

# HIGH VOLUME FISHERIES: A Year in Review

**2012...** A busy and challenging year for high volume fisheries and fisheries observers. Observer coverage for midwater trawl trips targeting Atlantic herring in the groundfish Closed Area 1(CA1) continued at 100%. Our high volume fisheries certified observers covered a total of 222 midwater paired trawl trips (paired and single), 99 in CA1, for a total of 806 sea days!! This marked an increase of 67 observer sea days from 2011 midwater trawl trips.

Through close coordination between the Fisheries Sampling Branch (FSB), observers, and the NEFOP provider, all herring vessels calling in for CA1 were covered. This was significant because without the observer hustle, vessels would have found themselves tied to the docks and unable to fish in CA1. Observers were asked to cover back-to-back trips, not only while submitting data on time, but maintaining high data quality. Observers met this challenge head on and did a great job!

In effort to meet the demand for 100% observer coverage in the CA1, coverage on carrier vessels for the purse seine fleet dropped from the previous year. Observers were still very busy covering the purse seiners, and accomplished 57 purse seine trips targeting Atlantic herring and menhaden, for a total of 110 sea days.



Photo Credit: NEFOP: NEFOP observer sorting sub sample baskets on a herring trip.



Photo Credit: NEFOP: Purse seiner hauling in the catch.

**Haddock Stats...** The herring fishery is allocated 1% of the haddock acceptable biological catch (ABC)



for each stock of haddock. When the haddock catch cap for a particular haddock stock is caught all midwater trawl gear is prohibited from fishing for, possessing, or landing more than 2000 lb of herring in that particular haddock stock area for the remainder of the multispecies fishing year (May 1, 2012 – April 30, 2013). Observer data are used in addition to vessel VMS reports and VTR data to monitor the incidental take of haddock in the fishery. As of

December 15, 2012 the haddock catch for the midwater trawl Atlantic herring fishery is as follows:

Area	Estimated haddock catch (mt)	Allotted Haddock Quota (mt)	Percent of Quota
George's Bank (3)	228.52	286	79.9%
Gulf of Maine (1A, 1B)	0.041	9	0.45%

**Herring Stats...** The midwater trawl fleet overall had a good year. They harvested their herring quota, with some overages, without reaching the haddock cap. These figures are determined by VTR and dealer reports by area.

Area	Cumulative Catch (mt)	Quota (mt)	Percent of Quota	2012 Harvest Period
Gulf of Maine (1A)	25,070	27,668	91%	June - Nov
Gulf of Maine (1B)	4,277	2,723	157%	Jan - Mar
South Coastal (2)	22,948	22,146	104%	Jan - Feb
George's Bank (3)	40,870	38,146	107%	May - Oct



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### Pressing Issues...

River herring bycatch continues to plague the Atlantic herring fishery. A petition requesting alewife and blueback herring each be listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act has sparked the interest of several groups. The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) and the University of Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) teamed up in 2011 to start a voluntary River Herring Bycatch Avoidance Program with midwater trawl vessels to reduce river herring bycatch. The New England Fisheries Management Council (NEFMC) voted at the June 2012 NEFMC meeting to adopt a two-phase bycatch avoidance program in Amendment 5 based on the program developed by MA DMF/SMAST. FSB is collaborating with the MA DMF to assist vessel captains in reporting incidental river herring catches real time (hint, hint...read your NEFOP Memo!).



The Final Amendment 5 to the Atlantic herring fishery management plan (FMP) was submitted September 10, 2012. However, it is still unclear when the measures will be put in place (likely sometime in 2013). A large portion of Amendment 5 deals with catch monitoring and will directly affect high volume fisheries observers. Included are provisions to enhance observers' ability to maximize sampling at sea (good news!) and document net slippage (not to fear...we're already doing that!). The council's *preferred alternative* involving slippage includes full sampling requirements by observers and a trip termination requirement when 10 slippage events occur by gear type and management area. Observers currently do an excellent job sampling catch brought onboard and documenting slippage events.

# amendment 5

Another hot topic in Amendment 5 is the implementation of 100% observer coverage for all category A and B herring vessels. The NEMFC voted that observer coverage will be funded through a combination of industry and federal funds, but the mechanism has yet to be determined (we'll keep you posted!). More information regarding Amendment 5 can be found at <http://www.nefmc.org/herring/index.html>

Observers also faced a major shift in NEFOP service providers from A.I.S., Inc to MRAG Americas. In April, MRAG Americas was awarded a bridge contract, and was recently awarded the final 5 year NEFOP contract, providing NEFOP observer coverage from North Carolina to Maine. To meet coverage demands of the NEFOP program, several trainings were held, including three high volume fisheries trainings. These trainings played a crucial role in getting the new observer cadre up to speed and out on the boats. As MRAG Americas settles into their new role, observers continue to meet the demands of the program, despite the challenges of 2012.

The importance placed upon observer data is ever increasing and plays a vital role in management decisions. 2012 was a year well done and FSB staff recognizes the hard work involved in collecting accurate and unbiased data. Members of the scientific community and fishing industry continue to praise the work ethic and professionalism of the NEFOP observers and we wish to extend that sentiment directly to you. Let's take a deep breath and welcome the new challenges of 2013.

## Observer Highlights...



Photo Credit: NEFOP: Mid-water pair trawlers

*“Overall she conducted her job very professionally”*

*“He has been happy with all the observers lately”*



Photo Credit: NEFOP: NEFOP observer sorting sub sample baskets on a herring trip.

*“Excellent observer!.....*

*....very competent...*

*....was a good worker”*

*“Commented on how safe and by the book the observer did his job”*



Photo Credit: NEFOP: Herring vessel at sea.

*“Did everything he was supposed to do. No problems”*