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North Pacific Observer Program Update

Freezer Longline Coalition Symposium
May 5, 2026

Observer Program Impact Summary

245

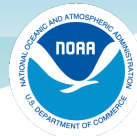
Distinct Observers
trained & deployed

428

Distinct Cruises
deployed on

25,911

Total Collection Days



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2025 Observer Data Collections

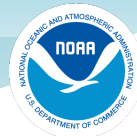
17 Freezer Longline Vessels were observed

- 7,611 sets retrieved – over 48% were sampled by observers
- 12,096 P.Cod lengths collected (12,444 from other species)
- 2,159 age samples collected (from 14 different species; includes otoliths, scales, vertebrae)
- 943 maturity samples collected from Pacific cod, Pollock, Big Skates, Longnose skates, and AK skates used to determine spawning timing and status
- 8,735,426 hook counts were verified by the observers



2026 Observer Data Collection Changes

- **Runway Alaska -FMA Photo project.**
 - FMA Project (need updated photos)
 - Must use NMFS issued camera
- **Shark ID Addendum**
 - Identifying unusual shark species.
- **P.Cod Genetics -Fin Clips**
 - Jan-Apr 2026
 - Collected from Female P.cod.
- **Sunflower Sea Star**
 - Now has a species Code and is needed for ID purposes.



Keeping the Work Environment Safe

- NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement offers, “Ensuring a Safe Work Environment for Observers”
 - Jaclyn.smith@noaa.gov - Observer Liaison Agent
- NOAA’s Workplace Violence Protection and Response will provide training or consultation with industry to help ensure a safe working environment
 - Lori.Newell@noaa.gov - WVPR Regional Representative
- OLE meetings with vessel companies
 - Discussions focused on current issues detected in the fishing fleet in general and in specific sectors.



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Questions?



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Current Electronic Monitoring (EM) requirements and issues for small LL vessels.



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A Vessel Monitoring Plan (VMP) is required yearly and must be signed by vessel operator/owner.

- VMP for small IFQ longliners has 15 -31 pages of documentation.
 - The process involves the vessel personnel and EM Service Provider staff.
 - Once VMP is completed it is sent to Alaska Regional Office for approval.
 - Once approved the VMP is good for the year unless deficiencies are noticed during review and then amendments are required during the fishing season or the vessel may not fish.

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3//2025-01/Nontrawl-2025-VMP.pdf>



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Primary responsibility on successful data collection is on the vessel operator.

- Once a VMP is approved the Captain/crew become responsible for the data collection.
- Captain must make sure all VMP requirement are being met at all times, and if something goes wrong must report it from sea.
 - Constant monitoring of the EM components is required during all fishing events.
 - Must self report issues. If issues are found during video review it is to late.
 - Potentially some issues could end trips/delay trip starts.



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Each Trip Captains Must:

✓ **Power:** Maintain uninterrupted power to the EM unit while the vessel is underway.

System may be powered down at anchor (while stationary). If vessel moves from the stationary location, EM unit must be powered on and maintain uninterrupted power.

✓ **Maintain Equipment:** Make certain that EM system components are not tampered with, disabled, destroyed, or operated or maintained improperly unless directed to make changes by NMFS, the EM service provider, or as directed in the troubleshooting guide of the VMP.



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Daily Requirements:

Logbook: Complete a NMFS Logbook entry for each haul and add in the comments section:

- If the vessel fished at night during the trip;
- EM malfunctions encountered during the trip;
- If marine mammals were observed feeding on the catch as it was brought aboard; and
- If/why the system was shut down or transitioned to sleep mode during the trip.



Regulatory requirements



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Marine Mammals

Incidental interactions include any action that results in an injury (as stated at 50 CFR 229.2) or the collection of an already deceased animal. Any incidental mortality or serious injury of marine mammals must be documented in your logbook and reported through the Marine Mammal Authorization Program.

- When reporting an interaction with a previously dead animal, please fill out the reporting form and use the notes section to specify that the animal was dead previous to fishing activities and give the reasons why this is apparent to you.
- Marine mammal depredation: Note in the logbook each set where marine mammals were feeding on the catch.



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Regulatory requirements continued:

Seabirds:

- Hold seabirds up to the camera for 3 seconds and show certain key parts of the animal, such as the beak, to the hauler view camera.
- Vessels are required to complete a Threatened and Endangered Bird Species Encounter Reporting Form (USFWS) when an encounter occurs for short-tailed albatross, spectacled eider, Steller's eider or other ESA-listed species.

Prohibited species catch (PSC): handling should follow regulations outlined 50 CFR 679.21. This includes non-retained Pacific halibut.

- Return all prohibited species, or parts thereof, to the sea immediately, with a minimum of injury, regardless of its condition (50 CFR 679.21(a)(2)(ii)).
- PSC as defined in 50 CFR 679.2, includes Pacific salmon (*Oncorhynchus* spp.), steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*), Pacific herring (*Clupea harengus pallasii*), king and Tanner crab



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Prior to each haul or set.

- Verify System Is Running Correctly
 - Verify that all cameras are recording and all sensors and other required EM system components are functioning as instructed in Appendix B – Guide for Vessel Operator.
 - Check the monitor and verify that the camera views are consistent with the images provided in Appendix A -Vessel Installation Details.
- Clear Camera Views: Clean cameras to maintain video quality and make sure camera views are not blocked.



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Catch Handling Requirements:

- Deployment of pot and hook/line gear in the same set is prohibited.
- All catch must be handled within view of the cameras as defined in the camera descriptions and deck diagram in Appendix A -Vessel Installation Details.
- All catch processing from the previous set must be complete prior to hauling the next set



Common Issues for EM Vessels

High Priority Issues

72 hr wait period; notify provider.

- Monitor & GPS
- Insufficient storage
- Control Center
- Insufficient lighting
- Hauling camera
- Deck/Discard Camera
- Continuous Power (IFQ)

Low Priority Issues

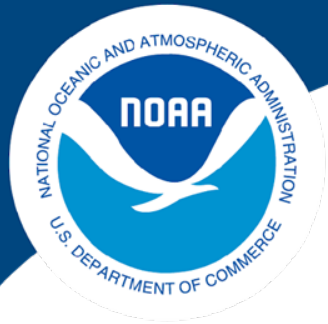
May depart; notify provider.

- Streamer line camera
- Hydraulic sensor
- Rotation sensor
- Keyboard & Mouse

VMP & Compliance

May require VMP amendment.

- Camera: Inactive, dirty, reposition, focus, or obstructed
- Catch: Handling out of view or inconsistent with VMP
- Data: Incomplete HD, missing trips, or no logbook
- System: Tampering or late activation



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Small LL compared to Freezer Longliner.

Small IFQ/P.Cod LL requires at least 3 cameras that must be functional at all time on an EM selected trip.

- Hauling Camera
- Deck/processing camera
- Bird line camera

Areas where freezer longliners would likely require functional cameras:

- Hauling (1-2) – must see groundline exit the water.
- Follow the fish until processing for any missed discards or targeted species discards
- Gear room cameras to verify total segments
- Hook count camera
- Bird line camera
- Others (?)

Other things to consider:



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- Retrieval speed may need to be slowed to ensure all animals can be identified;
- Prohibited species handling is captured on video;
- IPHC should be consulted early as to impacts on on injury assessments from vessels with EM;
- Timeliness of the data - current review capabilities do not allow for near-real time data....yet; and
- Stock assessment impacts need to be considered as to impacts of a loss of biological specimens and information on age and condition of harvest.