

PROPOSAL 274

5 AAC 39.646. Shellfish onboard observer trainee program qualifications and requirements.

Increase minimum training requirements needed for scallop trainee observer candidates, as follows:

5 AAC 39.646 is amended to read:

5 AAC 39.646. Shellfish onboard observer trainee program qualifications and requirements. (a)

To qualify as a crab [OR SCALLOP] onboard observer trainee, an applicant must have one of the following:

(1) a Bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited college or university with a major in the sciences of biology, any branch of biology, or limnology, which includes a minimum of 30 semester hours in applicable biological sciences with use of dichotomous keys in at least one course, and the successful completion of at least one course each in mathematics and statistics with a minimum of five semester hours total for both; or

(2) a valid National Marine Fisheries Service observer certification; or

(3) other fisheries related education or work experience approved by the department.

(b) In addition to the requirements in (a) of this section, to qualify as a scallop onboard observer trainee, an applicant must possess a valid department crab observer trainee permit or crab observer certification in good standing, except that, if an applicant with a valid department crab observer trainee permit or crab observer certification in good standing is unavailable, a valid National Marine Fisheries Service North Pacific Observer Program certification may be substituted at the discretion of the department.

(c) [(b)] A crab or scallop onboard observer trainee must

(1) have the ability to use a radio for communications; and

(2) be physically able to carry out the duties of an observer and not be incapacitated by chronic or debilitating seasickness.

(d) [(c)] Before an applicant may take the certification examination, the applicant must attend a training course approved by the department that provides instruction in the following subject areas:

...

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Alaska commercial weathervane scallop fishery effort and harvest is generally low. During most years 2 to 3 vessels catch and process scallops statewide during seasons that typically range from July through November. All vessels are required to carry an independent onboard observer while fishing. Scallop observers are supplied by third-party observer provider companies with deployment costs paid for by harvesters. Across the range of observer opportunities, most observers tend to work in larger federal observer programs that offer stable employment. Due to the small size and relatively unique timing of the Alaska scallop fishery, recruiting and retaining observers is challenging. Unreliable observer staffing adds to program costs and lost fishing opportunity for harvesters when observers are unavailable.

In addition to the scallop fishery, the department administers an onboard crab observer program that annually deploys around 30 observers in support of Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands rationalized crab fisheries. Scallop and crab observer training and sampling responsibilities substantially overlap and the department offers two crab observer training classes each year. Limiting recruitment of scallop observers to candidates that previously received department crab observer training should improve data quality, lower costs, and provide stability for scallop harvesters.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

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