

NMFS WEST COAST REGION – SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES DIVISION
REPORT ON WEST COAST REGION OBSERVER PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The West Coast Region Fisheries Observer Program has placed NMFS trained observers aboard large mesh drift gillnet (DGN) fishing vessels since 1990 primarily to monitor the incidental capture of marine mammals and sea turtles. Observers also record details on fishing activity, gear configuration, and the catch and disposition of target and non- target fish species. Observers collect biological samples for use in life history studies, stock assessments, and much of the information is used in published papers by Southwest Fisheries Science Center scientists. Catch summaries by fishing season are available at: http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/wc_observer_programs/sw_observer_program_info/data_summ_report_sw_observer_fish.html.

Observers for the DGN fishery are deployed under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, (Category I Fishery) and the West Coast Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan. NMFS is responsible for the overall program, implementing national observer policies, and designing the program consistent with regulations and/or recommendations about coverage for individual fisheries. NMFS conducts observer training, initial debriefing, and data management. A NMFS approved contractor, Frank Orth and Associates, (FOA) is responsible for observer recruitment and employment, monitoring vessels activity, observer deployment, logistics, and delivery of observer data to NMFS. Vessel owners and operators are responsible for contacting FOA to make arrangements for mandatory placement of trained observers aboard their vessels (50 CFR 229.7).

Observer coverage in the DGN fishery has varied from 4.4% in 1990 to 37.4% in 2013 with a target of 20% coverage since the implementation of the Pacific Ocean Cetacean Take Reduction Team. For the 2013/14 season and emergency rule mandating 100% coverage in an offshore zone was in effect and NMFS increased observer coverage to 34.2% (see Table 1).

Although the West Coast Region Observer Program has primarily focused on the DGN fishery since 1990, several other fisheries have been observed under the MMPA, ESA and MSA including:

- EPO Purse Seine (1976-1994)
- California Set Gillnet (1990-94, 1999-2000, 2006-07, 2010-13)
- California Small Mesh Drift Gillnet (2006-07, 2010-12)
- Albacore Troll (2004-07), HMS CPFV (2005-07)
- Coastal Pelagic Species Purse Seine (2004-08)
- Coastal Tuna Purse Seine (2004-07)
- Shallow Set Pelagic Longline (2001-05)
- Deepset Pelagic Longline (2005-present)

Table 1. Observer Coverage and effort in the DGN fishery since 1990:

Calendar Year	Total Sets	Observed Sets	% Observer Coverage
1990	4078	178	4.4
1991	4778	470	9.8
1992	4379	596	13.6
1993	5442	728	13.4
1994	4248	759	17.9
1995	3673	572	15.6
1996	3392	421	12.4
1997	3039	692	22.8
1998	3353	587	17.5
1999	2634	526	20.0
2000	1936	444	22.9
2001	1665	339	20.4
2002	1630	360	22.1
2003	1467	298	20.3
2004	1084	223	20.6
2005	1075	225	20.9
2006	1433	266	18.6
2007	1241	204	16.4
2008	1103	149	13.5
2009	761	101	13.3
2010	492	59	12.0
2011	435	85	19.5
2012	445	83	18.7
2013	470	176	37.4