

Fishery Monitoring and Research Division Update

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting
October 3, 2023

KB McArdle, acting Fishery Monitoring Research Division (FMRD) Chief

Outline

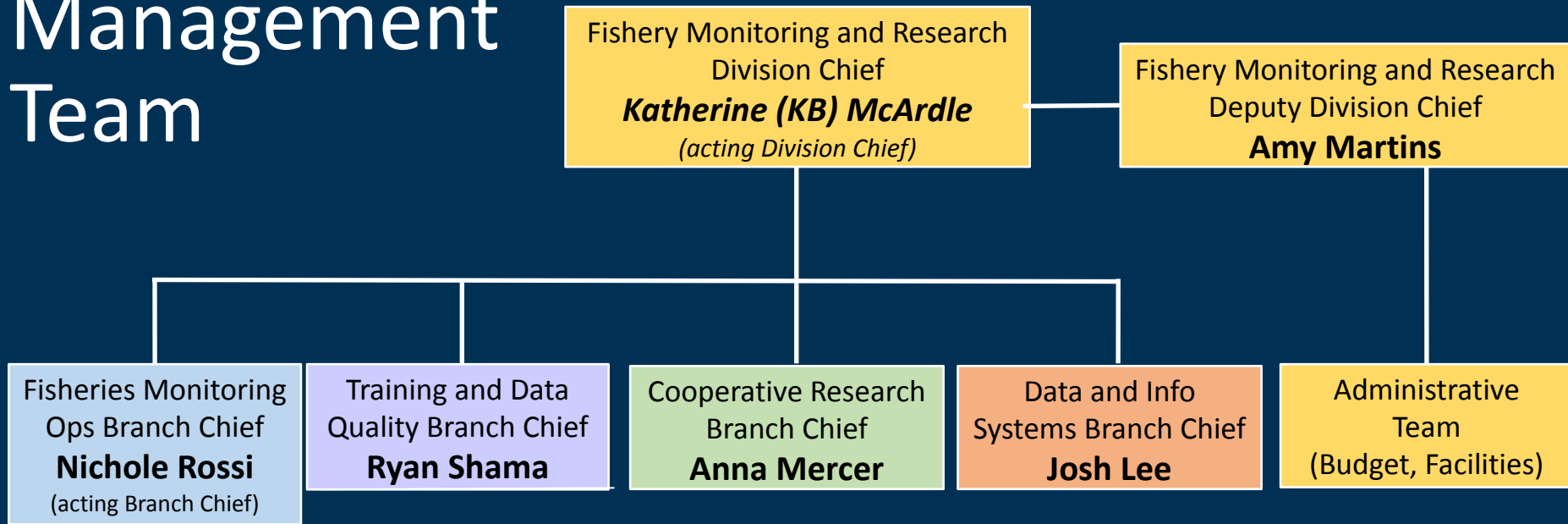
- Introduction: Mission and Organization
- Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology
- Summary of Coverage Accomplishments
- Programmatic Updates

Introduction: Mission and Organization

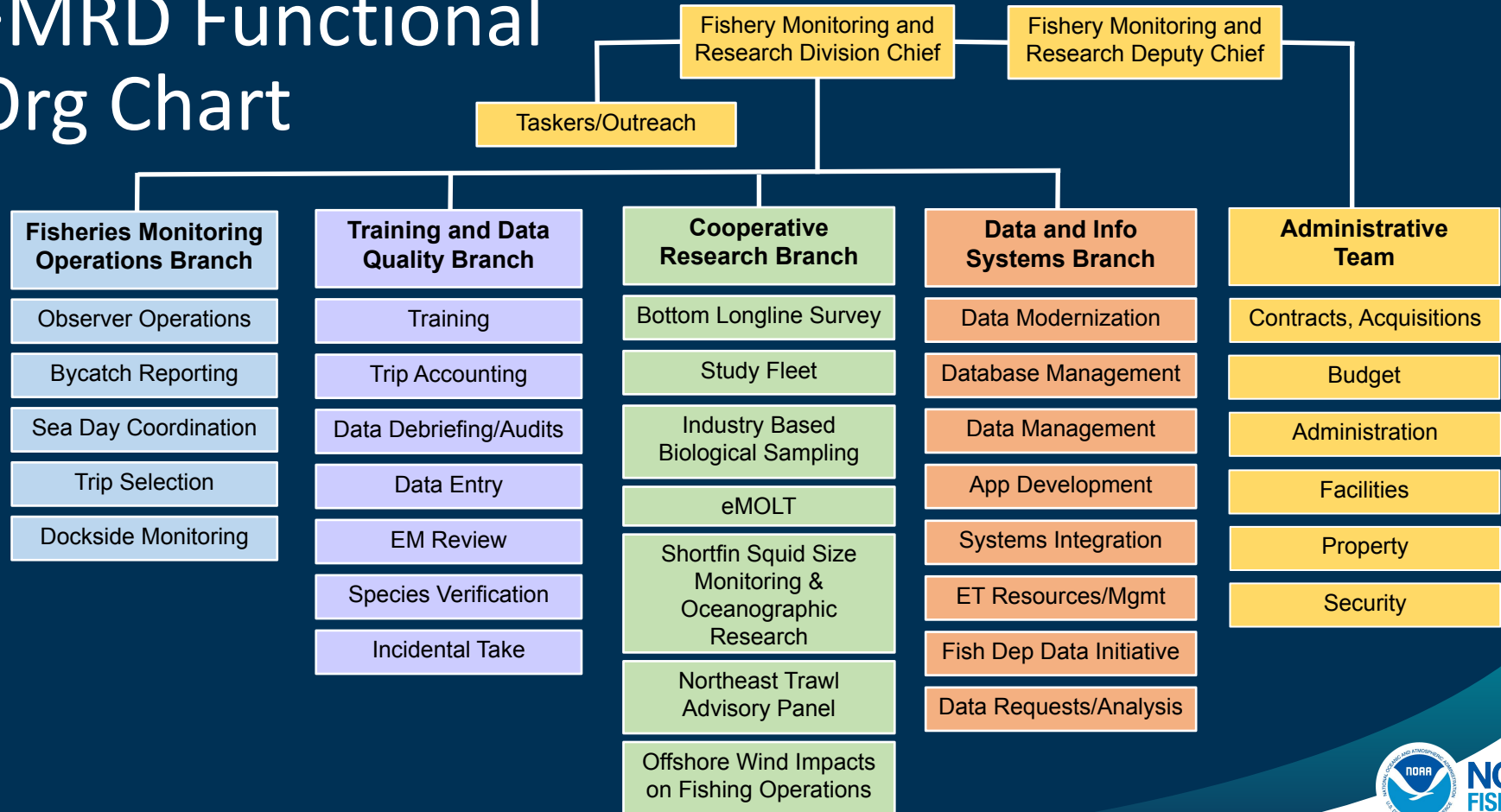
Our Division's Mission

- We collect information from commercial fisheries and support the use of that information to inform fisheries science and management.
- We bring the fisherman's perspective into the Federal process through collaboratively producing scientific information.
- We strive to be a trusted presence among the fishing, scientific, and management communities.
- FMRD Strategic plan under development

Management Team



FMRD Functional Org Chart



Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM)

Overview

- A revised SBRM Omnibus Amendment was implemented in July 2015.
- The SBRM amendment requires an annual discard report utilizing information obtained from the NEFOP and IFS Programs for 14 federally managed species groups and sea turtles.
- Each year, discard estimates and variability are derived from the prior year data to inform observer coverage needs for the upcoming year.

SBRM Sea Days (Apr 2023 - Mar 2024)

- 2023 SBRM Rollout occurred on August 9th
- The full SBRM Discard Analysis occurred in 2023
- Total sea days needed: **6,926**
 - Sea days for agency-funded fleets (NEFOP): **5,293**
 - Sea days for industry-funded scallop fleets (IFS): **1,633**
- Total sea days available (based on funding): **5,630**
 - Agency-funded sea days: **3,373**
 - Industry-funded sea days: **1,696**
- Annual discard report and sea day schedule can be found at:
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/data/annual-discard-reports-northeast>



SBRM 2023 Highlights

- Mid-Atlantic Small Mesh Otter Trawl (**1,483** seadays)
 - Small Mesh Groundfish (Silver Hake, Offshore Hake, Red Hake) and Loggerhead Turtles were the top two species groups driving sea days.
 - Due to the small difference in the top species groups driving the sea days, this fleet was not reduced in the penultimate prioritization.
 - While higher than past 3 years, these tasked sea days are in line with prior years
- Endangered Species Act Annual Determination Days (**45** seadays)
 - Funding was allocated to monitor for sea turtle interactions in the Mid-Atlantic gillnet fishery with the fleet's relisting in 2023.
 - Days are specific to state waters in order to fill gaps in observer coverage as NEFOP SBRM tasked days only cover federally permitted vessels.
- In-person outreach started in September with the SBRM release delays. However, there will be travel limitations in October.

Upcoming SBRM Work

- Analyses:
 - 2021-2023 SBRM 3-Year Review work is ongoing
 - 2024 Discard Estimation, Precision, and Sample Size Analysis for Fish
 - 2018-2022 Estimated Bycatch of Sea Turtles in Bottom Trawl Gear
- Additional deliverables:
 - Annual 2024 SBRM analysis and related reports

Observer Program Accomplishments

NEFOP Coverage Summary 2023

| Coverage type | SBRM Qtr 1 (April 1 - June 30) | | | SBRM Mid-Qtr 2 (July 1 - Sept 8) | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|------------|------------|----------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| | Tasked | Acc | Difference | Tasked | Acc | Difference |
| SBRM (NE) | 203 | 202 | -1 | 277 | 205 | -72 |
| SBRM (MID) | 486 | 394 | -92 | 702 | 422 | -280 |
| SBRM (PTNS NE) | 101 | 258 | 157 | 106 | 95 | -11 |
| SBRM (PTNS MA) | 3 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| SBRM | 793 | 861 | 68 | 1088 | 726 | -362 |
| MMPA (NE) | 64 | 66 | 2 | 6 | 5 | -1 |
| MMPA (MID) | 36 | 30 | -6 | 65 | 8 | -57 |
| MMPA (PTNS) | 10 | 7 | -3 | 26 | 47 | 21 |
| ESA (MID) | 9 | 3 | -6 | 27 | 4 | -23 |
| MMPA / ESA | 119 | 106 | -13 | 124 | 64 | -60 |
| Total | 912 | 967 | 55 | 1212 | 790 | -422 |

2023 Groundfish and IFS Achievements

- ASM coverage **target 90%** as of 5/1/23
- Realized **ASM coverage at 83%** (as of 9/10/23), 63-98% across 11 sectors
- Challenges to coverage include: communication challenges, inadequate number of ASMs, trips missed by observers, and notification compliance

- IFS is on track to meet LA Target Coverage
- GC coverage is low. Fishing Effort is lower by about 100 trips per month compared to previous years.
- Trawl coverage is difficult due to lack of available observers to cover this gear type, lack of trips, and where the trips are located.

| Fishing Category | VMS Trips | Observed Trips | Realized Coverage | AVG Target Coverage | Percent of Target Achieved |
|---------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| General Category (Dredge) | 3294 | 90 | 2.7% | 12.9% | 20.9% |
| General Category (Trawl) | 56 | 1 | 1.6% | 43% | 3.7% |
| Limited Access | 1290 | 117 | 9.1% | 10.6% | 85.9% |
| Total | 4640 | 207 | 3.9% | 22.2% | 17.6% |



2022 Coverage Summary

NEFOP

| Coverage type | Total Tasked | Total Acc | % Acc |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| SBRM (NE) | 1057 | 1174 | 111.1% |
| SBRM (MID) | 1574 | 1507 | 95.7% |
| SBRM (PTNS NE) | 660 | 682 | 103.3% |
| SBRM (PTNS MA) | 91 | 47 | 51.6% |
| SBRM | 3382 | 3410 | 100.8% |
| MMPA (NE) | 116 | 120 | 103.4% |
| MMPA (MID) | 176 | 48 | 27.3% |
| MMPA (PTNS) | 58 | 65 | 112.1% |
| MMPA | 350 | 233 | 66.6% |
| Total | 3732 | 3643 | 98% |

IFS

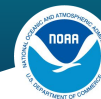
| Fishing Category | VMS Trips | Observed Trips | Realized Coverage | Avg Target Coverage | Percent of Target Achieved |
|---------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| General Category (Dredge) | 6000 | 217 | 3.6% | 5.9% | 61.3% |
| General Category (Trawl) | 45 | 0 | 0.0% | 2.3% | 0.0% |
| Limited Access | 2067 | 181 | 8.8% | 9.4% | 93.2% |
| Total | 8112 | 398 | 4.9% | 5.9% | 83.1% |

ASM

| Coverage type | Tasked Coverage Rate | Achieved Coverage Rate |
|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| At Sea Monitoring (ASM) | 80% | 59%* |

*Estimate based on the best available data from SIMM

Programmatic Update

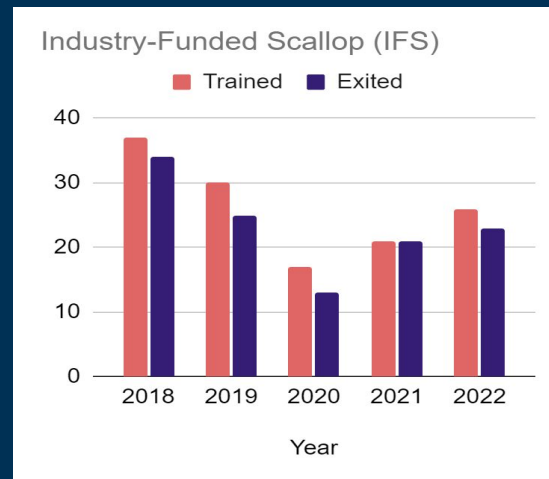
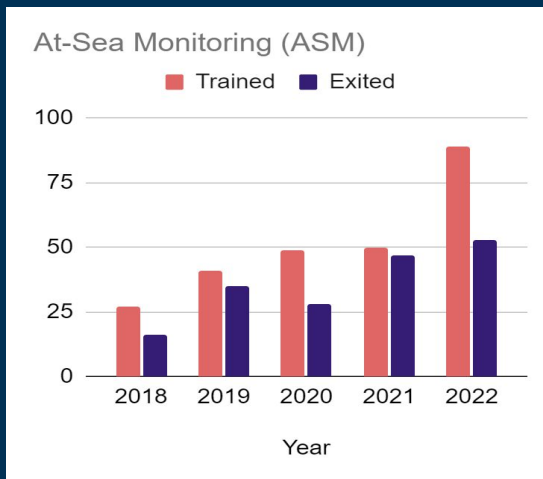
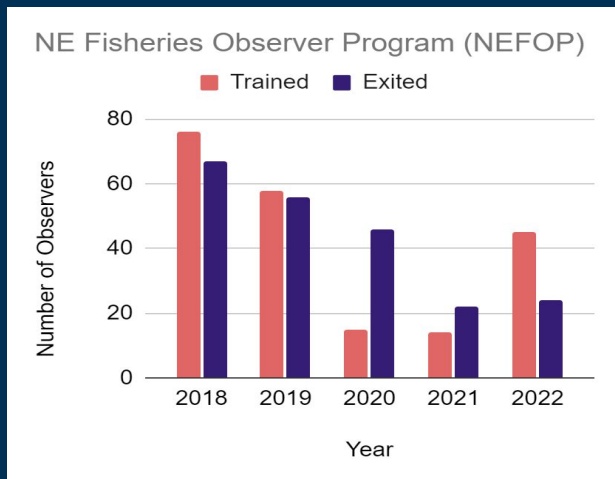


Contract Modification

Due to COVID impacts to observer deployments, additional funds remained on the NEFOP contract. An extension to the contract was determined to be the best route forward, with modifications that would help increase observer attrition and contract performance.

- Major Contract Modifications
 - Observer seaday rate, overtime rate, hourly rate increase
 - Dock work, field work summaries
 - Observers reimbursed for time spent at dock soliciting trips
 - Field work summaries - more real time information to monitor achievements/challenges
 - Professional development
 - Advanced recruitment practices due to challenges in hiring qualified candidates
 - Advancements to retention plan to provide incentives for longer term employment
 - OLE/FMO/Observer round table meetings in active ports to introduce OLE to observers
 - Valise liferaft update - no longer providing extra raft for deployments

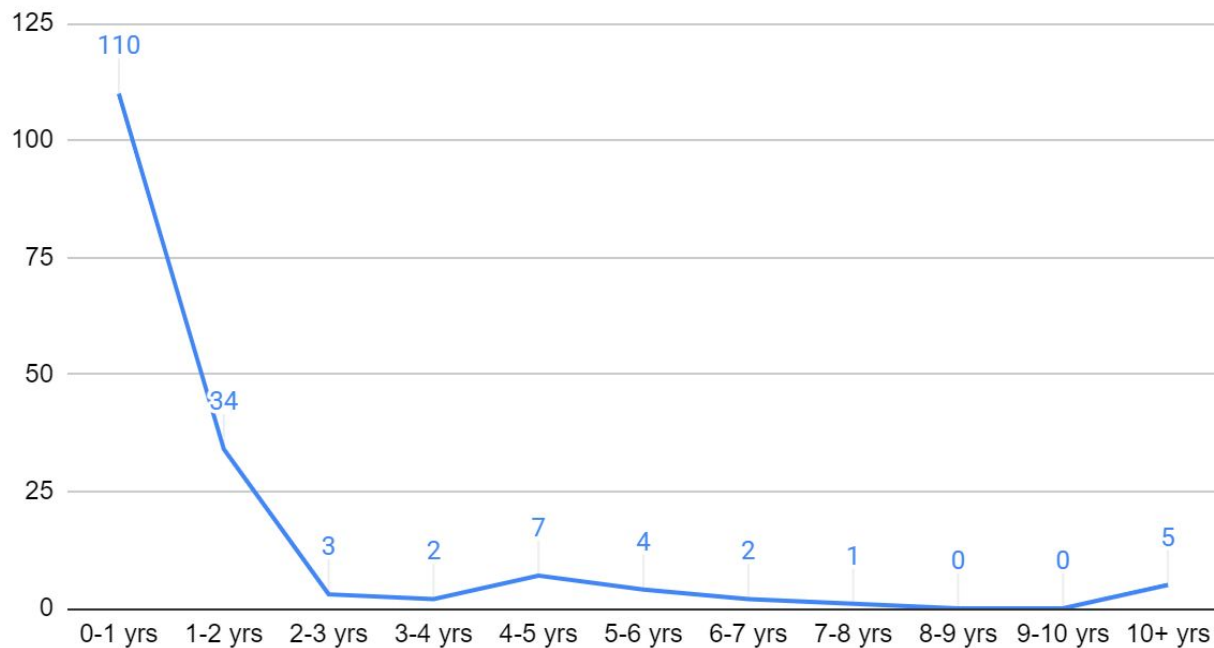
Observer Attrition



- In 2023, 57% of observers reported planning on staying in the program for 1 year compared to 45% in 2022 according to the Annual Observer Retention Survey
- Average retention rate across programs remains at 6 months
- NEFOP, IFS, and ASM observers trained in 2022 have stayed in the program an average of 8 months

Observer Experience

Years Experience of an Active Observer



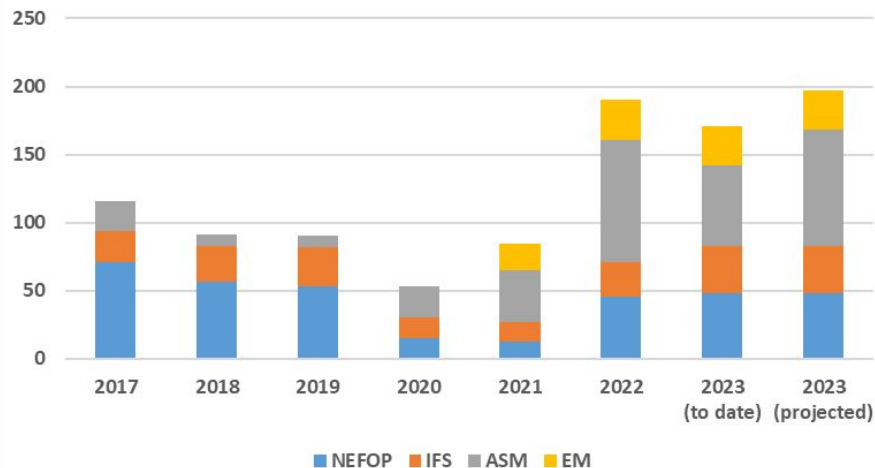
The majority of observers currently in the field have < 1 year experience with the Northeast observer programs.

Training Update

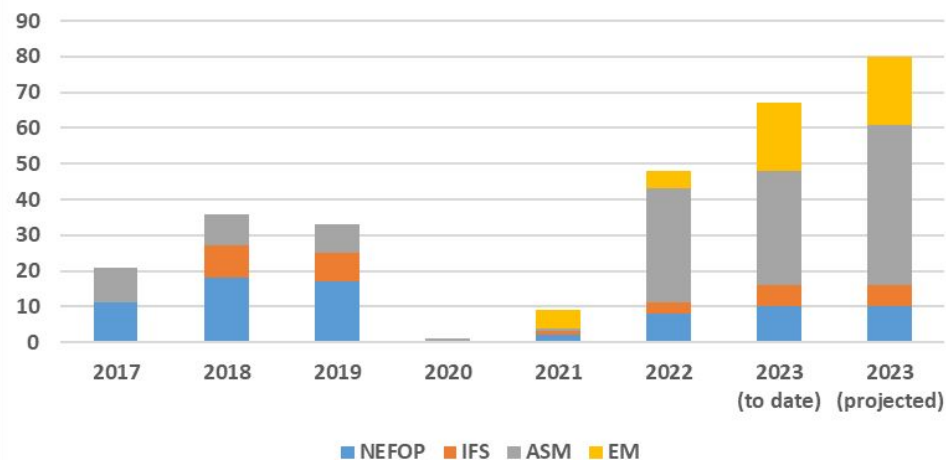
- Coonamessett Farm Foundation At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) Training Program
 - Partnership with Coonamessett Farm Foundation to increase our training capacity
 - CFF has completed 13 ASM trainings under a grant with ASMFC
 - This grant has been extended through June 2024
- Maximized Retention Electronic Monitoring (MREM)
 - First MREM Reviewer training developed and executed
- Reinstatement of Recertifications
 - First NEFOP and ASM Recertification Trainings since start of pandemic

Training Update

Initial Trainings Output



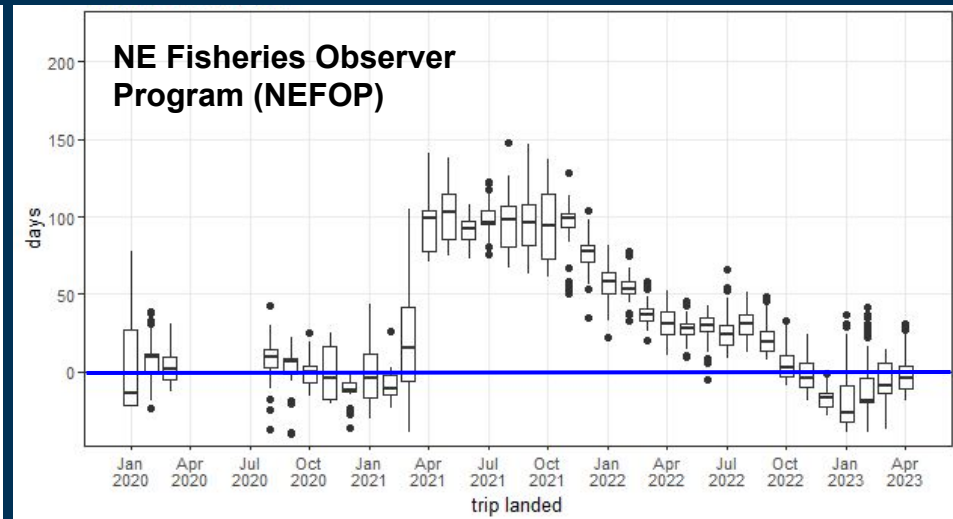
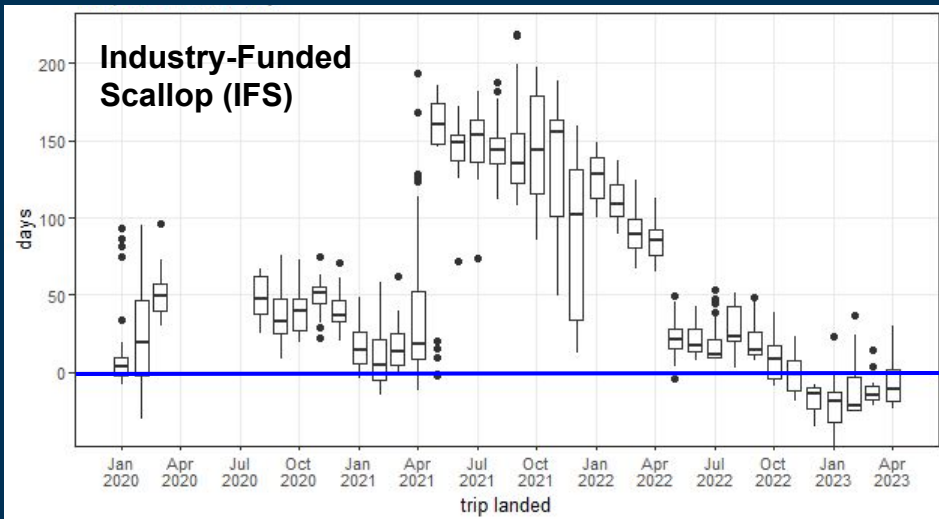
Initial Trainings Unutilized Seats



Certifications: **233** (182 observers; >60% trained in 2023)

- NEFOP: Trawl **44**/Gillnet **34**
- ASM: **59**
- IFS: **28**
- EM: **19**
- HVF: **8**
- Specialized: **41**

Data Review Update



Figures show number of days to finalize data in relation to targets (blue lines) for all trips from January 2020 through April 2023

Project Compass

- Compass will consolidate and sunset the existing data and information systems in support of the observer program, i.e., Sea Samp, Eddie, OBPRELIM, etc.
- This is an iterative process.
- Compass will provide a ‘one-stop-shop’ or single solution for data entry, editing, auditing, reporting, observer media, etc.
- This solution will standardize the data lifecycle and QA/QC process from collection to end user delivery.

Project Compass Phases

4. Operations Functionality (Reports, Analytics, Media, etc.)

4

3. Full Offline and Mobile Data Entry

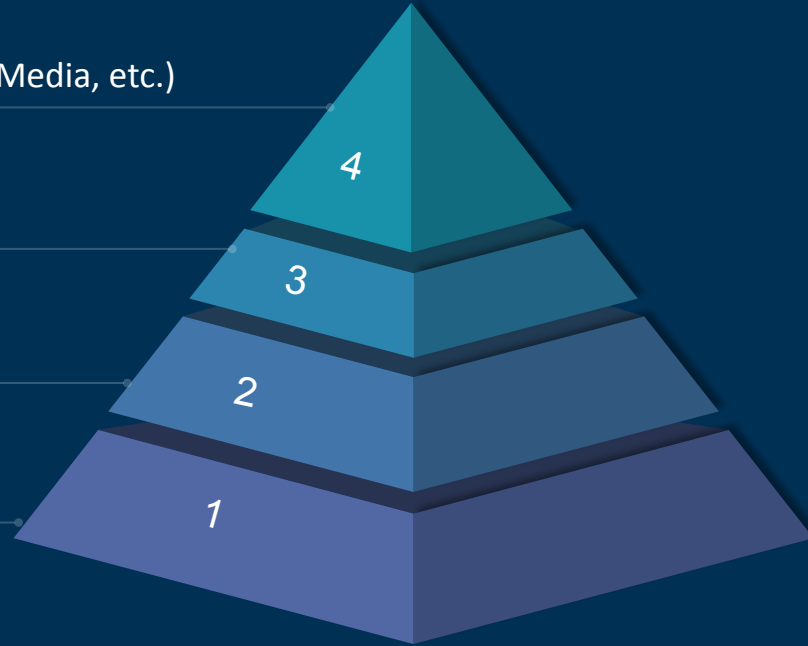
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2. Data Entry, Editing, Auditing and Debriefing

2

1. System Design, Architecture and Technology

1



FMRD's Work to Combat SASH

2021

2022

2022

2022/2023

2023

2023

2024

SASH Training Initiative for Observers

Implemented SASH information into Conflict Resolution. Initially added to IFS cross training then adapted to NEFOP and IFS base training and ASM initial trainings.

Respect Observers Campaign

Worked with RCB and a contracted graphics company to create a more approachable anti-harassment poster. This was posted online with an article about observer treatment. A GOVDelivery message with abbreviated sentiment followed.

OLE Action Plan

Five point plan developed outlining actions by OLE NED and NE Observer Program to improve the support process to observer harassment issues, target repeat or escalating offenses by industry members, communicate outcomes to survivors in a more timely manner, and working with GC to increase transparency.

Industry Workshops

Ensuring a Safe Work Environment for Observers workshops were conducted in November 2022 for groundfish fishermen and sector managers. January and September 2023 workshops were open to the public. OLE and the Observer program presented materials about what is harassment, penalties for conviction, the investigative processes, observer training on harassment, and risk reduction strategies.

Developed Further Support Mechanisms

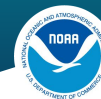
NOP developed national standards for SASH trainings that have been implemented into all initial observer trainings. Observer program created a code phrase for inReach usage as a result of an after action incident meeting and have been working with USCG to be prepared for its possible utilization.

Work with WVPR & Data Analytics

Worked with WVPR to host a training event for SASH: Strategic Resistance. This training teaches staff how to prepare observers to safely intervene on their own behalf while isolated on a vessel. We have been closely monitoring the rate of SASH occurrences and incorporating questions regarding harassment and reporting in the annual retention survey.

Continued Work with USCG & WVPR

Coordination with USCG and WVPR on communication involving SASH incidents. The lessons from the SASH: Strategic Resistance will be incorporated into initial and refresher trainings for observers. We will continue to develop areas of support. Work to incorporate SASH training into drill training for industry members.



Questions?

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