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## WHAT IS A FISHERIES OBSERVER?

Many people have no idea how the nation's fisheries are managed. Simply, in order to know how much quota of fish to give fishermen and to know how fishing practice policies impact other marine organisms, the agencies need fisheries observers to monitor at sea the fishing boat operations.

Fisheries observers are independent representatives of the fisheries management agency and are usually the only source of independently collected information on the impacts of fishing upon the marine environment. They are hired by a fisheries management agency or by a third party contractor and receive additional training in the monitoring of specific fisheries.

What do fisheries observers do?

Different fisheries observer programs have specific objectives, but generally, fisheries observers live on board the fishing vessel and ideally are an independent source of information on the vessels' daily catch, bycatch ("unintended catch", including unwanted fish, corals, crab and other invertebrates, seabirds, marine mammals and sea turtles), gear specifications, fisheries and marine pollution violations, and fishing locations.

Observers spend anywhere from 1 day to 3 months out at sea before returning to the agency to be "debriefed".

Upon completion of each monitoring trip, observers are “debriefed” and at this time they explain to an agency fishery biologist the details of their trip. They explain the sampling protocols employed and any specific modifications. They review any unusual occurrences or observations, violations observed, and any safety problems or other hardships they endured while carrying out their duties. This data is then integrated into the regional agency’s database that they use to monitor the fish quotas.

### Hiring requirements of a Fisheries Observer

Generally, fisheries observers are required to have an educational background in the biological sciences and a proven ability to handle life at sea. Specific programs have additional or less requirements. Also required is an independent attitude, an ability to get along with people in tight quarters and strong personal integrity. "Hang Loose" and "Stand By" are the general mottos for observers because conditions, boats and circumstances often change at the last minute. If you enjoy a life of adventure, hard work, personal satisfaction, and contribution to the management of the nation's fisheries, observer work could be for you.