

NOAA Fisheries Service, Southwest Region Observer Program

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Observer Program Mandate and Authority

Mission of the Program: To document the incidental take of marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, target and non-target fish species, and to collect selected biological specimens. To collect socio-economic data from vessel owners and operators.

Fishery management: Federal and State (California Department of Fish & Game; Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife; Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife)

Mandatory authority to place observers: Marine Mammal Protection Act, Category I and II Fisheries; Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Fishery Management Plans

Program duration (domestic fisheries): July 1990 to present (2005)

Annual program costs: Agency costs US \$1,025,000

Funding source(s): Government funded (Base, \$450,000 Marine Mammal Protection Act Programs funds; Temporary, \$575,000 Reducing Bycatch funds)

Fisheries Observed

Current:

California / Oregon drift gillnet for swordfish and thresher shark (1990 to present)

California pelagic longline for swordfish or tunas (2001 to present)

California coastal purse seine for sardine, anchovy, Pacific mackerel, and squid (2004 to present)

Southern California purse seine for tunas (2004 to present)

North Pacific albacore troll (2004 to present)

New, Completed, Transferred:

Recreational charter / party vessels for tunas and sharks (new 2005)

Southern California small mesh drift gillnet for yellowtail and white seabass (2002 to 2004)

California set gillnet for California halibut, white seabass, and soupfin shark (1990 to 1994 and 1998 to 1999)

Hawaii pelagic longline for tunas and swordfish (1994 until transfer 1998)

Observer Program Management

Brief overview of program structure: The Southwest Region (SWR), Long Beach, is responsible for monitoring all highly migratory and coastal pelagic species fisheries on the U.S. west coast (California, Oregon, Washington). Fisheries to have observer coverage are determined through cooperative input of priorities from the Sustainable Fisheries and Protected Species Divisions within the SWR. Associated sampling plans and coverage levels are determined by Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC), La Jolla, staff. Observer training is conducted in conjunction with SWFSC, Los Angeles County Natural History Museum, NOAA Fisheries Service Enforcement, U.S.

Coast Guard, and the fishing industry. By February 2005, 315 biological technicians have been hired and trained with over 4700 trips completed. During the 2004-05 fishing season, there were 12 observers collecting data from five fisheries. Vessels range in size from 40 to 90 feet in length and trips typically last 2 to 50 days. The SWFSC, Coastal Marine Mammal and Fisheries Resource Divisions receive all observer data and biological specimens. Among many uses of observer data, observed marine mammal mortalities are used to calculate estimates of incidental take rates of marine mammals in preparation of the Annual Stock Assessment Reports. To ensure consistency of standards for observers and the programs, SWR, Observer Program staff, are active participants within the National Observer Program Advisory Team process.

Service delivery type and function of each entity: NOAA Fisheries is responsible for observer training, initial debriefing, and data management. A NOAA Fisheries approved contractor is responsible for observer recruitment, monitoring vessel activity, observer deployment, logistics, insurance / benefits, and delivery of observer data to NOAA Fisheries. Vessel owners and operators are responsible for contacting the designated contractor to make arrangements for mandatory placement of NOAA Fisheries trained observers aboard their vessels.

Other participating agencies: Through a cooperative agreement with the California Department of Fish and Game, total annual fishing effort is provided for use in estimating total marine mammal and sea turtle mortality.

**NOAA Fisheries, Southwest Region
Observer Programs Funded in FY 2005
Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA),
Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA)**

| FMC | Fishery(ies) | Fleet size | Authority to place observers | Season of operation | Amount funded and Funding source(s) in 2005 | Program duration | % coverage/ # of observers/ est. sea days in 2005 |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|----------------------------|--|-------------------------|--|
| Southwest Region Office | California/Oregon pelagic drift gillnet | 60 vessels MMAP permits (40 active) | MMPA Cat. II (50CFR229) MSFCMA (50CFR660) | May-Jan | NMFS \$450K (MMPA) | 1990 to present | 19-21%; approx. 15 observers; target 350 sea days |
| Southwest Region Office | California tuna/swordfish pelagic longline | 6 vessels MMAP permits (1active) | MMPA Cat. II (50CFR229) MSFCMA (50CFR660) | Sept-May | NMFS \$150K (Reducing Bycatch) | 2001 to present | 100%; approx. 1-6 observers; target 300 sea days |
| Southwest Region Office | California purse seine – coastal pelagic species | 70 vessels MMAP permits | MMPA Cat. II (50CFR229) MSFCMA (50CFR660) | Annual | NMFS \$150K (Reducing Bycatch) | 2004 to present | 10%; 4 observers; target 200 days |
| Southwest Region Office | California purse seine – tunas | 10 vessels MMAP permits | MMPA Cat. II (50CFR229) MSFCMA (50CFR660) | July-Oct | NMFS \$50K (Reducing Bycatch) | 2004 to present | 33%; 4 observers; target 15 days |
| Southwest Region Office | North Pacific albacore troll | Approx. 800 vessels | MSFCMA (50CFR660) | May-Oct | NMFS \$65K (Reducing Bycatch) | 2004 to present | 1%; 4 observers; target 150 days |
| Southwest Region Office | HMS recreational charter vessels | Approx. 100 vessels | MSFCMA (50CFR660) | July-Oct | NMFS \$50K (Reducing Bycatch) | 2005 | 5%; 4 observers; target 100 days |