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Fishing Vessel Crew Survey Effort Enters the Last Lap

Social scientists at NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center are encouraging crew members to take advantage of the time remaining to respond to a new survey aimed at gathering data on broad social and economic conditions in the Northeast's commercial fisheries.

Tammy Murphy of NOAA's Social Sciences Branch at the NEFSC is the point person on several of the center's ongoing economic and social survey efforts. "We know next to nothing about crew, this critical part of the fishing community, which also includes hired captains. This survey collects basic demographic data that we do not have and that we need to understand what's going on in fishing communities," she said, emphasizing how essential crew cooperation is to the effort.

The socio-economic survey focuses on information such as availability of work, perceptions of fisheries management, the effectiveness and fairness of fisheries regulations, and fishermen's day-to-day experiences in their fishing communities. To help design the survey, and to train and deploy interviewers, the science center contracted with QuanTech, a professional survey research firm that specializes in fishery and environmental subject areas and based in Arlington, Va.

Interviewers have been working to survey crew in fifteen ports in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic since last October and plan to finish in August. So far, about 300 crew interviews have been collected. In June, interviewers are focusing on Rockland and Portland, Maine; Portsmouth, N.H.; New Bedford, Mass.; and Newport News, Va.

Fishing ports were selected in a way intended to capture a representative sample of crew proportional to participation in the fisheries. That means collecting data in different seasons and from crew that work in different fisheries, on vessels that vary length and in gear type.

The crew surveys are being conducted face-to-face and take about half an hour to complete. Interviewers come to the water front, and are trying to time their efforts with when crew are most likely to be available and not busy working. It isn't easy to get that timing right, and sometimes people are just reluctant to participate.

However, Murphy stresses, the data are extremely valuable and she hopes number of crew responses will increase significantly as expected activity in many ports increases over the summer months.

"To communicate to decision makers how regulatory actions have affected the people in the fisheries--the fishermen and their families--to tell that story and have it be heard, we need that data," Murphy said.

Taking any of the surveys is entirely voluntary and responses are strictly confidential. The completed surveys do not include information on the crew member's name, or names of the vessels, captains or vessel owners that crew work with.

Most of the responses are being collected on the docks, but interviews can also be arranged for other places or times by calling Coleby Wilt at 805-233-4128 or Tammy Murphy, 508-495-2137. Anyone interested in the information being collected can view the surveys in English, Spanish or Portuguese at our website: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/read/socialsci/>.

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