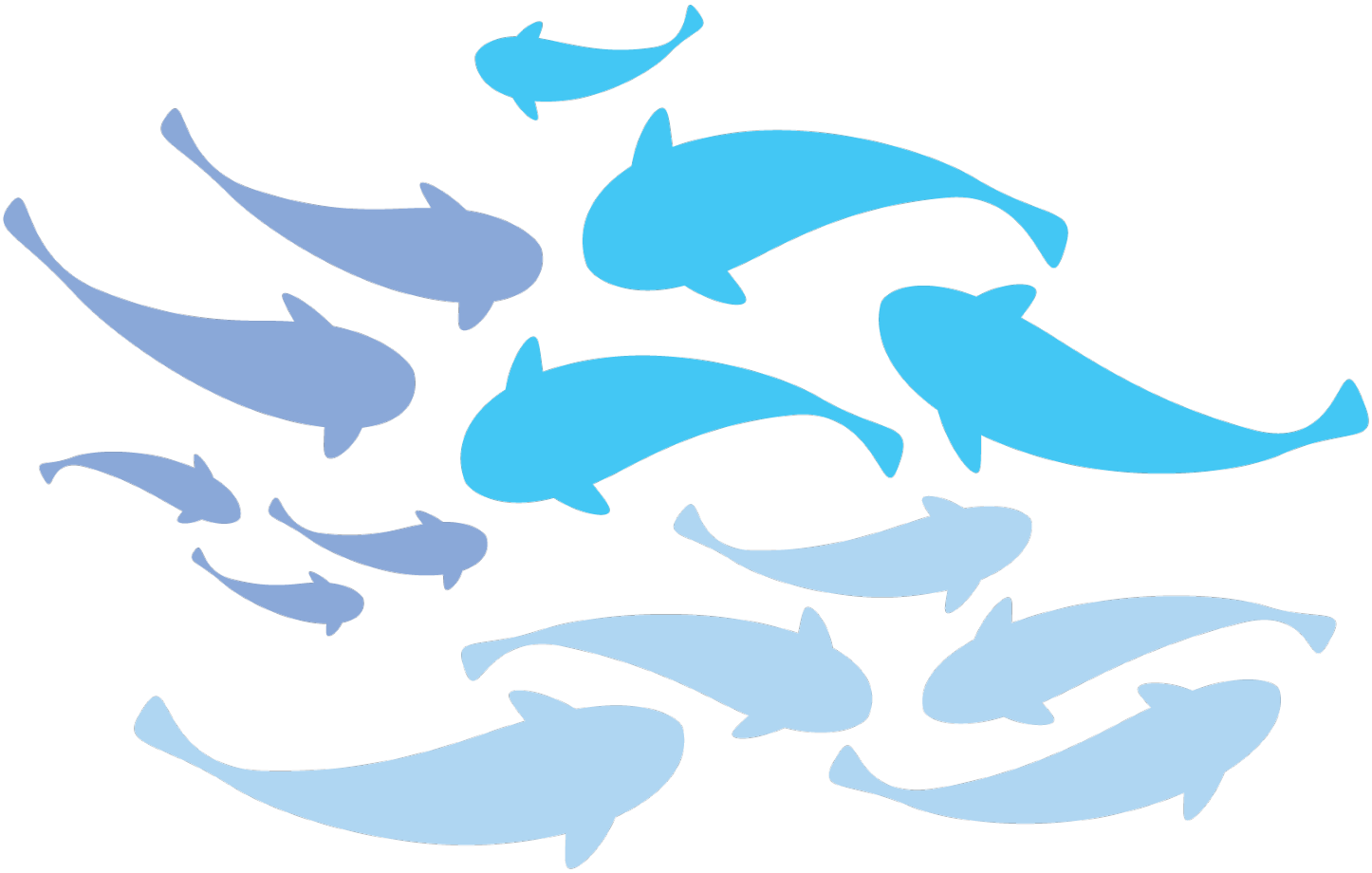
NOAA FISHERIES

Northeast Fisheries Science Center

Frequently Asked Questions

for NOAA's Pre-Trip Notification System (PTNS)



Notification Instructions

Q: How do I notify for a groundfish trip?

A: You can find the PTNS Groundfish Vessel User Guide in the "Help" section on the PTNS website: https://appsnefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/index.php/help

Q: What login information do I need?

A: As of January 2023, we have transitioned our PTNS authentication system to align with the GARFO FishOnline authentication system.

For FY26, you will log in to the PTNS website with your individual FishOnline credentials. Your FishOnline username as your PTNS website username and your FishOnline password as your PTNS website password.

To log into the PTNS, go here:

https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/ To

retrieve your Fish Online username, go here:

https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/fishtank/login/forgot_username To

reset your Fish Online password, go here:

https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/fishtank/login/forgot To

create a Fish Online account, go here:

https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/fishtank/login/

Q: Who can I contact if I have questions about the PTNS?

A: Call the PTNS Team at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) or email at NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov.

Observer Coverage

Q: What types of coverage are handled by the PTNS?

A: NOAA Fisheries uses the PTNS to assign Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) coverage, NEFOP Protected Species Branch (PSB) Limited Gillnet coverage, Industry-Funded At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) coverage, and certain types of Electronic Monitoring (EM) coverage to trips in the Northeast Multispecies groundfish and herring fisheries.

Q: What is the difference between an ASM and a NEFOP observer?

A: Both ASMs and NEFOP observers have undergone extensive training in the collection of commercial fishing trip data. Monitors collect similar data to that of observers; however, they collect a reduced set of data with an emphasis on gathering weights of kept and discarded fish rather than extensive biological sampling.

There is no difference in the NOAA Fisheries standards pertaining to monitors and observers successfully completing training, maintaining high data quality, preserving data confidentiality, and adhering to safety measures. In addition,

the same laws apply to vessel responsibility related to matters including accommodations, intimidation, and harassment of monitors and observers.

Q: What are my requirements regarding interactions with monitors and observers on my vessel?

A: Work together to make sure the sea is a safe place for everyone to work. Monitors and observers are onboard to observe fishing operations and to collect catch data needed by NOAA to support our fisheries. Monitors and observers are trained fisheries professionals and should be treated with respect.

For more information about NOAAs approach to observer safety and harassment prevention click here.

Q: Who decides the target coverage rate for sectors?

A: The New England Fishery Management Council established the method used to calculate sector target coverage rates for each new fishing year. This method determines the level of coverage that is needed on sector groundfish trips in order to accurately estimate bycatch discard rates. Based on an annual analysis of the most up-to-date data available, NOAA Fisheries sets the target combined sector coverage rate for each new fishing year based on the prescribed method. More information on this can be found here.

Q: What is the combined target coverage rate for sectors?

A: The preliminary FY26 target observer coverage level for sector groundfish trips subject to At-Sea Monitoring coverage is 100-percent. This target applies to each sector as a whole. More information on this can be found here: Northeast Groundfish Monitoring Program 2024.

Q: What is the NEFOP SBRM target coverage rate for sectors?

A: There is not a set target coverage rate for sector NEFOP SBRM coverage. Instead, the SBRM allocates the Observer Program a certain number of sea days to observe each year by fleet (gear and port region). The realized NEFOP SBRM coverage rate for each sector depends on several factors, including the number of groundfish trips that sail during the fishing year, the number of days each of those fishing trips is at sea, the gear used on those trips, and the areas fished.

Q: What is the NEFOP Limited Gillnet target coverage rate for sectors?

A: Starting in FY22, NEFOP Limited Gillnet coverage will be considered part of a sector's combined coverage rate. The Protected Species Branch (PSB) allocates the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program, via the SBRM Sea Day Schedule, a certain number of sea days to observe on gillnet vessels in order to record data on marine mammal interactions. Marine mammal data is prioritized and discard information is not collected. The realized NEFOP Limited Gillnet coverage rate for each sector depends on several factors, including the number of groundfish gillnet trips that sail during the fishing year, the number of days each of those fishing trips is at sea, and the size mesh used on those trips.

Q: What is the NEFOP target coverage rate for ASM-exempt trips?

A: The sector target coverage rates do not apply to ASM-exempt trips. ASM-exempt trips are selected randomly for NEFOP coverage in the PTNS. Whether they are observed or not, ASM exempt trips are not considered in calculating a sector's coverage rate. However, NEFOP observed ASM-exempt sea days do count toward the sea days allocated to the Observer Program by the SBRM Sea Day Schedule. Sector vessels may experience an actual realized NEFOP coverage rate of their ASM-exempt trips that is higher or lower than the actual realized coverage rate of their ASM-eligible sector trips.

Q: What is the NEFOP target coverage rate for the common pool?

A: The sector target coverage rates do not apply to common pool vessels. Common pool trips are selected randomly for NEFOP coverage in the PTNS. Common pool vessels may experience an actual realized NEFOP coverage rate that is higher or lower than sectors' actual realized coverage rates, as well as higher or lower than ASM-exempt coverage on sector vessels.

Q: Which sector groundfish trips are exempt from ASM coverage?

A: Vessels fishing under the Framework 55 exclusion or fishing in Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic entirely west of the 71°30' W Longitude line are not eligible for ASM coverage, but are still required to notify via the PTNS.

For more detailed information on the Framework 55 exclusion from ASM monitoring requirements, please refer to the final rule published in the Federal Register on May 2, 2016 (81 FR 26411), sections six and eight: Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Provisions; Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Northeast Groundfish Fishery; Framework Adjustment 55

For more detailed information on the 71°30' exclusion from ASM monitoring requirements, please refer to the final rule published in the Federal Register on December 9, 2022 (87 FR 75855): Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Northeast Multispecies Fishery; Amendment 23

If you notify for an ASM-exempt trip in the PTNS, you must fish under the exemption or contact the PTNS Team to change your notification before departing on that trip.

Q: How do I find out my current coverage rate?

A: To obtain the coverage rate of your individual vessel and/or your sector as a whole, contact your sector manager. A list of sector manager contact information can be found here: Sector Manager Contact Information.

PTNS Requirements

Q: Who is required to notify via the PTNS?

A: Certain vessels with multispecies permits may be required to notify:

- Sector vessels with any type of limited access multispecies permits
- Common pool vessels with limited access multispecies permits in category A, D, E, and F

Q: Who is NOT required to notify via the PTNS?

A: Certain vessels do not have a PTNS notification requirement:

- Vessels with open access multispecies permits (MUL HB, I, J, K) are not required to notify.
- Common Pool vessels with the following limited access multispecies permits are not required to notify:
  - Small Vessel Exemption (MUL C)
  - Handgear A (MUL HA)

Q: What types of trips require a PTNS notification (MUL)?

A: You must notify NOAA Fisheries if you have PTNS-eligible permits and you are a:

- Sector vessel planning any trip that uses MUL A-days at sea, including monkfish multispecies combo trips, where an A-day is used on a monkfish trip, or a
- Common Pool vessel planning on using groundfish days at sea (DAS)- including A DAS and Regular B DAS Groundfish trips
- Trips that require notification via the PTNS include:
- Standard fishing trips
- Set-only gillnet trips
- ASM-exempt trips
- Trips sailing under an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) - including those using electronic monitoring - unless otherwise specifically indicated in the EFP
- Transits with product under a groundfish or combination monkfish groundfish VMS declaration
- Research set-aside sector trips
- Research set-aside common pool trips using groundfish DAS
- Scallop-targeting trips using groundfish DAS
- Monkfish trips that are also using groundfish DAS

Q: What types of trips do not require a PTNS notification?

A: You do not have to notify for non-groundfish trips via PTNS, including:

- Monkfish-only trips fishing exclusively in an exemption area within the Northern or Southern Fishery Management Areas
- Transit trips for which you have declared out of fishery (DOF) in your VMS
- Trips in other fisheries that do not have a PTNS requirement

Note that herring and scallop trips also may require a PTNS notification and more details can be found in the Herring and Scallop PTNS FAQ document available on the PTNS help tab. Trips not requiring notification via the PTNS may still be subject to other types of notification and/or observer coverage based on the regulations of that fishery.

Using the PTNS

Q: How do I notify as Framework 55 ASM-exempt in the PTNS?

A: PTNS has been updated as of FY23, and you can now select the exemption under which you will be fishing in the 'Exemption' dropdown on the 'Enter Trips' page. The 'FW55:>=10 IN GILLNET IGB/SNE' exemption will appear as an option if you notify as using sink gillnet gear with greater than or equal to 10-inch mesh, within the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic or Inshore Georges Bank Broad Stock Areas.

Please see the FY26 Groundfish Vessel User Guide linked on the PTNS help page to learn more about using this new function: https://appsnefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/

If you notify for an ASM-exempt trip in the PTNS, you must fish under the exemption or contact the PTNS Team to change your notification before departing on that trip. Please note, ASM-exempt trips are still subject to NEFOP coverage.

Q: How do I notify under the 71°30 W ASM-exemption in the PTNS?

A: PTNS has been updated for Amendment 23 implementation, and you can now select the exemption under which you will be fishing in the 'Exemption' dropdown on the 'Enter Trips' page. The 'A23: FISHING WEST of 7130' exclusion will appear as an option if you notify any gear type fishing within the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic broad stock area. Please only select this option if you are fishing entirely west of the 71°30' W Longitude line.

Please see the FY26 Groundfish Vessel User Guide linked on the PTNS help page to learn more about using this new function: https://appsnefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/

If you notify for an ASM-exempt trip in the PTNS, you must fish under the exemption or contact the PTNS Team to change your notification before departing on that trip. Please note, ASM-exempt trips are still subject to NEFOP coverage.

Q: Can I notify less than 48 hours in advance of a trip?

A: No. You must submit trip notifications at least 48 hours in advance of your planned sail time.

Q: How far in advance can I notify for a trip?

A: You can submit notifications up to 10 days prior to the planned sail date and time. This means that up to 8 individual fixed-date notifications can be entered at one time. Notifications for dates more than 10 days in advance will not be accepted.

Q: Can I only call the PTNS line during business hours?

A: The PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) is monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. When the PTNS Team is not answering calls and checking voicemails during business hours, an answering service takes calls. The answering service can enter notifications, help troubleshoot issues, and contact on-call NOAA Fisheries staff in the event of an urgent situation. PTNS staff can also be reached by email at NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, which is also checked periodically after business hours.

Q: What is a fixed-date notification and when should they be used?

A: A fixed date notification should be used by vessels planning on sailing on back to back trips. Usually, vessels using fixed-date notifications sail on more than one trip in a week. Fixed-date notifications cannot be delayed past the calendar date of the notification.

Q: What is a flexible-date notification and when should they be used?

A: A flexible date notification should be used by vessels planning on sailing on trips with greater than 48 hours between these trips. Flexible-date notifications can be delayed passed the originally notified calendar date, we ask that you communicate any delays with your assigned observer provider if you have been assigned an observer. There is no restriction on the length of flexible-date notifications, these can be a single day in length.

Q: I departed on a fishing trip but had to return to port early because of weather/mechanical issues/crew needs/etc., and I want to go right back out. Do I have to notify again?

A: If you had nothing to offload or did not make your final offload, you do not have to submit a new notification - a confirmation number will be added for you by the PTNS coordinators. You will keep the same observer assignment status as your original trip; if you were assigned an observer, the assignment continues when you re-sail, and if you had a waiver, you may re-sail without an observer. If you are breaking a trip, please send an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) for an additional confirmation number.

If you offloaded all of your catch, a new trip notification is required 48 hours in advance of your planned sail time.

Q: I was late in notifying. Do I need to wait until the sail time of my notification to depart from the dock?

A: Vessels assigned an observer for a **flexible-date** notification may be required to wait until the sail time in the PTNS if an observer is not available before that time. If the trip has been delayed, they must give the provider sufficient notice of the new sail time so that an observer can be deployed.

Vessels assigned an observer for a **fixed-date** notification may be required to wait until the sail time in the PTNS if an observer is not available before that time. Vessels may not sail under a specific fixed-date notification on a different calendar day.

Vessels with a waived **flexible-date** notification may depart at any time upon receipt of a waiver email and/or the change of the notification's status in the vessel's PTNS web account to 'Waiver'.

Vessels with a waived **fixed-date** notification may depart at any time during that calendar day. Vessels may not sail under a specific fixed-date notification on a different calendar day.

Q: Do I need to cancel fixed-date notifications in the PTNS if I don't sail?

A: We strongly encourage you to maintain accurate information on your fishing activity, including the cancellation of notifications that don't sail. However, we do regularly compare PTNS information to sailing records (VMS, VTR, etc.) and cancel notifications that did not sail, on a vessel's behalf. The performance of the PTNS hinges on the accuracy of the fishing activity reported by the fleet.

Do not cancel PTNS notifications for dates on which you have sailed; you need an active notification in the system for each date on which you have departed on a PTNS-eligible fishing trip.

Q: I did not depart on a flexible-date notification on the PTNS sail date. Do I need to cancel the trip and provide another 48 hours' notice?

A: It is the nature of the industry to delay trip departures, so if you are departing past the PTNS sail date of a **flexible-date** notification, you may keep the same confirmation number and do not need to re-notify. The most important thing to do is ensure that you communicate the delay clearly to any assigned observer. You also can delay the sail date either in your PTNS web account, by sending an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or by calling the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-3474371). Providing accurate trip information results in more accurate coverage rates and compliance assessments.

If a PTNS notification will be delayed for more than 48 hours, due to the need for major repairs or crew availability, for example, please use your PTNS web account, send an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) in order to cancel the trip. You may then enter a new notification with 48 hours' notice when trip plans are known.

Trip Selection

Q: Why is my vessel being selected/assigned coverage/covered for a different proportion of trips than another vessel?

A: The PTNS selection process attempts to achieve the target coverage for the fishing year at the stratum level. Each observer sampling program may use different stratification variables, but an example of a stratum for the At-Sea Monitoring Program is a unique combination of sector, gear, and fishing area. Vessels may fish in different strata throughout the fishing year, but only their coverage rate in the stratum for which a vessel notifies is the individual vessel coverage rate used in the PTNS selection process. As more trips are taken within a stratum, individual vessel coverage rates tend to even out closer to target coverage levels, but they may still vary from the exact target.

For these reasons, vessels should not assume that trip selection rates, observer assignment rates, or observer coverage rates will be equal among individual vessels.

Q: Under a proposed 100% combined coverage rate, am I tied to the dock if I do not have an observer?

A: No. Although you should not expect to see any waivers, you may receive programmatic waivers for a limited number of reasons. Observer or monitor availability will not tie vessels to the dock.

When a trip is assigned an observer in the PTNS, do not depart on your trip until you receive a PTNS waiver email or communicate with your assigned provider.

Q: Will I continue to get selected for coverage if I cancel a trip assigned an observer (not applicable when target coverage is 100%)?

A: PTNS uses a two-step selection process to promote equitability of individual vessel coverage.

The first step of selection is random - when a notification is entered, it may be randomly selected for coverage. The probability of random selection is based on the difference between the realized stratum coverage rate and the target stratum coverage rate.

During the second step of selection, the system evaluates a vessel's individual stratum coverage rate. If the trip was randomly selected and the vessel's individual coverage rate for that stratum is above a high threshold, then the trip will be waived in the second step. If a trip was randomly waived of coverage, but the vessel's individual coverage rate for that stratum is below a low threshold, then the vessel will be selected in the second step.

If a vessel continually cancels trips that have been assigned observers and only sails on waived trips and/or refusals, then their individual coverage rate will fall below the threshold. As a result of the low coverage rate – rather than as a direct result of canceling or refusing trips assigned observers – the vessel's notifications will be selected until its coverage rate rises above the low threshold.

Q: What happens when I cancel a trip assigned an observer?

A: Canceled trips occur when a vessel informs the observer provider that they are canceling the trip and does not sail on the trip. NOAA Fisheries monitors vessel cancellation rates of waivers versus trips assigned observers and may

contact sector managers if there is a significant discrepancy. When calculating coverage to determine selection probabilities, PTNS does not take into account canceled trips.

The act of canceling a trip does not specifically trigger any PTNS functions.

Q: What happens when I don't inform the observer provider that I've canceled a trip that has been assigned an observer?

A: A No-Call/No-Show (NCNS) may occur (depending on requirements in the sector/provider contract) when a vessel is assigned an observer and the observer provider does not receive return contact from a captain, so an observer is deployed to the dock for the sail time in PTNS; the captain and crew do not show, and the vessel does not end up sailing (note that if the vessel sailed, it would become a refusal - see question "What happens when I sail on a trip without my assigned observer?" below). NCNS is an incident associated with a canceled trip. These incidents are reported to NOAA Fisheries by the observer provider, and repeat incidents may be followed up on by the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE). Some ASM providers include in their sector contracts a charge for NCNSs, since the observer generally arrives one hour prior to the PTNS sail time and stays one hour past, without a trip occurring. NOAA Fisheries reports all instances of groundfish NCNSs to the vessel's sector manager in monthly PTNS compliance reports. Sectors are responsible for addressing compliance issues occurring within the sector. PTNS counts these trips as canceled trips. When calculating coverage to determine selection probabilities, PTNS does not take into account NCNS trips.

The act of changing a canceled trip's status to NCNS does not specifically trigger any PTNS functions.

Q: What happens when I sail on a trip without my assigned observer?

A: Refusals occur when a vessel is assigned an observer for a particular trip and sails on that trip without the observer. These incidents are reported to NOAA Fisheries by the observer provider and may be identified by the PTNS Coordinators when reconciling notifications with actual fishing trips. Follow up may involve OLE, and NOAA Fisheries reports all instances of groundfish refusals to the vessel's sector manager in monthly PTNS compliance reports. Sectors are responsible for addressing compliance issues occurring within the sector. When calculating coverage to determine selection probabilities, PTNS counts refusals as sailed, unobserved trips.

The act of changing a trip's status to a refusal does not specifically trigger any PTNS functions.

Q: Why did I get a waiver email if I should have been selected for electronic monitoring (EM) coverage?

A: You are required to follow your Vessel Monitoring Plan, which includes having your cameras on for ALL groundfish trips. We have set up an additional bulletin email reminder when an EM vessel receives a waiver of human coverage to remind them of their camera requirements.

Q: For questions about electronic monitoring, who can I contact?

A: For more information about the different electronic monitoring (EM) programs, please first refer to the GARFO EM help page. For additional questions about electronic monitoring or to get information on how to join one of our EM programs, please contact Nichole Rossi at Nichole.Rossi@noaa.gov.

Troubleshooting

Q: I can't get to the login screen and am getting an error message. What's wrong?

A: Ensure you are using this PTNS web address. If you still cannot get to the PTNS website, the system may be undergoing scheduled routine maintenance or there may be an unscheduled outage. In that case, please email your notification to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) if you would like to sail within 48 hours of your attempted login.

Q: Why can't I log into my PTNS web account? It says "Authorization Failed".

A: If you forget your username, please click here Retrieve FishOnline Username. If you forget your password, please visit Retrieve FishOnline Password. The PTNS Team will still be able to access your PTNS account during this time and you can contact them at 855-347-4371 if you need PTNS assistance, but they do not have access to your username and password.

Q: I notified for my trip by sending an email or by leaving a voicemail on the PTNS line. If the PTNS team doesn't enter my trip right away, will I have to wait more than 48 hours to sail?

A: The 48 hour notification requirement is based on the time of your email or voicemail, regardless of the time the new trip notification is entered into the PTNS by the PTNS team.

Q: I notified for a trip, and I have not received an entry confirmation email. Why?

A: When you enter your own notifications through your PTNS web account, you receive an entry confirmation email within 15 minutes. When you email NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) to notify, the PTNS team must manually enter your trip, so receipt of the entry confirmation email may be delayed.

If it is 24 hours or less before your trip is set to depart, and you still do not know the status of your trip, call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) as soon as possible in order to leave ample time to work out any issues before your departure.

Q: When am I supposed to get emails?

A: The PTNS will send an automated email when:

- A new notification is entered
- A trip is waived or assigned an observer
- A trip is canceled before the sail date

You may add or remove personal email addresses in your PTNS web account, by sending an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or by calling the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371).

Q: It is 24 hours prior to the scheduled sail time for my trip assigned observer coverage, and I have not yet heard from an observer. What do I do?

A: Observer providers have up to 24 hours prior to the PTNS sail time to accept a trip for coverage. The observer or provider will contact you as soon as possible after a trip is assigned coverage. You also have the option to contact the observer provider by calling the phone number provided in the trip's automated observer assignment email. Please call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) if you are having trouble regarding contact with your observer or provider.

Q: I left a voicemail to notify for a trip. Why hasn't anyone called me back to give me my confirmation number and status?

A: When you call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) to notify for a trip, your information is manually entered into the system by the PTNS team. Your trip status will be updated in your PTNS web account and an entry confirmation email will be sent to your VMS, as well as any additional email addresses that you have registered in the PTNS. If you cannot access your PTNS web account, your VMS, or your email, specify in your notification that you would like a member of the PTNS team to call you and provide a phone number at which you can be reached.

Q: I am at the dock, and my observer is not here. What should I do?

A: Check your VMS, email account(s), and/or your PTNS web account to be sure that you were not issued a waiver for your trip.

If you have been assigned an observer and have been unable to make contact with the observer or provider, call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) to obtain clearance from NOAA Fisheries to depart on your trip.

Do not leave the dock without your assigned observer if you have not called the PTNS line at 1-855FISHES1 (1-855-3474371).

Q: I have a problem with my VMS. What should I do?

A: Contact the NMFS Northeast VMS Office at 978-281-9213 or the VMS Support Center at 888-219-9228. You may also send an email at any time to the NMFS Northeast VMS team at NMFS.OLE.NE@noaa.gov.