whenever I am not working is simply fabulous. The amount of time we each get to spend enjoying our shore life varies quite a bit from port to port, but I have only averaged 7 days at sea per month over the past year, so I have been able to enjoy a lot of free time on the beach. Some ports have more active vessels, and observers in those ports spend a lot more time at sea, whereas there are other ports where observers have seen even less activity than I have. Observers who end up working more than 12 sea days in a month earn additional sea day pay, so having less free time at home is compensated financially; I think most of us see

this as a win-win situation. When we are not at sea, we are on call 24/7 for vessel assignments, but if we maintain good communication with our vessels, other observers, and our coordinators, we can usually anticipate when we will have free time, and it allows us to enjoy recreational activities in and around our new homes. A disadvantage of this situation is that it is difficult to make plans ahead of time unless we want to schedule official time off. I have purchased concert tickets in advance and missed the concert I was hoping to attend more than once. However, almost all touring bands schedule a lot of concert dates in California, and I have managed to catch plenty of fabulous shows this summer, so I felt the gamble was worth taking.

The obvious disadvantage of having to provide your own place to live is cost, and in central California where I am stationed, that certainly does cut a big chunk out of my salary. However, when you consider that it is actually quite unusual to not need to provide for your own accommodations, this job still pays really well for a field biology job. It is really a trade-off. You can save more money if you work a lot up in Alaska, but if you work a lot in Alaska, it's difficult to have much of a personal life on shore.

Another big difference between working in Alaska and working for the West Coast Program is that the vessels that we work on are generally much smaller than anything you'd see fishing for Groundfish in Alaska. This also has advantages and disadvantages. Smaller vessels generally take shorter trips and catch less fish, but they obviously have fewer creature comforts on board. Over the past year, I have worked on vessels that ranged from 75 feet to 17 feet in length. The smallest of the boats that I've worked on did only day trips and had absolutely no facilities (open skiffs), whereas a few of the larger vessels I've worked on have had a working head and shower and stayed out for 5 days. The gear types that we see and fisheries that we observe also vary dramatically which introduces additional challenges in figuring out how to go about sampling. Although the challenge can be overwhelming at times, it is exciting to be breaking new ground and to be in a position to help develop sampling protocols that can be effectively applied to these new situations. All in all, I have found that being on the ground floor of this new observer program has been a very positive experience. Despite the uncertainty of how fisheries on the West Coast will be managed in the future and how changes in management might affect the observer program, I think it is clear that observer data will continue to be needed to help manage these fisheries and that this program will continue to offer a unique employment opportunity for observers that have grown a bit tired of living out of their sea bags.

WEST COAST GROUND FISH OBSERVER PROGRAM

Hello All!

The first year of the program just finished up on August 31st! So, what is it like to be involved in the West Coast Program? I'm sure many of you have already talked to those in the program and may have learned probably more than you want to know about it. However, for those of you who haven't heard what it's all about I hope the following will give at least a glimpse into the happenings.

The west coast observers are distributed along the coast from Bellingham, WA to Santa Barbara, CA. They are covering vessels that target or have incidental catch of groundfish stocks off the west coast. The gear types include trawlers, longliners, pots, traps, and a multitude of small vessel gears including fishing poles! Unlike the major fisheries in Alaska that most of us are familiar with, the fisheries off the west coast may discard a significant portion of the catch at sea. Until this year, the management of the fishery has depended on past studies to determine the bycatch rate used to calculate allowable take. These studies were relatively short spanned and covered only a limited portion of the coastline (see the Pickitch Study or the Enhanced Data Collection Project; both out of Oregon). An important piece to managing the resource responsibly and within the mandate of the Magnuson-Stevens Sustainable Fisheries Act is the observer program. Observer data is an important piece in establishing a reduction of bycatch in the west coast fishery. Therefore, the primary goal of the program is the estimation of total discard and composition along the west coast.

So how does an observer in the West Coast fishery estimate the amount and composition of discard? For simplicity sake, we will describe the gear type that takes the major proportion of groundfish along the coast: trawlers. The bulk of the observed groundfish trawl is bottom trawl gear and the mix of fish can be very diverse. A total catch estimate can be found by using one of multiple methods: an actual weight, a volumetric estimate, an average weight applied to a number of baskets or in unique cases, a visual estimate. This is very similar to what many observers do in other programs.

Once the total catch estimate is determined, the vessel will start to sort the catch. The retained catch is iced and brought to shore plants to process. They will retain the marketable species and discard unmarketable species or species they are not allowed to keep because of regulations. The crew sorts the species into management groupings called 'catch categories'. Catch categories can consist of a single species or multiple species. They often have different levels of allowable quota. As an example, blackcod is a catch category and currently has a limit of 4,500 lbs/ 2 months south of 40° 10' N. Minor slope rockfish is also a catch category and includes 10 species such as aurora, redbanded, and sharpchin rockfish. Its limit currently is 600 lbs/ 2 months north of 40° 10'N. This retained catch is sampled at the plant where it is delivered. There have been port biologists and samplers in ports along the west coast in all three states for years. Therefore, the observer's major focus is on the discard. Sampling the discard is easier said than done, however!

Observers sampling the vessels on the West Coast are faced with many challenges on how and what discard can be sampled. They include the size of the vessel, the type of the fishery, the crew, the size and composition of the catch. The first step to sampling the discard is to attempt to sort out all 'species of attention'; for example, salmon, Pacific halibut, and rockfish species. These sorted species would be put into catch categories such as Pacific halibut, Salmon and any one of a number of rockfish catch categories. If the number and amount of these species of attention is manageable, the total weight of these catch categories will be an actual weight. The remaining fish can be lumped into a Miscellaneous catch category. The weight of this category can be estimated in one of many ways, again depending on the size. An actual weight, a volumetric estimate or applying an average basket weight applied to a known number of baskets are some of the methods. The catch category is then randomly subsampled for composition. This is a pretty straightforward case.

Sampling methods can be confounded by vessel operations and size. Let's take the case above and apply it to a small vessel and a medium amount of discard in a haul. The bag is dumped in the trawl alley. The crew sorts out the retained, but sorts the large skates off to a side bin to get them out of their way. The observer sorts out all of the few salmon, Pacific halibut and discard rockfish left in the trawl alley. The remaining discard in the alley is too much to sort, weigh and count. The observer takes a volumetric measurement and randomly takes density and species composition baskets. It would be recorded as a Miscellaneous catch category. (Let's say the weight of Miscellaneous was found to be 2,300 lbs., 400 lbs. which was a species composition) Did you forget about the large discard skates thrown to a side bin? It is a discard so it has to be recorded! (Let's say the actual weight for the pile of skates was found to be 550 lbs. and all the skates were sorted and counted by species.) Unfortunately, the skates' weight and composition can't be combined into the Miscellaneous catch category. Why not? First, the method of estimating the weight of each of them differed. Second, to do so would suggest that a great proportion of the discard ($2,300 + 550 = 2850$) was mostly skates ($550/(400+550) = .5789$). Therefore in this case there would be two catch categories (Miscellaneous and Skate) in addition to the catch categories for species of attention. Each would have its own weight method and species composition.

The above is a relatively simple example. Commonly, the sampling situation is much more convoluted. Since sorting of fish can differ markedly between vessels, fisheries and size of the bags (codends), sampling methods designed to overcome them can be viewed as being complicated. This is a major difficulty in recording a good representation of discard; more often than not, a complicated picture cannot be painted in broad strokes. However, it also allows for a very accurate picture of certain species of attention or species infrequently encountered. The methods allow for sorting of all individuals of a certain species if time allows. This is extremely important when the limit of certain rockfish species is set at a very low level. The more accurate method of recording a representative picture of the discard for a 'species of attention' is preferred. An actual count

and weight of a species in a haul is preferable over a subsample of a species proportioned up to the total haul weight.

For those of you unfamiliar, I hope that this gives a little better idea what we are all about in the West Coast program. A bit more background and current issues of the West Coast fisheries can be found at the Pacific Fishery Management Council webpage <http://www.pcouncil.org/> and the Fishery Resource Analysis and Monitoring Division webpage <http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/fram/> (FRAM is the part of NMFS that is responsible for stock assessments done on West Coast groundfish).

The program staff can be reached via the program's toll free number (1-866-780-8064) or email address (NWFSC.observerprogram@noaa.gov). If you have any questions about the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program, please contact us.

Regards,
Jonathan Cusick
West Coast Groundfish Observer Team Lead



Hawaii Longline Observer Program Update

The most recent longline training class has five trainees from S. Korea. They are on contract with the National Fisheries Research & Development Institute's (NFRDI) Distant Water Resources Division. The NFRDI is developing an observer program for the S. Korean longline and purse seine fleets.



ALASKA FISHERMAN'S UNION INFO

For any union or contract related problems or questions, please contact Duke Bryan or Harold Holten at:
Alaska Fisheries Division-UIW
721 Sesame St., #1C
Anchorage, AK 99503
Ph: 907-561-4988
Toll free: 1-877-471-3425
Duke Bryan in Tacoma: 253-272-5551 or 253-272-7774
Email: dukeworks2@aol.com or haroldholten@ak.net

The latest versions of AOI, NWO and SWI union contracts can be found at the following URL:

http://www.apo-observers.org/union_page.html

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The APO attempts to update Job links on the website weekly. Visit <http://www.apo-observers.org/> and click on current jobs & internships in the left side navigation bar. If you'd like to be on the email list for weekly reminders/updates, send Kim an email at apo@apo-observers.org.

MISC. NOTES & TIDBITS

NEW MEMBERSHIP: if you want to become a member of the APO, please write, e-mail or call Kim Dietrich. An annual donation of \$15 is required. Donations are used to publish and distribute the *Mail Buoy* and to pay for costs of testifying at Council meetings out of state. Also, if you are not an observer but would like to receive your own copy of the *Mail Buoy*, there is an annual charge of \$10. The *Mail Buoy* is also available electronically either directly from the APO or via our website.



APO T-SHIRTS are available. Size options: L or XL. Color options: Black, but others can be ordered. The price is \$15 (sales tax included).

WEBSITES OF INTEREST:

North Pacific FMC: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/>
Pacific FMC: <http://www.pcouncil.org/>

National Observer Program (NOP) Website:
<http://www.st.nmfs.gov/nop/index.html>

North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program:
<http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/refm/observers/default.htm>

ObserverNet: <http://www.observernet.org/>



BOOKS

Publications utilizing observer data:

- Nel, D. C., P. G. Ryan, and B. P. Watkins. 2002. Seabird mortality in the Patagonian toothfish longline fishery around the Prince Edward Islands, 1996-2000. *Antarct. Sci.* 14: 151-161.
- Rochet, M.-J., I. Peronnet, and V. Trenkel. 2002. An analysis of discards from the French trawler fleet in the Celtic Sea. *ICES J. Mar. Sci.* 59: 538-552.
- Romanov, E. 2001. Bycatch in the tuna purse-seine fisheries of the western Indian Ocean. *Fish. Bull.* 100: 90-105.
- Sampson, David B. 2002. Analysis of Data from the At-Sea Data Collection Project. Final Report to the Oregon Trawl Commission.
[\[http://www.onid.orst.edu/~sampson/projects/edcp/OTC_final.pdf\]](http://www.onid.orst.edu/~sampson/projects/edcp/OTC_final.pdf)
- Walsh, W. A., P. Kleiber, and M. McCracken. 2002. Comparison of logbook reports of incidental blue shark catch rates by Hawaii-based longline vessels to fishery observer data by application of a generalized additive model. *Fish. Res.* 58: 79-94.
- Walsh, W. A., and P. Kleiber. 2001. Generalized additive model and regression tree analysis of blue shark (*Prionace glauca*) catch rates by the Hawaii-based commercial longline fishery. *Fish. Res.* 53: 115-131.
- Wienecke, B., and G. Robertson. 2002. Seabird and seal-fisheries interactions in the Australian Patagonian toothfish *Dissostichus eleginoides* trawl fishery. *Fisheries Research* 54: 252-265.
- ### THINGS TO DO (Seattle):
- UW School of Fisheries & Aquatic Sciences (SAFS) Quantitative Seminar every Friday, 12:30-1:20pm, Rm. 203, Fishery Sciences Building, 1122 Boat St. See: <http://students.washington.edu/gfay/seminar.html> for more information.
- UW SAFS Department Seminars, every Thursday, 4:00-5:00 pm, Rm. 102, Fisheries Science Bldg.
<http://www.fish.washington.edu/seminars/>
- Fisheries-Oceanography Coordinated Investigations (FOCI) Lunchtime Seminar Series. Thursdays, Noon, Bldg 4, Rm. 2039. For topics see www.pmel.noaa.gov/foci/seminar.html
- ### Conferences & Workshops
- 2ND INTERNATIONAL FISHERS FORUM**
November 19-22, 2002, Honolulu, Hawaii
Hosted by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council. See the Council's website at <http://www.wpcouncil.org/fishforum.htm> for additional details.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS/E-MAIL

APO General *apo_obs@hotmail.com*
Kim Dietrich (VP & Treas) 206-547-4228
dietrichk@qwest.net
Liz Mitchell (APO Board) *emitch@efn.org*
Kelly Van Wormer (Secretary) *akfishsticks@hotmail.com*
Tracey Mayhew (contracted) mayhewinak@yahoo.com
(907) 562-5122
Suzanne Romain (contracted) *sromain@hotmail.com*

OTC 907-257-2770
NPFMC (Council) 907-271-2809



UPCOMING MEETINGS

North Pacific Fishery Management Council:

Anchorage, AK, December, 2002
<http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/>

North Pacific Plan Team Meetings: Seattle, WA,
November 12-15.

Pacific Fishery Management Council: Foster City, CA,
Oct 28-Nov 1, 2002 <http://www.pcouncil.org/>

BRIEFING & TRAINING SCHEDULE

Visit <http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/refm/observers/schedules.htm> for more up to date information on groundfish training & briefing.



INTERESTED IN WRITING/PUBLISHING THE MAIL BUOY or doing other APO tasks?

Volunteers needed—contact Suzanne, Kim or Kelly. We're always looking for extra help with letter writing/editing, insurance research, grant writing, database updates. The **SUBMISSION DEADLINE** for the next issue is **December 15, 2002**.

The APO continues to be interested in your ideas - if you have an idea for an article or story, would like to respond to a previous article, or think the APO has overlooked some issues, drop us a letter or call any time. Contributions from all sectors are welcome. **Thanks to Dave Edick, Jen Eichelberger, Jeanette Alas, Tim McHugh, Vicki Cornish, Dennis Hansford, Suzanne Romain, Janell Majewski, Jonathan Cusick, Kelly Van Wormer, Gillian Stoker & Stuart Arceneaux** for your articles/comments, your prompt answers to questions, requests for information in electric format, and/or your editing contribution. Your efforts are greatly appreciated. (KD)

WHAT IS THE ASSOCIATION FOR PROFESSIONAL OBSERVERS?

APO is a non-profit corporation dedicated to the exchange of information for observers and to the conservation of marine resources. Specifically, APO's Objectives are: (A) **To facilitate the exchange of information for observers regarding fisheries in the United States territorial waters by:** *creating a professional association and network for exchanging information and expertise and fostering contacts within the various observer programs, management personnel and the fishing industry throughout the nation; *disseminating information concerning observer, marine conservation, biological and interagency issues via a quarterly newsletter, the Mail Buoy, maintaining a website and listserv for up-to-date information between newsletters, and developing brochures explaining procedures to obtain better access to publicly owned information; *encouraging and promoting observers to attain positions of leadership within the fisheries; *identifying the needs of observers within the current management system in United States fisheries by formulating a Bill of Rights assuring observers the right to adequate insurance, wages and safe working conditions; providing input to the developing National Observer Program to standardize protocol on a national basis, developing a national vessel safety protocol for vessels carrying observers to promote and maintain a safe working environment for all observers; working with agency officials to monitor cases where safety violations occur; and *encouraging national and international growth of APO by promoting chapters to qualified groups, including observers from private, state and federally supported observer programs, who will promote the purposes of APO. (B) **To encourage the conservation and sustainability of marine and other aquatic resources by:** *initiating a partnership with the administrative agencies and scientific communities to enhance biological sampling protocol and overall data quality; *helping secure funding for observers, who are the base-line data collectors, to participate in observer program workshops for the purpose of improving the monitoring systems of the nation's fisheries; *educating members and non-members concerning the uses of observer data; *disseminating abstracts and references of emerging research and publications to the public relevant to observer programs or that which is based on observer data; *identifying problems in sampling protocol and recommending alternatives and future priorities to management agencies to improve data quality;

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PLEASE FORWARD

NOTE: The date listed on the mailing label is when your dues expire. If you're past due, you will not receive the next issue of the Mail Buoy.