



NOAA Fisheries Updates Policy on Issuance of Waivers Under Emergency Rule

June 17, 2021

A vessel will not be eligible for release from observer or monitor coverage if a fully vaccinated observer or a quarantined/shelter in place observer is available.



Observers. Credit: NOAA Fisheries

Observers and monitors, at sea and shoreside, are an essential component of commercial fishing operations in the U.S. They provide critical information that is necessary to keep

fisheries open and to provide sustainable seafood to our nation during this time. A little more than a year ago, NOAA Fisheries clarified its [policy](#) for how vessels could receive a waiver from required observer or at-sea monitor coverage. That approach was appropriate under the circumstances. However, in the United States, much has changed and improved since then. COVID-19 vaccines are widely available and infection rates are dropping. At this point, we need to acknowledge and adapt to improved conditions and, in turn, update our policy for issuing waivers under the Emergency Rule national-level criteria.

As of today, a vessel is no longer eligible for release from observer or monitor coverage under the Emergency Rule or regional waiver criteria if a fully vaccinated or quarantined/shelter in place observer is available. Per guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an observer will be considered fully vaccinated 2 weeks after their second dose of a two-dose series, or 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine. A quarantined/shelter in place observer is one who has been isolated in place for 14 days. The observer provider companies track and confirm observer vaccination/shelter in place status and they will confirm when observers are ready for deployment.

This updated policy applies to all full- and partial-coverage fisheries where observers and at-sea monitors are required. NOAA Fisheries may still waive observer and at-sea monitoring requirements under other circumstances, based on the national-level criteria.

The pandemic is an evolving situation, so we will continue to monitor local public health notifications and the CDC for any updates and adapt as needed.

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