



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Office of the Chief Information Officer
High Performance Computing and Communications
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

Dominic J. Mancini
Deputy Administrator
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
Office of Management and Budget
Washington DC

Subject: Adding Safety Questions related to COVID Pandemic and other Communicable Diseases to Fisheries Observer Information Collection - Request for Emergency Review and Clearance
OMB Control No. 0648-0593

Dear Dr. Mancini:

Pursuant to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) procedures established at 5 CFR Part 1320, Controlling Paperwork Burdens on the Public, I request approval of the proposed information collection revision to add safety questions related to the COVID pandemic and other communicable diseases to the existing fisheries observer information collection. Given the urgent need to address observer safety during ongoing deployments, I request that this revision be processed as an Emergency Revision Request in accordance with section 1320.13, Emergency Processing.

I have determined that the information must be collected prior to the expiration of time period established under Part 1320, and that this information is essential to fulfill the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) mission to conserve and manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources. The Covid-19 pandemic is an unanticipated event that is unprecedented in the sudden and dramatic manner in which it is impacting the health and economic well-being of American citizens.

NOAA deploys fishery observers on United States (U.S.) fishing vessels and to fish processing plants in order to collect biological and economic data. These observer programs provide the only reliable and/or most effective method for obtaining information that is critical for the conservation and management of living marine resources. All observers are employed by contracting companies, referred to here as observer providers.



In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, NOAA published an emergency rule on March 27, 2020, that provides NOAA the authority to waive requirements for fisheries observers on commercial fishing boats. NOAA took this action to protect public health, economic security, food security, and to safeguard the health and safety of fishermen, observers, and other persons involved with such monitoring programs, while safeguarding the ability of fishermen to continue business operations and produce seafood for the Nation.

In order to re-deploy and resume the integral role of observers on fishing boats, observer providers have requested that NOAA obtain authorization to ask the communicable disease related questions prior to deployment. Without that additional information, observer providers may not allow deployment of their observers, which would jeopardize fulfillment of mandatory observer monitoring requirements. The added safety questions are necessary to ensure that an observer can be safely deployed on a specific fishing vessel or stationed at a specific processing plant and work safely once assigned to a specific vessel or plant. The questions also provide the observer with necessary information on protocols that will be followed were the observer or a fishing crew member to become sick.

Given the unique conditions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, NOAA cannot reasonably comply with the normal clearance process and requests emergency clearance. With your emergency approval, NOAA is positioned to update observer questions to address safety concerns, and re-deploy observers on commercial fishing boats, a vital part of sustainable marine resource management. We commit to publishing a public notice about this information collection in the Federal Register within 30 days of approval. We appreciate your understanding of this urgent request and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Zachary G. Goldstein
Chief Information Officer and
Director, High Performance Computing
and Communications.