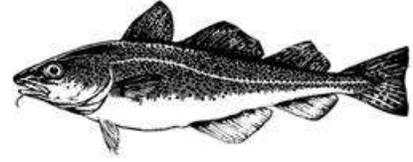


**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
NEWS RELEASE**



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**CHANGES TO THE FEDERAL NORTH PACIFIC GROUND FISH
AND HALIBUT OBSERVER PROGRAM**

Beginning January 1, 2013, the National Marine Fisheries Service will implement a new fisheries observer program for Alaska's federal commercial groundfish and halibut fisheries. The new Observer Program will change how observers are deployed, how observer coverage is funded, and the pool of vessels and processors that must have some or all of their operations observed. These changes will increase the statistical reliability of data collected by the program, address cost inequality among fishery participants, and expand observer coverage to previously unobserved fisheries. The program primarily affects those vessels that have been determined to need partial coverage, meaning they are not required to carry an observer during all of their fishing trips. Operations in the partial coverage category will be randomly selected for observer coverage when fishing for halibut or when directed fishing for groundfish in the federally-managed or state parallel groundfish fisheries with a Federal Fisheries Permit (FFP). Regulations for this program use the common definition for "parallel groundfish fishery" as a fishery that occurs in state waters, is open at the same time as federal groundfish fisheries in federal waters, and groundfish catch is deducted from the federal total allowable catch (TAC).

Observer coverage in the partial coverage category will be funded through revenue generated from an exvessel value-based fee. The observer fee is 1.25% of the exvessel value of the groundfish and halibut subject to the fee, based on standardized prices that will be published in the Federal Register, and is intended to be split evenly between the vessel owner/operator and processor or registered buyer. The landings that are subject to the observer fee include fish harvested in the EEZ and in state waters where the catch is subtracted from the federal TAC and the vessel is carrying an FFP. More information and frequently asked questions on the restructured observer program can be found at: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/observers/> or by contacting the Observer Program office in Seattle at: (206) 526-4195 or (206) 526-4194.

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